

# The Honorary Member of Beis Harav

PART 2

The story of the devoted chossid, brilliant talmid chochom, beloved *rav*, and famous polemicist:

Harav Avraham Chaim Na'eh

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לעילוי נשמת  
הרה"ח הרה"ת רב פעלים וכו' ר' דוד ז"ל  
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' יעקב יוסף שו"ב ז"ל  
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נלב"ע ז' אייר ה'תשע"א  
תנ"צ'ב'ה'  
נדבת משפחתו שיחיו

## Warsaw, Lubavitch, Kalisk, Eretz Yisroel

When he was twenty years old, Reb Chaim Na'eh left Yerushalayim for a Shlichus in Samarkand.

Seeing the sorry state of local halachic knowledge, he soon headed for Warsaw to publish Chanoch Lanaar—a guide for Hilchos Tefillin—in the local language, and shipped it back to Samarkand. Then, Reb Chaim had the opportunity of a lifetime.

Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel lived very far from Lubavitch, and contact with the Rebbe Rashab was sporadic. The young Chassidim heard from their elders about the previous Rabbeim, but never had the experience for themselves. Now, Reb Chaim headed for Lubavitch.

He arrived in time for Pesach 5672, and remained in the Rebbe Rashab's presence for over a half a year, through the following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Despite being only 22 years old, Reb Itche Masmid held a *kabalas ponim* for him upon his arrival, and the two farbrenged with a large crowd late into the night.

In *yechidus*, the Rebbe Rashab asked Reb Chaim to take on the role of Maggid Shiur in Tomchei Temimim, but when his father heard of the suggestion, he wrote to the Rebbe

Rashab that he could not imagine not having his son at his side—and so the offer was shelved. He continued to Kalisk to meet his grandfather, Reb Moshe Tzvi Na'eh, who served as the *rav* of the town, and then returned to Eretz Yisroel where he married his wife, Devorah Fenigstein, in Shevat of 5674.

## Elevating Egypt

29 Kislev 5675 is remembered as the infamous “Black Thursday.” World War I had erupted and the Ottoman Empire was now at war with Russia. On that day, all Russian citizens living in Eretz Yisroel were declared enemies.

The Jews were given a choice: accept Ottoman citizenship and enlist in the military (practically a death sentence), or be deported. Over ten thousand Jews were told to report to the port at Yaffo, where they would be loaded on a ship to Egypt.

When Reb Chaim and his pregnant wife arrived at the port, they were met with total bedlam. Thousands were trying to get onto the ship, and Ottoman soldiers were pushing and whipping those not moving fast enough. Being that Reb Chaim's wife was in her ninth month of pregnancy, he decided to go ahead and find a place on the boat for them both.

Suddenly, the soldiers decided that the ship had reached capacity. Ignoring the cries and screams of many separated families, they raised the gangplank and left the harbor. Reb



REB AVRAHAM CHAIM IN YERUSHALAYIM, AROUND THE TIME OF HIS WEDDING.



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

SOME OF THE FIRST 'LUCHOS' CREATED BY REB AVRAHAM CHAIM BASED ON MINHAGEI CHABAD AND THE ALTER REBBE'S RULINGS.

Chaim was on his way to Egypt and his wife was left behind.

She proceeded to her father's house in Yaffo, where, two weeks later, she gave birth to their oldest son, Boruch. She managed to rejoin her husband in Egypt three weeks later.

The family was settled into a refugee camp in a decrepit corner of Alexandria. Thousands of Jews were stuffed into a small neighborhood of warehouses that were now being converted into makeshift living spaces. Businessmen, merchants, long-term Torah students and Jews of all walks of life were now penniless refugees with nothing to do and no way of bettering their plight.

Reb Chaim didn't rest for a moment. With the small sum of money he had, he requisitioned an old theater and established a Yeshiva. He called it Yeshivas Eretz Yisroel, and immediately got to work inviting all the refugees, young and old. Over two hundred people spent the following four years ensconced in Torah learning, supported by Reb Chaim Na'eh.

To support the Yeshiva, Reb Chaim would make occasional trips to wealthy Egyptian Jews. He quickly became fluent in Arabic, and soon—as in Samarkand—became widely revered. After one specific event, he became known as a miracle worker:

A local merchant once asked Reb Chaim to daven for his wife, who would soon give birth. As he continued on his travels some time later, Reb Chaim recalled the request

and decided to dispatch a telegram wishing the merchant Mazal Tov.

The next time he appeared in that town, the merchant greeted him excitedly. His wife had been hospitalized, he said, and the doctors hadn't given much hope for the survival of the mother or the baby. As he sat in his store despondently reciting Tehillim, he received Reb Chaim's telegram wishing him Mazal Tov—and moments later, someone came running to inform him that his wife had given birth, and mother and baby were healthy.

News of the story spread far and wide, and the happy father worked hard to help Reb Chaim's fundraising efforts. He even published pictures of Reb Chaim which were distributed and hung in many homes.

During his years in Egypt, Reb Chaim noticed the severe lack of practical halachic guides in the local language. Again, he immediately set out to correct the situation, and authored

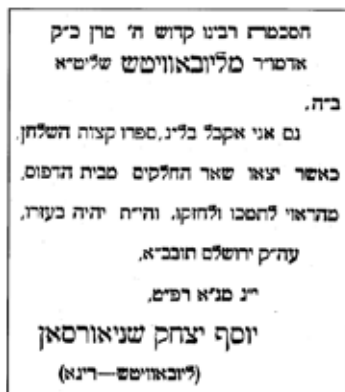


LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

FIRST VOLUME OF 'KETZOS HASHULCHAN' PUBLISHED IN 5686.



A RECENT EDITION OF THE ENTIRE SET OF KETZOS HASHULCHAN.



THE FRIEDDIKER REBBE'S LETTER OF APPROBATION FOR THE THIRD VOLUME OF KETZOS HASHULCHAN.

*Shnos Chaim*, a year-round guide to halacha and minhag written entirely in Arabic. It became so popular that the Jewish community of Egypt republished it a second time, thirty years later.

## Restoring the Crown

One day, back in Eretz Yisroel, Reb Chaim walked into the offices of Colel Chabad where he noticed a worker preparing a package with 'Rabbi Tucazinsky's Luach.'

"Where are you sending that?" Reb Chaim inquired. The worker replied that one Colel Chabad donor was a Gabbai and had asked for the *luach* to hang up in his shul.

Reb Chaim was upset. "The Alter Rebbe's rulings are being forgotten about in shuls everywhere, and you want to bring that situation into the Chabad shuls too?"

At the time, the 'Luach Eretz Yisroel' authored by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky was the only one of its kind, going through the *minhagim* of the year and guiding communities and individuals through the days and seasons on the Jewish calendar. It hung in many Chassidische shuls, despite the fact that it followed Nusach Ashkenaz and didn't take *minhag Chabad* into account. Chassidim used the *luach* while always remembering that it was not reliable—"the *luach* is a *misnaged*."<sup>1</sup>

From a very young age, Reb Chaim had been deeply pained by the widespread ignorance of the Alter Rebbe's Torah. His greatest passion was the Alter Rebbe's rulings in the Shulchan Aruch and Siddur, and yet they were so often neglected and forgotten.

As always, when faced with a problem—he set out to fix it.

Reb Chaim set out to write his own *luach*, based on *Minhagei Chabad* and the Alter Rebbe's rulings. After researching in *seforim* and consulting with many Chabad Rabbanim, the first *luach* appeared in the mid 5680s.

It became popular very quickly. Finally, there was a resource for Chabad *minhagim*, clear, easy to use, and detailed down to every *piyut* and *haftorah*. At a time when there wasn't even a Lubavitcher Machzor, the *luach* was a very welcome development.

During those same years, Reb Chaim published the first volume of his magnum opus, *Ketzos Hashulchan* on the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch.

His work was divided into two sections. The *Ketzos Hashulchan* was a shortened version of the Shulchan Aruch in the style of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, while *Badei Hashulchan* contained explanations, delving into the Alter Rebbe's rulings and discussing how they applied in various situations.

The *sefer* was received incredibly well. One of the greatest proponents of the work was Reb Dovid Tzvi (Radatz) Chein, the Chernigover Rav, who had just immigrated to Eretz Yisroel from Russia. Radatz had numerous traditions about *piskei halacha* he had received from the Rabbeim and from previous generations of Chabad Rabbanim,

and he shared many of those with the young Reb Chaim Na'eh throughout the short time he lived in Eretz Yisroel before his passing.

Reb Chaim continued to release volume after volume, and *Ketzos Hashulchan* became a major focus of his life.

The third volume of *Ketzos Hashulchan* was being prepared for print during the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit to Eretz Yisroel, and Reb Chaim merited to receive a short letter from him, despite the fact that the Rabbeim didn't write letters of approbation for *seforim*. When the seventh volume went to print after the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus*, the Rebbe's name was featured prominently as one of the donors who had enabled the project.

There were also other works pertaining to the Alter Rebbe's Torah.

The *Piskei Hasiddur* presented the rulings in the Alter Rebbe's Siddur according to the order of the Shulchan Aruch, so that differing rulings could be referenced easily. Until then, one might have learned a halacha in the Shulchan Aruch without knowing that the Alter Rebbe rules otherwise in his siddur, which is what we generally follow (as *mishnah acharona*). When the Rebbe republished the Shulchan Aruch in 5720, Reb Chaim's *Piskei HaSiddur* were included in the new edition.

Another two volumes were released pertaining to errors that had crept into the Alter Rebbe's Torah. Throughout the decades delving into Shulchan Aruch and the Alter Rebbe's Siddur, Reb Chaim compiled a long list of mistakes that had crept into the editions of the previous century, and published them in two *kuntreisim* called "*Kuntres HaSiddur*" and "*Kuntres Hashulchan*."

## The Rebbe Gave Me A Good Yom Tov

On Chai Elul 5710, Anash of Yerushalayim gathered for a momentous occasion. It was a few months after the *histalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe, and they were preparing to sign a *Ksav Hiskashrus* to the Rebbe.

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin wrote an emotional appeal, asking 'the Rebbe's son-in-law' to accept the *nesius*, highlighting how deserving he was and the need to continue the chain of leadership going back to the Alter Rebbe. In his draft, the Rebbe's name appeared with several formal titles.

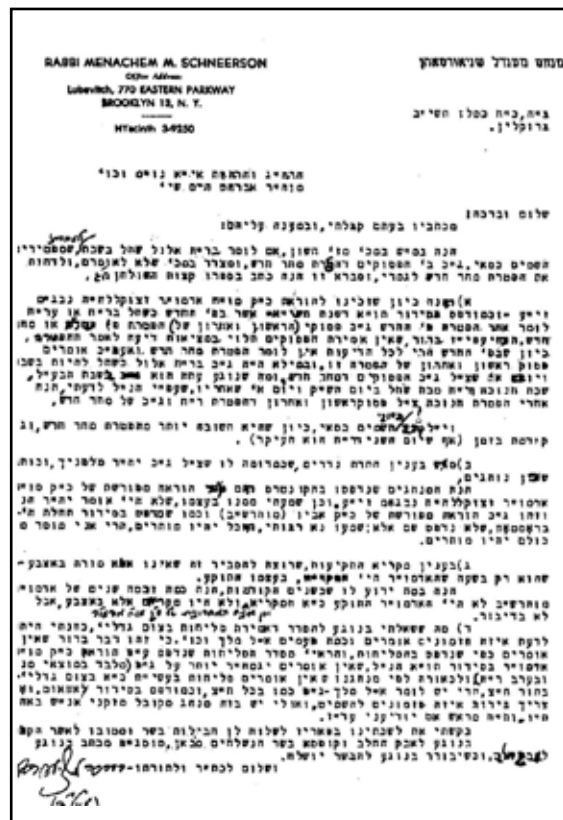
Reb Chaim Na'eh protested. He said the letter should start like any letter to a Rebbe: "*Kvod Kedushas Admur Shl-*

*ita*," making it clear that the *nesius* was already accepted, without needing to ask for approval. His suggestion was adopted, and everyone signed the final version.

From the moment of Yud Shevat 5710, when the Frierdiker Rebbe was *nistalek*, Reb Chaim had been adamant that the Rebbe needed to accept the *nesius*. Most Chasidim in Yerushalayim, and had only heard of the Rebbe from afar, but Reb Chaim was convinced that the Rebbe was the right choice. For years, he had already been telling people that the Rebbe was "one of a kind," and throughout the year following Yud Shevat, he would make sure to mention it at every farbrengen.

Reb Chaim never saw the Rebbe in person, but a written correspondence had developed throughout the Rebbe's years in America.

Most of the letters pertained to the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch and *Minhagei Chabad*. The Rebbe sent him comments and corrections for the Luach Colel Chabad, and asked for his edits on the Siddur and Machzor that were being published. Reb Chaim asked the Rebbe ques-



ONE OF THE REBBE'S LETTERS TO REB AVRAHAM CHAIM PERTAINING TO MINHAGEI CHABAD.



REB AVRAHAM CHAIM IN HIS LATER YEARS.

*On Rosh Hashanah 5752, the Rebbe said the following at the farbrengen:*

It's important to emphasize the need to properly prepare for the upcoming days—learning and becoming familiar with the halachos relevant to this time...

It's now easier than ever, as many halachos for these times are printed in the *luchos*. This is particularly helpful for those who, for whatever reason, don't have access to *seforim*, or who have them but lack the time or knowledge to look things up. By simply glancing at these calendars—like the “Luach Colel Chabad” (whether it's hanging on the wall or in a small booklet format), which presents numerous daily customs and relevant halachos—it becomes much easier to find and remember the necessary halachos.

tions regarding the *minhagim* in Hayom Yom, and asked the Rebbe to assist him in converting the measurements in his *seforim* from the metric system to the American system for the benefit of an American audience.

Shortly after assuming the *nesius*, the Rebbe wrote to Reb Chaim that Kehos was preparing a Selichos according to *Minhag Chabad*, and asked for his comments and corrections. Before Tishrei 5713, the Rebbe sent a draft with his edits for approval, and on Simchas Torah, Reb Chaim danced at *hakafos* holding the draft close to his heart. “The Rebbe wanted me to have a joyful Yom Tov,” he said, “so he sent me the draft.”

The Rebbe would send Reb Chaim money for the publication of his *seforim*, and even food packages for his special diet during the years of austerity in Eretz Yisroel. Throughout the years, the Rebbe regularly referred to his *seforim* in *sichos* and letters and called Reb Chaim “our *posek acharon*.” Many *minhagim* commonly observed today were published by the Rebbe based on the correspondence with Reb Chaim.

In fact, the one sefer that always remained on the Rebbe's desk, often noticed by visitors in *yechidus*, was the *Luach Colel Chabad*, authored by Reb Chaim Na'eh.




One Sunday morning in the summer of 5714, Reb Chaim suffered a massive heart attack. He passed away two days later, on 20 Tammuz, at the age of sixty-four. Thousands of people crowded the streets around his home, Lubavitchers, Bukharians, Yerushalmim, people of all stripes who all felt bereft by the loss.

“When I was first told about Reb Chaim's passing,” related his close colleague, Rabbi Zevin, “I couldn't believe it. I went to his house and saw him lying there, and I just couldn't understand how Reb Chaim wasn't rushing to the mikvah or rushing to daven. But at his funeral, when his students carried him and ran with his *aron* all the way to Har HaMenuchos, that's when I finally accepted it. This was Reb Chaim—always running for a mitzvah, even to his own burial.”

In a letter to Rabbi Zevin, the Rebbe wrote about his shock about Reb Chaim's untimely passing, and asked that he ensure that the writings—the next volume of *Ketzos Hashulchan*, and so on—be carefully preserved and published.

Many years later, a unique sefer called *Sefer Hatze'etza'im* was published at the Rebbe's request. It was an *ilan yuchsin*, a family tree, including the names of thousands of the Alter Rebbe's descendants.

One name stood out. One individual whose name and picture appeared prominently in the book's pages was not a grandchild of the Alter Rebbe at all!

He was included at the Rebbe's personal behest, as an “honorary grandson”—Harav Avraham Chaim Na'eh. 

*This article is based on Nodah Bashiurim, a comprehensive work chronicling the life of Reb Chaim Na'eh by Rabbi Shneur Zalman Berger.*

1. As termed by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin.