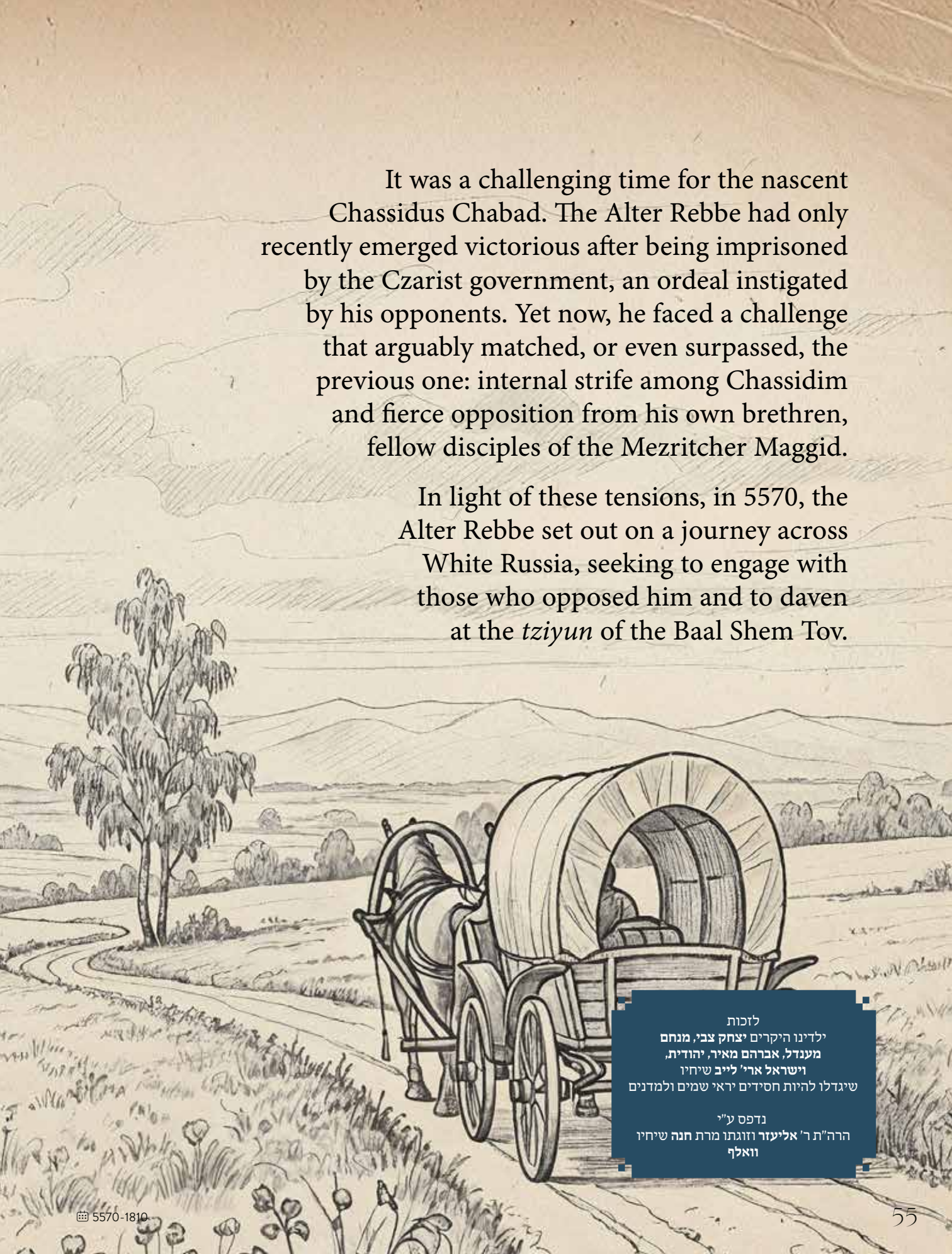


Journey Toward Peace

The Alter
Rebbe's
Trip to
Berditchev

BY: MOTTI WILHELM

The research on the Alter Rebbe's journey was undertaken by Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine, who published a book on the subject. It is primarily thanks to his work that this topic has been explored, and this article draws extensively from his book.



It was a challenging time for the nascent Chassidus Chabad. The Alter Rebbe had only recently emerged victorious after being imprisoned by the Czarist government, an ordeal instigated by his opponents. Yet now, he faced a challenge that arguably matched, or even surpassed, the previous one: internal strife among Chassidim and fierce opposition from his own brethren, fellow disciples of the Mezritcher Maggid.

In light of these tensions, in 5570, the Alter Rebbe set out on a journey across White Russia, seeking to engage with those who opposed him and to daven at the *tziyun* of the Baal Shem Tov.

לזכות
ילדינו היקרים יצחק צבי, מנחם
מענדל, אברהם מאיר, יהודית,
וישראל ארי' לייב שיחיו
שיגדלו להיות חסידים יראי שמים ולמדנים

נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' אליעזר זוזגתו מרת חנה שיחיו
וואלף

To fully understand the context of the journey, we must go back four decades, to the period immediately following the *histalkus* of the Mezritcher Maggid.

At that time, the Maggid's *talmidim* each returned to their respective cities and began to assume positions of leadership, "illuminating the world with the light of the Maggid's Torah, as transmitted to him by the Baal Shem Tov."¹

The Alter Rebbe, however, initially refused to accept the mantle of *nesius* or take on leadership of the Chassidim. He remained in Anipoli for some time, where he continued to learn Torah from Reb Avrohom HaMalach, the Maggid's son. Even later, after returning to his hometown of Lyozna, he declined any official position of *rabbanus* and counted himself among the *talmidim* of Harav Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk.

(It is interesting to note that in *Beis Rebbe*, the author adds a footnote: "The Alter Rebbe did not require a *rebbe* at that point, but he said, 'B'soch ami anochi yosheves—I dwell among my people.' And since all the Chassidim in our region had accepted R. Menachem Mendel as their *rav*, he too traveled to visit him."²)

In 5537, four years after the Maggid's *histalkus*, Harav Menachem Mendel decided to journey to Eretz Yisroel, driven by the intense persecution the Chassidim were suffering at the hands of the *misnagdim*. The Alter Rebbe accompanied him on the first leg of the journey, and only agreed to remain behind in White Russia to lead the Chassidim there after repeated pleas from *anash* who begged him to stay and assume the mantle of leadership.

At first, the Alter Rebbe accepted only a position of *rabbanus* in Lyozna, firmly refusing to take on the role of *nesius*. It was only after receiving numerous letters from the Maggid's disciples in Eretz Yisroel, whom he referred to as *Rabboseinu she'b'Eretz Yisroel*, urging him to accept the *nesius*, alongside their appeals to the Chassidim to recognize him as their *rebbe*, that he finally agreed.

Once he accepted the role, he began to lead the Chassidim and guide them in their *avodas Hashem*, following the path laid out by the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid.

One area in which the Alter Rebbe was especially active was raising funds for *Rabboseinu she'b'Eretz Yisroel*, ensuring that the Chassidim consistently contributed to their support, something well-documented in many letters found in *Iggeres HaKodesh of Tanya*.

Even after the passing of Harav Menachem Mendel in

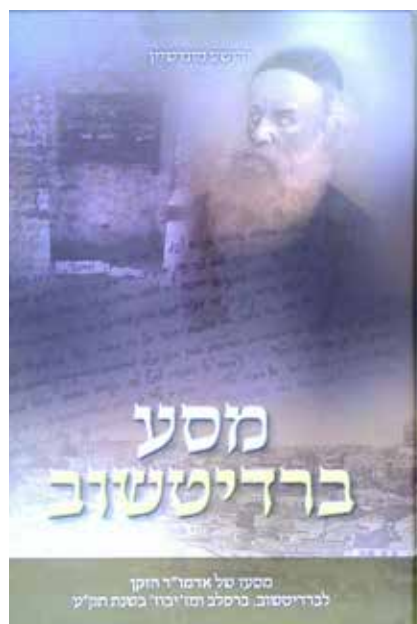
5548, the Alter Rebbe continued to support his successor, Harav Avraham Kalisker. In turn, Harav Avraham wrote to *anash*, urging them to follow the Alter Rebbe's guidance and to direct their contributions for Eretz Yisroel through him.

Winds of Machlokes

The following years were turbulent ones for Chassidus, and especially for the Alter Rebbe. The conflict between the *misnagdim* and Chassidim continued to intensify, ultimately reaching a boiling point with the Alter Rebbe's arrest by the Czarist government, following an accusation from a prominent *misnaged*.

Following his release on Yud-Tes Kislev, and subsequent exoneration from any investigation or government-decreed limitations on his teachings and leadership, the Alter Rebbe visited some of the greatest *rabbanim* of the *misnagdim*, where he was received with much honor. It seemed that the era of opposition had finally come to an end, and that the Alter Rebbe would enjoy a time of peace.

But alas, it was not to be. Shortly thereafter, a new and bitter *machlokes* erupted, this time from within. The Alter Rebbe now faced opposition not from the *misnagdim*, but from three fellow disciples of the Maggid: Harav Avraham Kalisker, Harav Boruch of Mezibuzh, and Harav Mordechai of Lechovitz.



THE SEFER BY RABBI YEHOShUA MONDSHINE ON THE ALTER REBBE'S JOURNEY TO BERDITCHEV.

Beis Rebbi, in his account of the *machlokes*, writes:³

“All of this was merely the work of the Satan, *Rachmana litzlan*, who constantly seeks to confuse the world. When he saw that he could not succeed in obscuring our Rebbe’s path and holy conduct, he toiled to incite even the Rebbe’s longtime companions and loyal friends against him, turning their hearts to wage an aggressive campaign. Perhaps, he thought, in this way he could conceal the Rebbe’s path and holy influence.”

He continues:

“But thanks to Hashem, even this plot failed. Though our Rebbe and those who stood by him endured much suffering and many hardships, none of it succeeded in swaying the Rebbe from his sacred path in the slightest. On the contrary, the Rebbe ultimately prevailed, and it became evident to all that ‘Hashem was with him, and the *halacha* follows his opinion in every area.”⁴

How did Harav Avraham Kalisker go from being a close companion of the Alter Rebbe to a fierce opponent? *Beis Rebbi* explains:

“Harav Hakadosh R. Avraham, *nishmaso Eden*, was an *ish Elokim kadosh*. However, *hu kadosh v’ein m’sharsav kedoshim*—he himself was holy, but his attendants were not. Some of the individuals he sent as emissaries to our region on matters of the *maamados* (communal contributions) were coarse and difficult people. When they arrived here, they opposed our Rebbe on many matters, and he endured much suffering from them. Yet, in his great humility, he accepted it all with grace.

“But they went further: upon returning to the Holy Land, they submitted numerous slanderous reports about the Rebbe to R. Avraham. *Lashon hara* has a way of taking root in the heart, especially in the hearts of great *tzaddikim*. And so, some of their words were, to a certain degree, accepted by R. Avraham.”

At first, the *machlokes* was limited to differences of opinion regarding how to spread the teachings of Chassidus. Harav Avraham expressed opposition to the Chabad approach, both to its method of study, which emphasized understanding G-dly concepts through natural *sechel*, and to the idea of publicizing Chassidus to the broader public. These early letters were still written in a tone of friendship and respect. However, it was not long before the tone and content became sharper and more confrontational.⁵

The disagreement soon extended to the matter of the *maamados* as well. Harav Avraham’s emissaries began



UNIQUE TRANSCRIPT OF A MAAMAR (TITLED: KSIV V'YADAATA HAYOM) DELIVERED BY THE MITTELER REBBE IN BERDITCHEV DURING HIS VISIT IN 5570 TOGETHER WITH HIS FATHER, THE ALTER REBBE. THE MAAMAR IS IN A SIMPLE STYLE, FOR THOSE NOT YET FAMILIAR WITH CHASSIDUS CHABAD. THE HEADING OF THE MAAMAR READS: “THIS IS A DRUSH THAT THE SON OF THE ADMUR SAID FOR NEW CHASSIDIM IN 5570.”

raising their own funds independently, backed by several of the Maggid’s disciples in Europe who supported his position, chief among them Harav Boruch of Mezibuzh and Harav Mordechai of Lechovitz. Others, including Harav Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, sided with the Alter Rebbe.

This *machlokes* continued to unfold over the following decade, with many of its details preserved in letters written by the Alter Rebbe and his contemporaries.⁶

Another stage in the escalation of the *machlokes* occurred when the Alter Rebbe traveled through regions that were under the spiritual jurisdiction of other *tzaddikim*. This took place during his efforts to assist the many Jews who had been displaced as a result of a harsh government decree.

In 5565, Czar Alexander I issued a cruel edict prohibiting Jews from leasing inns and taverns. The decree went into effect three years later, uprooting tens of thousands of Jewish families. These Jews were forced to begin their lives anew, finding new places to live, applying for governmental permission to settle, and seeking new means of livelihood.

In response, the Alter Rebbe undertook a series of journeys to support these displaced and resettled communities. He raised funds, convened leaders of Jewish communities, and even traveled to Petersburg to appeal directly to the government.

During these travels, at a time when the *machlokes* was already at its peak, the Alter Rebbe passed through territories overseen by other *tzaddikim*. This further intensified the conflict, deepening the opposition he faced.



MAP OF SEVERAL OF THE PLACES VISITED BY THE ALTER REBBE DURING THE MONTHS-LONG JOURNEY.

The Journey of 5570

In the winter of 5570, the Alter Rebbe set out on a journey through White Russia. Various traditions offer different reasons for this trip: to pay a condolence visit to the family of Harav Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, who had passed away on 25 Tishrei of that year; to daven at the *tziyun* of the Baal Shem Tov; to continue his efforts on behalf of the displaced Jewish communities; and to visit Harav Baruch in hopes of resolving the *machlokes* between them. It is likely that all of these motivations played a role in the Alter Rebbe's decision to travel.⁷

Accompanying the Alter Rebbe on this journey was the famed chossid Reb Pinchas Reizes, who had joined the Alter Rebbe on many of his travels. During the trip, he recorded several *maamarim* that the Alter Rebbe delivered at various stops, and also shared stories from the journey. Also accompanying them was the chossid Reb Sholom Freidas, who transcribed additional *maamarim* along the way. The Mittlerer Rebbe joined for part of the journey as well, recording *maamarim* in his own handwriting.

There is no clear record of the exact route the Alter Rebbe took on his journey, but based on known stops, it appears that the first locations he visited were Telyk and Haisyn, towns located in present-day central Ukraine.

A story from the Alter Rebbe's visit to Telyk is preserved in Breslover sources:⁸

"Once, a serious question arose in Telyk concerning an *agunah*. The town's *dayan*, R. Mordechai, wished to permit her to remarry, but refrained from ruling immediately. Instead, he decided to wait for the arrival of the Rebbe, the author of the *Tanya*, to discuss the matter with him.

"When the Rebbe arrived in Telyk, he, Rabbi Mordechai, and an additional local *rav* deliberated the issue together. Their joint conclusion was to permit the woman [to remarry].

"As the Rebbe was leaving the town, he remarked to those accompanying him: 'Telyk has two rabbis. One is worth a fortune, the other a kopek.' That is, Rabbi Mordechai was worth a great deal, while the other, by comparison, was worth but a mere penny."

The next stop was Breslov, home to Harav Nachman, great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. As *Beis Rebbi* records:⁹

"When he traveled through the cities of Poland on his way to meet with Harav Boruch, he passed through

the city of Breslov. The holy Rebbe of Breslov came out to greet him beyond the city limits, brought him into his home, and accorded him great honor.”

Breslov sources provide additional details about the visit:¹⁰

“When the [Alter] Rebbe arrived at the home of Harav Nachman, Harav Nachman turned to Reb Moshe Chinkes, a wealthy supporter and close follower, and said to him: ‘Give *tzedakah* to a true *talmid chacham*!’

“Reb Moshe placed a gold coin (*rendl*) on the table for the Alter Rebbe. Harav Nachman looked at him in astonishment and said, ‘That’s what you give to a true *talmid chacham*?!’

“Reb Moshe added another *rendl*, and then a third. Seeing Harav Nachman was still not satisfied, he continued to add coin after coin, until ten gold coins lay on the table. At that point, Harav Nachman swept the coins off the table and placed them into the Alter Rebbe’s hands.

“Then Harav Nachman asked the Alter Rebbe, ‘Is it true that you have eighty thousand Chassidim?’

“The Alter Rebbe responded that it should not come as a surprise. Among his Chassidim were many *melamdim*, and each *melamed* had numerous students. Each of those students gave *tzedakah* to support the Rebbe, and through that act, they were considered his Chassidim.”

For when someone gives *tzedakah* to a *tzaddik*, the Alter Rebbe explained, that spiritual bond ensures he will not become opposed to the *tzaddik*. On the contrary, the merit of the *tzedakah* will protect him and help transform him for the good. In this way, he explained, one can count eighty thousand Chassidim.

For reasons unknown, the Alter Rebbe declined to spend the night in Harav Nachman’s home. Instead, the townspeople of Breslov accompanied him out of the city, the two *tzaddikim* riding together in the same carriage.

As they traveled, Harav Nachman asked the Alter Rebbe about his dispute with Harav Boruch, his own uncle, who had also spoken out harshly against Harav Nachman. Using a play on words, Harav Nachman told him:

“From *Feterburch* you are already *patur*,” using the Yiddish pronunciation for Petersburg, where the Alter Rebbe had been imprisoned. “But from *Feter Boruch*” - Uncle Boruch, “you have not yet become *patur*.”



OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY OF BRESLOV.

Meeting Reb Boruch of Mezibuzh

From Breslov, the Alter Rebbe continued to Tulchyn, home of Harav Boruch of Mezibuzh. Harav Boruch lived in an attic, and as the Alter Rebbe ascended to meet him, he recited the *possuk*, “*Mi ya’aleh v’har Hashem*”¹¹—“Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem?” Harav Boruch stepped out to greet him and replied with the next *possuk*: “*Neki chapayim u’var levav*”—“He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”¹²

According to other sources, Harav Boruch descended three steps, or perhaps only one, and remarked that he would not descend further, not even for Moshiach himself.¹³

Beis Rebbi writes:¹⁴ “He brought him up to the attic, and they spoke with love and friendship. The Alter Rebbe then related to him the entire story of his imprisonment in Petersburg, from beginning to end.”

What followed was later recorded by the Alter Rebbe himself.¹⁵ This was prompted by a man named Dovid, who circulated a false account of the meeting. In response to requests from *anash*, the Alter Rebbe wrote down the true version of events.

“I received the letter *Shigayon LeDovid*”—a play on words referencing Dovid, the author, and the nature of the letter itself: a falsification—“and my insides trembled. Can there truly be such a person, who so thoroughly distorts the truth, turning everything upside down, from

one extreme to the other?

“On the contrary, I rebuked Reb Boruch to his face: How could he be so ungrateful? After all, both times I traveled to Petersburg [under arrest], it was solely out of honor for his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov. I could have said, ‘His grandson is alive and well, let him come and respond to the accusations!’ But I did not. And I did not say, ‘Who am I, that the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov should be sanctified through me?’”

Among the other topics recorded by the Alter Rebbe from this meeting was a question posed by Harav Boruch: Why was the Alter Rebbe investing so much effort in helping the displaced Jews?

“Why do you need all this?” Harav Boruch asked. “You can be *mamtik dinim* just by passing your hand over your forehead and face.”

The Alter Rebbe replied, “Yaakov Avinu surely knew how to be *mamtik dinim*, and yet he still sent a gift to appease Eisav.”

Harav Boruch then asked whether it was befitting the Alter Rebbe’s honor to personally undertake such extensive travel. The Alter Rebbe responded with a rhetorical question:

“Am I greater than Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair, who spent his days traveling for *pidyon shevuyim*?”

After asking and receiving confirmation from Harav Boruch that he had indeed spoken in praise of the *Tanya*,

the Alter Rebbe asked, “If so, why are you upset with me?” Harav Boruch responded by asking why the Alter Rebbe had come into their regions, to which the Alter Rebbe offered two answers.

While this exchange was taking place, Reb Pinchas Reizes stood between the two *tzaddikim*, attempting to defuse the intense conversation. Later, the Alter Rebbe rebuked him:

“How did you dare presume to stand between me and the Mezibuzher?! If you weren’t so dear to me, I would have already punished you!”¹⁶

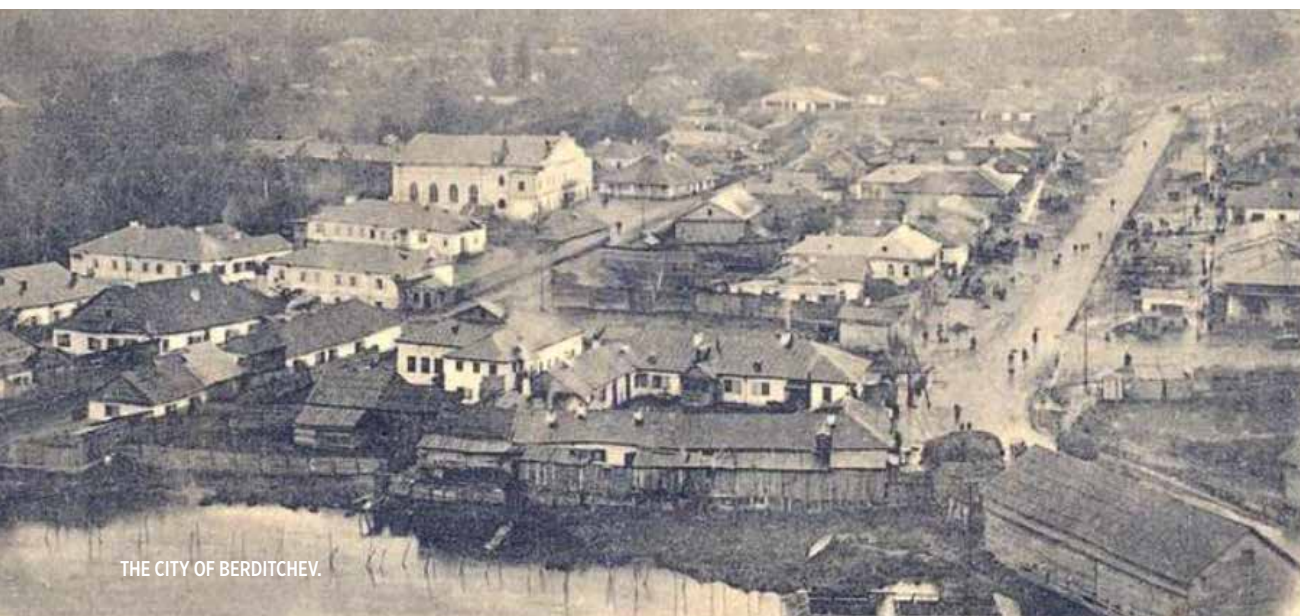
Beis Rebbi concludes his account of the meeting:¹⁷

“But nothing helped, they parted in *machlokes*, and no good came to either side from it.”

In a footnote, he clarifies this statement by citing “printed stories.” Around that time, Harav Boruch’s daughter passed away, and the Alter Rebbe lost a significant portion of his *Shulchan Aruch* manuscript in a fire, an immeasurable loss.

Visiting Berditchev

According to *Beis Rebbi*, the Alter Rebbe’s visit with Reb Boruch took place on Rosh Chodesh Adar 5570. In some handwritten accounts, it is noted that the visit occurred “before Purim.” Since 5570 was a leap year, combining both sources suggests that the Alter Rebbe’s visit



THE CITY OF BERDITCHEV

likely took place at the beginning of *Adar Sheini*.

Reviewing the *maamarim* delivered by the Alter Rebbe during this period, we find one on *V'yikchu Li Terumah*, presumably said on or around Shabbos Parshas Terumah, 6 Adar Rishon of that year. Following that, additional *maamarim* are recorded in various locations, with more delivered later once again in Berditchev. On Purim, the Alter Rebbe was in Mohyliv-Podilskiy, as recorded by the Tzemach Tzedek.¹⁸ Other sources place the Alter Rebbe in Starokostiantyniv and Sharhorod, other cities in modern-day Ukraine, at other points in his journey. This suggests that over the course of his journey, the Alter Rebbe traveled back and forth to Berditchev multiple times.

This pattern aligns with a story related by Reb Yochanan Gordon about the Alter Rebbe's visit to Berditchev.¹⁹ The Alter Rebbe had traveled there to be *menachem avel* the family of Harav Levi Yitzchok after his passing that Tishrei. Before Purim, the Alter Rebbe considered returning home, but the widow of Harav Levi Yitzchok asked him, "Who will lead the Seder in my home?" Hearing that, the Alter Rebbe instructed that one of the boxes that he had brought with him, which contained *shemura* flour, be opened. They baked matzah for Pesach with it, and the Alter Rebbe remained there for the Yom Tov.

Another fascinating detail is recorded in *Beis Rebbe*, in the section describing the lifelong connection between the Alter Rebbe and Harav Levi Yitzchok. There, it mentions that during the condolence visit after Harav Levi Yitzchok's passing, the Alter Rebbe went to visit his *kever*.

"When the Rebbe left the cemetery, he was quietly singing a *niggun* to himself. Upon arriving at the Rav's home, they brought him coffee and also offered him water to wash his hands. The Rebbe replied, 'I don't need water. The graves of *tzaddikim* do not impart *tumah*.'"²⁰

During this visit to Berditchev, the Alter Rebbe recited several *maamarim*, which were transcribed and later published in *Sefer HaMaamarim Admur Hazaken 5570*. Since these *maamarim* were delivered to audiences unfamiliar with the style and depth of Chassidus Chabad, they reflect a somewhat unique tone and structure, adapted to the listeners' background and understanding.

Another story from that journey recounts a meeting between the Alter Rebbe and the Shpoler Zeide.

"After the *histalkus* of Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the Alter Rebbe traveled to console his family and remained there through Pesach.

"During that time, the Shpoler Zeide arrived in

Berditchev. When Harav Levi Yitzchak's grandson heard of his arrival, he informed the Alter Rebbe that the 'Sabba' was in town. The Alter Rebbe asked the grandson to convey that he planned to visit the Sabba.

"The grandson went to the inn where the Sabba was staying and found a crowd of Chassidim crowded around the entrance, many holding *pidyonos*. The Sabba noticed him and asked, 'Did you also come to give a *pidyon*—you, a grandson?' Upon hearing the Alter Rebbe's message, the Sabba stood up and swore that he would not allow the Alter Rebbe to come visit him.

"The grandson returned and found the Alter Rebbe already preparing to head out. Even after hearing of the Sabba's oath, the Alter Rebbe insisted on going, saying he was not exempted from greeting the Sabba even after the oath.

"Before he could set out, the Sabba himself arrived and entered the Alter Rebbe's home. The two great *tzaddikim* went into a room together and remained there for a long time. When they finally emerged, ready to part ways, the grandson intervened. 'If Hashem has granted me two such distinguished guests,' he said, 'I cannot let the moment pass. I ask that you both eat with me.'

"If you give, we will eat,' replied the Sabba.

"They sat down for the meal, and each time the door needed to be opened, the Sabba quickly rose from his seat to do so."²¹

These sources also describe a gathering of *tzaddikim* convened by the Alter Rebbe to address the pressing challenges facing the Jewish people at the time. Some versions of the story include Harav Levi Yitzchok among the participants, but this appears to be an error, as the meeting likely took place during the Alter Rebbe's visit to Berditchev, after Harav Levi Yitzchok's *histalkus*.

Another notable gathering mentioned from that visit was of the *baalei hora'ah*, recorded by the Alter Rebbe himself in a *teshuva* addressed to Harav Aryeh Leib Katzenellenbogen, Av Beis Din of Brisk.²²

In his response, the Alter Rebbe notes that he received the letter, which included a halachic query, while in Berditchev, writing: "And I was very preoccupied with communal matters, *Hashem yerachem*." The *teshuva* dealt with a question regarding *treifos* in an animal, and the Alter Rebbe adds, "While I was [in Berditchev], the local *baalei hora'ah* gathered around me," and they collectively agreed on the *psak*.

Moving to Berditchev?

While the Alter Rebbe was still on his journey, tragedy struck. A fire broke out in Liadi, destroying the home and possessions of the Alter Rebbe and his family, including many priceless manuscripts of Chassidus and *nigleh*, among them the handwritten draft of the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch.



THE TZIYUN OF REB LEVI YITZCHOK IN BERDITCHEV AS IT APPEARED FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE ITS MORE RECENT RENOVATION (BELOW).

The fire is described in a letter penned by the Mitteler Rebbe to all of *anash*.²³

“We now come to inform you of our sorrow: the hand of Hashem has touched us, as a sudden fire, sparked by a minor cause, broke out in the great house of *kvod adoneinu moreinu v'rabeinu, ateres rosheinu, sheyichye*.

“There was no time whatsoever to save even a single item, for in but a brief moment, the entire roof and the inside of the house were engulfed in a terrifying blaze. All who saw it were stricken with awe and shaken to their core; no one had the strength to respond or act. Nothing at all was saved from the house, not even a thread or a shoelace.”

In the same letter, the Mitteler Rebbe goes on to describe the great losses and appeals to the Chassidim to support the Alter Rebbe with funds. He also notes that the community of Berditchev was attempting to persuade the Alter Rebbe to relocate there:

“Especially after hearing from trustworthy sources that it is the wish and approval of the dignitaries and leaders of the Berditchev community that [the Alter Rebbe] establish his permanent residence there, to illuminate the land and its inhabitants.”

The Mitteler Rebbe writes that they have already communicated to Berditchev, “urging that such an idea should not even be entertained, *chas v'shalom*,” expressing confidence that the Alter Rebbe will not “break the bond he shares with the *anash* of our areas, who are truly bound to him with their very souls and have devoted themselves to him wholeheartedly for so many years.” Still, *anash* needed to ensure there was nothing preventing the Alter Rebbe's return by providing him with a house and all necessary items.

In the end, however, it was the fire itself that led the Alter Rebbe to remain in Liadi. In a letter of comfort written to a community that had suffered a fire of their own, the Mitteler Rebbe shared a powerful insight: specifically in the place where the Divine attribute of *midas hadin* is revealed and brought to completion, the inner *ahava* concealed within it becomes revealed. “For this reason,” he explained, “the Alter Rebbe did not wish to leave Liadi after the fire.”²⁴

And indeed, by Shavuot the Alter Rebbe had returned to Liadi, where he remained until the French invasion of Russia forced him and his family to flee deeper into the country. It was during that journey that the Alter Rebbe was *nistalek*.

Machlokes of Tzaddikim

While the fierce *machlokes* between the Alter Rebbe and other *tzaddikim* may have appeared to stem from ideological or practical disagreements, the Rabbeim explained that, in truth, its roots lay in the loftiest realms of *ruchniyus*.

The Beis Rebbe quotes the following from “One of our rebbes”—namely, the Magen Avos of Kopust.²⁵

“On one occasion, his grandfather, the Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, learned with him a certain *maamar* addressing the dispute between Shaul and Dovid. After concluding the *maamar*, he spoke at length about how this paralleled the disagreement between R. Boruch and the Alter Rebbe. However, the exact nature of the parallel was not explained to us.”

Later, at the end of the chapter describing the *machlokes* between the Alter Rebbe and his contemporaries, the *Beis Rebbe* adds:

“From all that has been written above, it is clear that their disagreement was not a simple one. It dealt with lofty, exalted issues, matters that stand at the pinnacle of the world. Even during the dispute, there was never complete enmity between them. It was only when the matter spread to others, especially to the public, that it became more divisive. But they themselves, even in the midst of disagreement, were careful to preserve one another’s honor.”

“Indeed, we heard from a trustworthy member of *anash* that he personally witnessed a man speaking disrespectfully of the Alter Rebbe in the presence of R. Boruch, referring to him by name without the title ‘Rebbe,’ and so on. R. Boruch trembled and rebuked the man, saying: ‘You are degrading a *talmid chochom*, and the punishment for that is severe and bitter.’

“Realizing that such words from a *tzaddik* would not return empty, the man began to cry bitterly and begged R. Boruch to lift the curse. But R. Boruch replied, ‘I do not have the power to help you. You must travel to him yourself—perhaps he will be able to assist you.’

“At the time, the Alter Rebbe was in Berditchev. The man traveled there and poured out his heart before him. The Alter Rebbe told him: ‘A curse from a *tzaddik* must leave some mark. Still, if you have merit, the punishment may be lessened.’ And so it was, the words of the *tzaddik* were fulfilled, but part of the consequence was eased, just as the Alter Rebbe had said. This story is well known

in the cities of Poland, though this is not the place to recount it in full.”

The *Beis Rebbe* concludes:

“From all this, a discerning person will recognize that their opposition was not born of hatred. On the contrary, they remained respectful even in the midst of disagreement. One can sense that their words were like burning coals, and their rebuke carried the bite of a serpent.

“We also learn that Hashem Himself guards the honor of *tzaddikim* and exacts retribution on their behalf. Therefore, anyone who possesses fear of Heaven should guard his mouth and lips from speaking falsely or disrespectfully about the holy and exalted *tzaddikim*. He should know that his very soul is at stake, and one who values his life will keep far from such speech.”

May Hashem help us to follow in the ways of our Rabbeim, upon whose path we all tread until the coming of Moshiach. **1**

1. *Beis Rebbe*, vol. 1, ch. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, fn. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

4. A quote from Sanhedrin 93b.

5. *Igros Kodesh Admur Hazaken* (Kehos, 2012), letter 89.

6. *Ibid.*, and appendix 34.

7. Yehoshua Mondshine, *Masa Berditchev* (Keramim, 2017), p. 26.

8. *Siach Sarfei Kodesh*, brought in Mondshine, *Masa Berditchev*, p. 31.

9. Vol. 1, ch. 25.

10. *Masa Berditchev* p. 32.

11. *Tehillim*, 24:3.

12. *Beis Rebbe* vol. 1, ch. 21.

13. *Masa Berditchev* p. 39.

14. Vol. 1, ch. 21.

15. *Igros Kodesh* letter 98.

16. *Masa Berditchev* p. 42.

17. Vol. 1, ch. 21.

18. *Ohr Hatorah Megilas Esther*, p. 30.

19. *Masa Berditchev* p. 67.

20. Vol. 1, ch. 25.

21. *Migdal Oz* (Machon Lubavitch, Kfar Chabad, 1980), p. 170.

22. *Sha'alos U'teshuvos Admur Hazaken, teshuva* 12.

23. *Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtzai* (Kehos, Brooklyn, 2012), letter 3.

24. *Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtzai*, letter 76.

25. Vol. 1, ch. 21.