

לזכות
הו"ח אי"א נו"נ
ר' יואל ראובן שיחי'
דרו
לרגל יום הולדתו השבעים לאורך ימים
ושנים טובות
יום הבהיר יו"ד שבט ה'תשע"ט
נדפס ע"י בתו וחתנו
הרה"ת ר' צבי גרשון
וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה
ובנם מנחם מענדל שיחיו
פלברבוים



MEMMALEH MEKOMO

The stories of *kabbalas hanesius*

What defines a Rebbe? Is he a *tzaddik*? A *baal mesiras nefesh*? A *rav*?

One of the Rebbe's early letters discusses this topic. The answer, the Rebbe writes, is none of the above. A Rebbe could include all of these descriptions, but that is not his defining term. A Rebbe is a *nossi hador*, the leader of the generation. He is "*lev kol kehal Yisroel*"—the heart and focal point of all the Yidden in his times; the intermediary who elevates the Yidden and connects them with the *Aibershter*.

Every Rebbe is different. A quick perusal of the *maamarim*, *sichos*, and letters of each of the Rebbeim shows a vast difference in style. The Mittlerer Rebbe is known as *rechovos hanahar* (widely flow of a river¹) due to his long and detailed explanations of Chassidus; the Tzemach Tzedek is known for his combination of Chassidus with *nigleh*; while the Rebbe Rashab is called the Rambam of Chassidus, for his systematic approach to *nistar*.

The styles of leadership and circumstances were also different. The Alter Rebbe dealt with teaching deeper elements of Torah to the Yidden; the Mittlerer Rebbe sought to find jobs for his Chassidim; while the Friediker Rebbe battled to keep basic Yiddishkeit alive.

The periods of the *kabbalas hanesius* of the Rebbeim has always been a fascinating subject. Witnessing the passing of the torch from one generation to the next was always an extraordinary and intense experience for everyone who witnessed it. At times, many months or even years could pass before the next Rebbe fully accepted the *nesius*.

Yet, the Rebbe explained on numerous occasions, there is really no gap between the *histalkus* of one Rebbe and the ascension of the next. Although there were times that the new Rebbe didn't immediately agree to become Rebbe, and many months could have passed before he would begin reciting *maamarim* or accepting *panim*, the *nossi hador* existed nonetheless. Being a Rebbe isn't a job description that necessitates doing something specific. All of his actions are merely an extension of who he is by simply existing—the *nossi hador*.

In terms of Chassidus, a Rebbe is *ma'or*, or *etzem*. While *giluyim* change with time and circumstances, the *etzem* always remains the same. Thus, the Rebbe explained, all the Rebbeim are really one united entity. A common saying of the Rebbe was that a *memaleh makom* is a real term. The term is freely translated as "successor," but the literal meaning is "the one who fills the place." Each Rebbe fully and completely filled the place of all his predecessors, and added another component of his own. Each Rebbe is a manifestation of all the Rebbeim before him, and through our *hiskashrus* to our Rebbe, we connect with all of the Rebbeim—all the way back to the Baal Shem Tov.

The Rebbe would also add that, in line with the dictum of *maalin bakodesh*—everything in holiness must grow—this *etzem* and *ma'or* also grows constantly, and therefore each Rebbe added his own unique contributions and additions.

In honor of Yud Shevat, the day our Rebbe became Rebbe, we present a short description of the *kabbalas hanesius* of each of the Rebbeim.

FROM BODY TO SOUL

THE BAAL SHEM TOV



RESTORED REPLICA OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S SHUL IN MEZIBUSH.

The story of the Baal Shem Tov's "*kabbalas hanesius*," or, better said, his *hisgalus* (revelation of his greatness), takes place with the backdrop of terrible times for the Jewish people.

Born only 50 years after the horrors of *Tach V'tat*, when hundreds of thousands of Yidden were slaughtered by Ukrainian Cossacks, the Jewish community was in tatters. People were miserably poor, barely eking out a minimum to live; all of their time and energy was expended on procuring food for their next meal.

The spiritual state was no better. The *lomdim* remained closeted among themselves, occupied with their personal spiritual pursuits, while the simple and ignorant were deemed unworthy of their attention. Generations of Jews—although devoutly pious—were raised to feel

secondary and unimportant due to their ignorance.²

It was due to this situation that the Baal Shem Tov revealed himself on Chai Elul 5494*, when he was 36 years old.

His previous 10 years had been spent under the tutelage of the *novi* Achiya Hashiloni, who would teach him Torah. Achiya had begun their studies by teaching him Parshas Bereishis on Chai Elul 5484*, and upon concluding the entire Torah, the revelation took place.³

From age 22, the Baal Shem Tov had been part of the *Chevraya Kaddisha*, a society of hidden *tzaddikim* who sought to better the welfare of their fellow Jews. This group was, in essence, the forerunner to Chassidus. At one point, its leader, Reb Adam Baal Shem, gave over the reigns of the secret leadership to the Baal

Shem Tov, and by the time the Baal Shem Tov was 33, Reb Adam began to urge him to reveal himself. He wrote to the Baal Shem Tov that Eliyahu Hanavi had revealed to him that his time for revelation had arrived.⁴ After three years, his efforts were successful.

After the revelation, the work of the *Chevraya Kaddisha* changed dramatically. Previously, their work had been primarily "to help the Jewish body"—they dealt mainly with the simple folk, encouraging them and helping them, but after the Baal Shem Tov revealed himself, they began to focus on the *talmidei chachamim* as well, bringing them the warmth of Chassidus.⁵

THE HEAVENLY ENTOURAGE

THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID

THE OHEL OF THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID, IN ANIPOLI.

When the Baal Shem Tov was *nistalek* on Shavuos 5520*, after 26 years of leadership, the bereft Chassidim naturally turned to his son, Reb Tzvi, for guidance. Initially, Reb Tzvi accepted the mantel of leadership, and he began to follow in his father's footsteps.

However, the Baal Shem Tov's *talmidim* were worried.

The mounting pressures on the new movement necessitated a leader who could properly nurture and defend it from the *misnagdim* who were constantly seeking to delegitimize it; someone who was blessed with a strong character.

The answer came on the Baal Shem Tov's first *yahrtzeit*, when the *Chevraya Kaddisha* came to Mezhibuzh and gathered around the table of Reb Tzvi throughout the Yom Tov of Shavuos.

During the *seuda* of the second day of Yom Tov, after concluding his Torah, Reb Tzvi stood up and announced:

"Today, my father appeared to me and said, 'The heavenly entourage that always accompanied me has moved today to accompany the holy and awesome Reb Berenyu ben Reb Avraham. Therefore, pass the leadership to him in the presence of the entire *Chevraya Kaddisha*. He should sit in my place, and you, my son, should sit in his. Know that you will be successful; *u'pi shnayim b'rucho* (double the spirit of his predecessor).'"

Saying this, Reb Tzvi turned to the Maggid, wished him *mazal tov*, and gave him his cloak and his place.

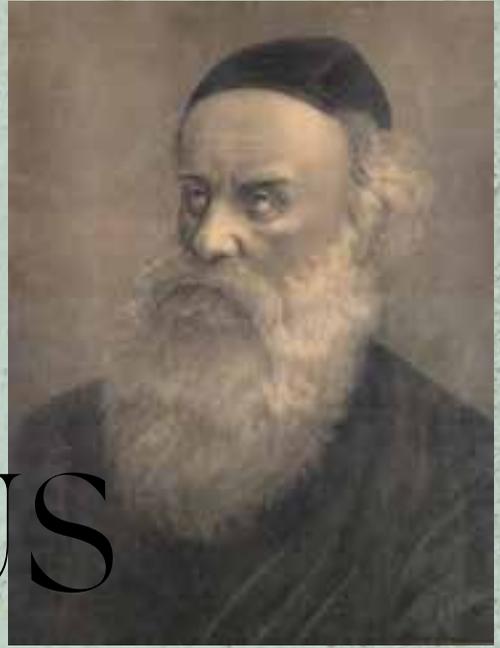
The Maggid seated himself at the head of the table, and the *Chevraya Kaddisha* immediately stood on their feet, ready to hear Torah from their

new Rebbe. The first Torah was on the *possuk* "*Mar'eihem u'maaseihem*," which was later printed in *Torah Or Parshas Yisro* (in the style of Chassidus Chabad).

Within a short period of time, the centers of Chassidus throughout Europe were reenergized. Originally, the news had spread that the Baal Shem Tov's work was falling apart, but now the efforts to spread Chassidus doubled and tripled, with the Maggid's *talmidim* spreading far and wide. The Maggid set up his *talmidim* in places where he knew they would have maximum influence, and Chassidus even made significant inroads in the *misnagdish* strongholds of Lithuania.⁶

CHASSIDUS CHABAD

THE ALTER REBBE



The Mezritcher Maggid passed away on Yud-Tes Kislev 5533*, almost 13 years after the *histalkus* of the Baal Shem Tov.

Following his passing, all of his *talmidim* returned to their hometowns where they began to lead the local Chassidim, while the Maggid's senior *talmid*, Reb Mendel Horodoker, was viewed as the primary leader of Chassidus. However, there was a general consensus among the *talmidim* that one person should be appointed as the head of the *vaad* to energetically defend Chassidus from the *misnagdim* and to actively lead the campaign to spread Chassidus. The person chosen to head the *vaad* was the Alter Rebbe.

The Alter Rebbe had already begun formulating his special brand of Chassidus, called Chassidus Chabad, before the Maggid's *histalkus*. Now, he

returned to his hometown of Liozna and founded a *cheder*—a place for superior *talmidim* to gather and study Torah in an organized fashion—unlike the *yoshevim* that existed in Chassidic centers until then. Streams of Torah scholars gathered to Liozna and became the founding nucleus of the Alter Rebbe's Chassidim. He would also travel throughout the area (often with Reb Mendel Horodoker) to visit the *batei midrash* and bring the light of Chassidus to their *lomdim*.

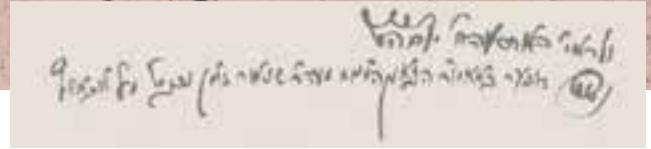
A few years later, in 5536*, the Mezritcher Maggid's *talmidim* held another *asifa*, where it was decided that Reb Mendel Horodoker would journey to Eretz Yisrael. His position as *nossi* of the Chassidim in Lithuania and White Russia was to be filled by the Alter Rebbe.⁷

Even then, the Alter Rebbe always deferred to Reb Mendel Horodoker as the final authority. In letters, the Alter Rebbe often mentions “Rabboseinu in Eretz Yisroel,” and for all intents and purposes had accepted him as his Rebbe. It was only when Reb Mendel Horodoker passed away 12 years later that the Alter Rebbe agreed to remain the final authority of Chassidus.

The first *maamar* that the Alter Rebbe said when openly accepting the *nesius* over Chassidus Chabad was on the verse “*Gadol Hashem u'mehulal me'od b'ir Elokeinu*.” (This fact was said by the Rebbe in the name of the Frierdiker Rebbe, but they didn't clearly explain if it was referring to the time after the *histalkus* of Reb Mendel Horodoker or perhaps a time before then.)⁸

EACH GENERATION TO ITS OWN

THE MITTELER REBBE



SIGNATURE OF THE MITTELER REBBE.

The Alter Rebbe passed away on Chof-Daled Teves 5573*, while on the road fleeing from Napoleon and his army (see “The Battle of Good vs. Evil,” Derher Teves 5779). The Mitteler Rebbe was in Kremenchug at the time, where the Alter Rebbe had sent him to see if they could settle there.

Upon notification about the *histalkus*, the Mitteler Rebbe began a journey to rejoin the family and Chassidim. This journey spanned several months, and the Mitteler Rebbe stopped off in many cities and towns where he spoke Chassidus and accepted the local Chassidim for *yechidus*. Many Chassidim requested that the Mitteler Rebbe stay in their town, but he ultimately decided to settle in the town of Lubavitch.

During the lifetime of the Alter Rebbe, the Mitteler Rebbe had been appointed to fulfill numerous tasks for his father. When he was just 16 years old, he was appointed to guide the younger Chassidim, and later, some four years before the Alter Rebbe’s *histalkus*, the Alter Rebbe began sending Chassidim to him when they had questions in *avodas Hashem* (with the Alter Rebbe himself only answering questions on material matters).

Before receiving people, the Mitteler Rebbe would enter the Alter Rebbe’s room for a short while, and if someone requested a *bracha*, he would

return to consult with the Alter Rebbe on that specific issue.

The Alter Rebbe also tasked the Mitteler Rebbe with saying Chassidus; he would recite his father’s *maamarim*, with additional explanations in his own specific style (more on this later). There were instances when the Alter Rebbe and the Mitteler Rebbe would both say a *maamar* on the same Shabbos! Sometimes, the Alter Rebbe himself would listen in to these recitals.

After the Alter Rebbe’s *histalkus*, many Chassidim felt that it was only natural that the Mitteler Rebbe assume the *nesius*. However, some Chassidim felt that the *nesius* should be passed on to a *talmid* of the Alter Rebbe, not a biological son, just as had occurred after the passing of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid. (It should be noted that the Maggid’s son, Reb Avraham Hamalach, passed away shortly after his father’s *histalkus*.)

Those Chassidim chose to follow Reb Aharon Strasheler, who had been the most prominent of the Alter Rebbe’s *talmidim*, and whose style closely resembled the Alter Rebbe’s, unlike the Mitteler Rebbe, who had a unique style.

There are two extant letters of prominent Chassidim answering these claims; one from Reb Yehudah Leib, the younger brother of the Alter Rebbe, and the other from Reb Pinchas Reizes of Shklov.

Reb Yehudah Leib related a story:

Once, the Alter Rebbe heard that the Mitteler Rebbe had revealed something in one of his *maamarim* that the Alter Rebbe wouldn’t have allowed to be made public. The Alter Rebbe’s reaction was, “What can I do? *Dor dor dorshav*, each generation has its teachers. Perhaps his generation has reached a level where they are worthy of it.”

Reb Pinchas Reizes related another story, which highlights this idea even more clearly:

Four years earlier, when the Mitteler Rebbe’s daughter married Reb Yaakov Yisrael Cherkasser, the son of Reb Mottel Chernobiler, the Alter Rebbe had called Reb Pinchas and the Mitteler Rebbe into a room and closed the door.

He explained that being that the Mitteler Rebbe’s entire life is dedicated to spreading Chassidus and teaching and guiding the Chassidim, he requests that Reb Pinchas see to it that after his passing the *pidyonos* be given to the Mitteler Rebbe and no other.

“Upon hearing his words, we were both deeply frightened and we remained deathly silent, for we understood the implication of his words. The Rebbe would be taken from us; he was wanted in the heavenly realms.

“...Due to the recent circumstances, I feel obligated to publicize these words.”⁹

A PROOF FROM TORAH

THE TZEMACH TZEDEK

Following the passing of the Mittlerer Rebbe, on Tes Kislev 5588*, the leading Chassidim held a meeting, where they decided to crown the Mittlerer Rebbe's son-in-law and nephew, the Tzemach Tzedek, as the new Rebbe. They publicized their choice to all of the Chassidim, far and wide.

A delegation of Chassidim, including Reb Hillel Paritcher, Reb Aizik Homiler and Reb Peretz Chein, were dispatched to the Tzemach Tzedek to tell him about their decision. To their consternation, the Tzemach Tzedek refused to accept the *nesius*.

The uncertain state of affairs continued until Pesach of that year. Then it was decided that the issue would be resolved during Shavuos, when many of the prominent Chassidim were due to visit Lubavitch.

Shavuos was quickly approaching, and no progress had been made.

When asked, the Tzemach Tzedek said they should turn to the Alter Rebbe's son Reb Chaim Avraham or the Mittlerer Rebbe's son Reb Nochum.

On Erev Yom Tov, Reb Peretz Chein gathered a *minyan* of Chassidim, including Reb Aizik Homiler, and they paid a visit to the Tzemach Tzedek. When he once again refused to accept the mantle of leadership, Reb Peretz exclaimed, "The Rebbe's (i.e. the Alter Rebbe's) grandson must be the Rebbe. And I have a proof from Torah that you are the one:

"The *possuk* says, איש מזריע תחלה (when the man seeds first, a female will be born), which refers to your mother (Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, the Alter Rebbe's daughter) and אשה מזרעת תחילה יולדת זכר (when the woman seeds first, a male will be born), referring to you."

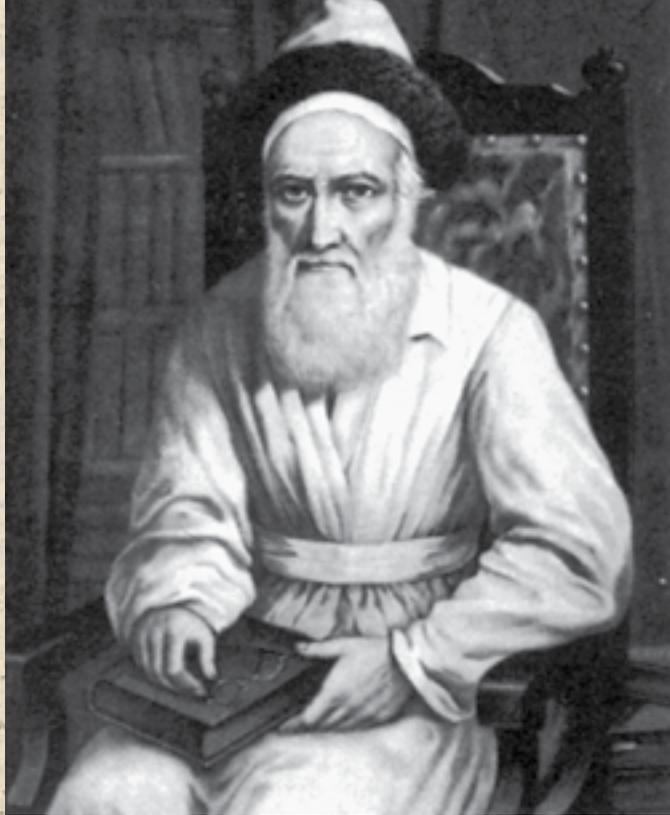
Hearing these words from Reb Peretz, the Tzemach Tzedek leaned his

head on the cushion and went into a *dveikus*. Reverently, the delegation of Chassidim left the room.

Some time later, the Tzemach Tzedek left his room garbed in a white *sirtuk* and a white *shtreimel*, which he had inherited from the Alter Rebbe, and entered the large *beis midrash* of the Mittlerer Rebbe, and he recited the *maamar* "Al shloscha devarim."

When he concluded the *maamar*, he returned home, while the Chassidim broke into a joyous dance, celebrating their new Rebbe.

The elder Chassidim decided to encourage the younger folk to become *mekushar* to the Tzemach Tzedek. To do so, they each committed to travel around during the upcoming year, and they divided among themselves all of the Chassidish communities. Reb Hillel Paritcher traveled to Cherson, Reb Aizik Homiler to Shklov, Mohilev, Zhlobin, and Homil, and other Chassidim took up postings as well.¹⁰



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THE FIRST MAAMAR.

As a young child, the Tzemach Tzedek's mother passed away, and the Alter Rebbe took responsibility for the upbringing of the young orphan. Often, Chassidim would see the Tzemach Tzedek running around the room with his toy tefillin fashioned from potatoes, and the straps would become tangled around the legs of the Alter Rebbe's table. The Alter Rebbe would bend down and free the straps, and the Tzemach Tzedek would continue playing.

Once, a select group of Chassidim entered the Alter Rebbe's room to hear a *maamar*. One youngster among them was Reb Aizik Homiler. The Alter Rebbe began to recite the *maamar*, and, intently concentrating on the Rebbe's words, Reb Aizik suddenly felt movement near his legs. Looking down, he saw the Tzemach Tzedek pushing his way through the crowd.

Reb Aizik bent down and whispered, "Reb Mendele..."

The Alter Rebbe abruptly stopped the recital, and interjected.

"*Loz em, er hert, du vest vissen az er hert.* Leave him be, he is listening; you'll know [one day] that he is listening."

And the Alter Rebbe continued the *maamar*.

Many years passed. The Alter Rebbe, and then the Mittlerer Rebbe, were *nistalek*, and Reb Aizik was now one of the elder Chassidim, beseeching the Tzemach Tzedek to accept the leadership.

When the Tzemach Tzedek finally agreed and recited the first *maamar*, Reb Aizik trembled when he heard the opening words. The *maamar* was the same as the one he had heard from the Alter Rebbe so many years earlier, "*Al shloscha devarim.*"

"*Loz em, er hert, du vest vissen az er hert,*" the Alter Rebbe had said, "Leave him be, he is listening; you'll know that he is listening..."¹¹

NO REVELATIONS

THE REBBE MAHARASH

About half a year before the Tzemach Tzedek's *histalkus* on Yud-Gimmel Nissan 5626*, he instructed his youngest son, the Rebbe Maharash, to begin saying Chassidus. This may have come as a surprise to many of the Chassidim. The Rebbe Maharash was the quietest of the Tzemach Tzedek's seven sons. While others, such as the Maharil, were well known to the Chassidim, the Rebbe Maharash had never taken an active part in leading Chassidim or demonstrating his talents and knowledge in Torah.

Along with the Tzemach Tzedek's instructions came a message for the Chassidim: "אליו תשמעו, כאשר שמעתם אלו, Listen to him, just as you have listened to me."

Another letter of the Tzemach Tzedek, this one directed to the Rebbe Maharash himself, also seems to be from that period of time. In it, the Tzemach Tzedek writes that he had read the Rebbe Maharash's Chassidus, and that it was good in his eyes. "Ani somech os'ha b'smicha rabbah," ("I offer

you ordination with great joy") the Tzemach Tzedek writes, and includes many *brachos* in the letter.¹²

After the *histalkus*, many Chassidim didn't know which of the Tzemach Tzedek sons to turn to, and many visited each one separately. One account tells of a Chossid who davened each day in the presence of a different brother to witness their unique *avoda*.

The Chossid related that the Maharil was known for his *hispa'alus* during davening; once he began davening, he would lose track of time and space and would pace around the room davening slowly, totally oblivious to the fact that he was the *chazan*. Once, he agreed to be tied to the *amud* to help him remain aware of his surroundings, but even then, he simply dragged the *amud* around the room.

Another brother, the Maharin, was known for his intense crying. Everyone participating in his *minyán* would be swept along in his tears; no one would be able to retain their

composure. When a few young Chassidim decided to pinch each other so that they wouldn't cry, nothing changed. The first *yungerman* began to cry, and when they pinched him, it only strengthened his sobs. Soon enough, everyone was crying along with him.

The Rebbe Maharash's *minyán* was entirely different. His davening was simple; no cries, no ecstasy, no length. The only thing they noticed was that before *Ashrei* and *Uva L'tziyon*, he would pull his tallis over his head and do something.

A certain young Chossid brazenly peeked under the tallis to see what he was doing, and the Rebbe Maharash flicked his nose. The *yungerman* later told his friends, "While I did get a flick, I also got to see what he was doing." The Rebbe Maharash was changing his head tefillin from Rashi to Shimusha Rabba.¹³

During that period, most of the Tzemach Tzedek's sons began saying Chassidus, and Chassidim went from



A MANUSCRIPT OF A MAAMOR OF THE REBBE MAHARASH.



one son to another to try to decide whom to accept as a Rebbe.

One Friday night, the Rebbe Maharash said the *maamar*, “Az Yashir... Ali Be’er.” The next day, Shabbos morning, his brother the Maharil repeated the *maamar* with an addition of his own. On Motzei Shabbos, the Rebbe Maharash repeated the *maamar* with an addition of his own. This repeated itself a number of times, until Tuesday evening, when the Rebbe Maharash said the *maamar* for the fifth time, again adding something new. With that, the Maharil came to him and said, “This time, our father said it, and I don’t want to stand up against father.”

One of the young Chassidim at the time, Reb Shmuel Gronem Esterman, went to consult with Reb Shmuel Ber Barisover, a distinguished Chossid, regarding whom he should accept as Rebbe. Reb Shmuel Ber advised him as follows:

“We cannot distinguish between the Rebbe’s sons, since they are all *tzaddikim*, and so I cannot advise you.

What I can say is I will travel to the youngest son [the Rebbe Maharash].”

Rabbi Shmuel Ber explained why.

“I was recently in Lubavitch. The Tzemach Tzedek said Chassidus, and among other things, he referred to something that seemed to contradict the *sefer* Eitz Chaim. I thought about this and found no solution.

“On Motzei Shabbos, I went to one of the Tzemach Tzedek’s sons and presented this question. He began to explain it to me, but I didn’t accept his answer. I went to a different son and presented my question, and he said it was a strong question and began to resolve it; but for some reason his explanation also didn’t sit well with me...

“Suddenly, I saw that the house of the youngest son was lit up. I said to myself, ‘I’ll go to him and ask him my question.’

“I peeked through the window and noticed to my excitement that he was studying the very passage in Eitz Chaim that had bothered me. I tried opening the door, but it was locked.

“Who’s there?’ He asked.

“Shmuel Ber,’ I answered.

“Just one second.’

“When he opened the door, I saw only newspapers spread across the table.

“Yes, Reb Shmuel Ber, how can I help you?’

“I told him that I had a question on the *maamar* that had been said on Shabbos.

“He looked at me and said, ‘Reb Shmuel Ber, they say you are a smart man. Why are you coming to me about this?’

“I told him, ‘I saw that you were studying Eitz Chayim a moment ago. If you don’t help me, I will tell everyone what I saw.’

“Hearing that, he began to smile, and we spent the rest of the night in discussion.”¹⁴

THE EMPTY SEAT

THE REBBE RASHAB



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

The Rebbe Maharash passed away on Yud-Gimmel Tishrei 5643*, after 14 years of *nesius*, when he was only 48 years old. The Chassidim felt especially bereft, taking into account that the Rebbe Maharash's children were still quite young; the Rebbe Rashab was 22 years old, and the youngest child, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, was just eight years old at the time.

The first *maamar* the Rebbe Rashab recited was on the second day of Sukkos, titled “*Kesser yitnu lecha*.” Although we know the *dibbur hamaschil*, no known transcript of the *maamar* exists. The Rebbe Rashab continued saying Chassidus, doing so once again on Shabbos Chanukah, and he would also accept *panim* to be read at the Rebbe Maharash's Ohel; however, he still refused to accept the *nesius*. During the year of *aveilus*, he closeted himself in the *yechidus* room of the Rebbe Maharash, where he davened, ate, slept, and studied, and he refused to answer Chassidim or guide them.

When the next Tishrei approached, many Chassidim were doubtful if they should travel to Lubavitch for Yom Tov at all. Reb Shmuel Gronem Esterman related that he brought his doubts to Reb Avraham Zhebner,

who had been a Chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, and he told him in no uncertain terms that he should travel to Lubavitch as always.

As the years passed, not much changed. The Rebbe Rashab would sometimes answer questions, but still refused to accept the *nesius*, and spent much of those years traveling out of the country for health reasons and for *askanus haklal*. The numbers of Chassidim visiting Lubavitch dropped drastically during those years, and that period of time has been remembered as “*churban Lubavitch*.”

Seven years later, in 5650*, a slight change became evident. The Rebbe Rashab stopped his long journeys and remained in Lubavitch, where he began to accept Chassidim for *yechidus*. However, his official position remained the same. In shul, the Rebbe Maharash's place—to the south of the *aron kodesh*—was still unoccupied, and the Rebbe Rashab continued sitting in his regular seat, two seats down—after the seat of his older brother, the Raza.

Over the next few years, the flow of Chassidim to Lubavitch began to grow once again, where they would come hear Chassidus from the Rebbe Rashab and enter for *yechidus*. In the summer of 5652*, two weddings took

place in *beis harav*; the Rebbe Rashab's sister Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka married Reb Moshe Horenshtein, and his brother Reb Menachem Mendel's wedding took place as well. Thousands of Chassidim streamed to Lubavitch for the occasions.

For Tishrei of 5653*, which coincided with the tenth *yom hillula* of the Rebbe Maharash, many hundreds of Chassidim arrived. The shul was packed to the rafters, and many were left to daven outdoors. The Rebbe Rashab said two *maamarim* on Rosh Hashanah, and the Chassidim reviewed them throughout the three-day Yom Tov. That Rosh Hashanah was a turning point; Chassidim felt that the sun had begun to shine once more, and the long wait was finally over.

It took one more year for the last vestige of “not accepting the *nesius*” to change. On Erev Rosh Hashanah 5654*, the Rebbe Rashab spent a long time at the Ohel of the Rebbe Maharash and the Tzemach Tzedek. Later that night, upon entering the shul for Maariv, the Rebbe Rashab walked right past his usual place, and took the place of his father, the Rebbe Maharash. The long wait of 11 years was finally over.¹⁵

FACING AMALEK

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE



When the Rebbe Rashab was *nistalek* on Beis Nissan 5680*, Russia was in deep turmoil. Four years earlier, during World War I, the Rebbe Rashab had fled Lubavitch due to the approaching German army, and had settled in the city of Rostov.

When the war finally came to an end, a vicious civil war broke out in Russia. The Czar was overthrown, and the Bolsheviks and the anti-Bolsheviks fought bitterly for control over the country. With the state of war came extreme danger for Yidden throughout Russia. With no law enforcement to control the streets, anti-semites vented their frustrations freely on any Jew they caught, and roaming the streets became a deadly venture for the Jewish community. News traveled very slowly, and it took many months for the Chassidim to hear about the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus*.

As the Bolsheviks consolidated their control over vast areas, they immediately began implementing their Communist agenda, and gatherings were outlawed, private assets were seized, and religion as a whole was persecuted.

The continuation of Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim, the life-work of

the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe, was in dire peril. The *yeshiva* was scattered in different locations, and financial support was non-existent.

It was in this climate that the Frierdiker Rebbe began his *nesius*.

In his will, the Rebbe Rashab commanded the Frierdiker Rebbe to continue leading Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim, and also to teach Chassidus (i.e. say *maamarim*) and advise Chassidim and guide them. Fulfilling the Rebbe Rashab's wish, the Frierdiker Rebbe recited his first *maamar* before the conclusion of the *shiva*. The event is described in *Ashkavta D'Rebbi*, written by Rabbi Moshe Dovber Rivkin:

"It was after Mincha on Shabbos Parshas Tzav, the last day of the *shiva*. The Chassidim were all waiting for Maariv in the dining room near the study of the Rebbe Rashab, and the Rebbe *shlita* [the Frierdiker Rebbe] was in the study alone. One of his

attendants called for me, and as soon as I entered he said with a broken heart: 'My father, after all, ordered me to speak words of Chassidus to *anash*. But who am I, and how can I bring myself to stand in front of the Chassidim and deliver *maamarim*?'

"In his humility, he wanted to continue, but I interrupted him by saying that I would rather not hear further words in this vein.

"He continued: 'Nevertheless, since my father gave me an order, I would like to deliver a *maamar* of Chassidus for you. In that way I will have fulfilled my father's holy instructions.'

"I of course agreed. He did not want to be seated; instead, we walked about in the study, and he recited for me the last *maamar* that the Rebbe of blessed memory delivered publicly—the *maamar* that begins, "*Reishis Goyim Amalek*." The wording was identical to that of the original *maamar*, except that he interspersed many explanations of his own.

“When it came to an end and I was about to leave, he held me back for a moment and asked me not to reveal to anyone what had transpired.

“‘Why not?’ I asked. ‘In fact, I would very much like to let people know,’ and so on.

“He earnestly repeated his request and I remained silent. When I left the study, however, I shared my information ‘as a secret’ only with the elderly chassid, Rabbi Shmuel Gurary. Since he had not been ordered to keep it a secret, he promptly passed it on. Within a few minutes, by word of mouth, the news had spread throughout the whole of the Chassidic brotherhood, to whom it served as a measure of consolation.”¹⁶

Similar to the Rebbe Rashab, the Frierdiker Rebbe spent much of the first year after his father’s *histalkus* closeted in the Rebbe Rashab’s *yechidus* room. From time to time he would send out fiery letters to the Chassidim, encouraging them to remain strong and to dedicate their lives to keeping Yiddishkeit alive. During those months the Frierdiker Rebbe began planning the network of *chadarim*, *yeshivos* and underground Jewish institutions that would keep Yiddishkeit alive in the Soviet Union over the next 70 years.¹⁷

The fight for Yiddishkeit began in full swing. Once, while the Frierdiker Rebbe was davening Shacharis at the *amud*, a group of policemen burst into the room to arrest him. Keeping his cool, the Frierdiker Rebbe told them to return when he was finished davening, and then he accompanied them to the police station. It was during this “warm encounter” that the Frierdiker Rebbe said his famous statement that “the little toy” (i.e. the gun lying on the table) can frighten a person with one world and many gods, but not someone with one G-d and two worlds.

THE SEVENTH IS BELOVED

THE REBBE

Following the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus*, Chassidim's eyes turned towards the Rebbe in the hope that he would agree to be *memaleh makom*. However, the Rebbe adamantly refused to accept the *nesius*, insisting that the Frierdiker Rebbe continues to lead the Chassidim.

Yet when *anash*, and especially *temimim*, approached the Rebbe to ask his holy advice, the Rebbe would reply to their queries. Even when pressed to give advice on material matters, the Rebbe would say his opinion, adding that the advice did not come with the title of "Rebbe" attached.

Nevertheless, Chassidim began to pressure the Rebbe to formally accept the *nesius*. In letters, and one-on-one, the Rebbe always refused to change his *hanhaga* from before the *histalkus*. "I didn't hear anything from the *shver*," the Rebbe once said.

Nonetheless, changes did happen. In Iyar, the Rebbe began accepting people for *yechidus* with a *gartel*, and on Lag B'omer, the Rebbe accepted *panim* to be read at the Ohel. On Chai Elul, the Rebbe wrote a *michtav klali* for the first time, addressed to world Jewry—yet another indication that the Rebbe was willing to accept the *nesius*.

The new year's beginning brought with it much positive change. On Simchas Torah, when the Rebbe received *Chosson Bereishis*, the *gabbai*, Reb Berel Chaskind had the courage to call up the Rebbe with the title "*Adoneinu Moreinu V'rabeinu*." This was the first time that the Rebbe had been called to the Torah this way publicly, and everyone present was filled with emotion.

In general, from the beginning of the new year (5711*), many signs pointed to the Rebbe's willingness to accept the *nesius*.

- The Rebbe established a schedule for *yechidus*, receiving people three times a week—



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Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights, starting at 8:00.

- From Simchas Torah onward, the Rebbe was called to the Torah as "*Adoneinu Moreinu V'rabeinu*."
- On *yomei d'pagra*, the Rebbe always *farbrenge*d.
- Also during this time, the Rebbe authorized the official establishment of "*Va'ad L'hafatzas Sichos*."

On 26 Teves, articles appeared in the New York Jewish newspapers reporting that the Lubavitcher Chassidim had crowned a new Rebbe on the 24th of Teves, and that the official acceptance of leadership would soon take place on Yud Shevat. When

the Rebbe saw this, he instructed Rabbi Hodakov to have the elder Chassidim contact the newspapers' editorial staff to deny the previous reports.

Rabbi Kazarnovsky, Rabbi Jacobson and Reb Shmuel Levitin entered the Rebbe's room and begged him to reconsider. Reb Shmuel argued that the newspapers had not written that the Rebbe had accepted the *nesius* but rather that the Chassidim had accepted the Rebbe as their leader, something that could not be denied. In the end, the Rebbe agreed not to contact the newspapers.

When Yud Shevat finally approached, many Chassidim felt that

the Rebbe would finally accept the *nesius*.

Following Shacharis, Reb Meir Ashkenazi presented the Rebbe with a “*ksav hiskashrus*” on behalf of all the Chassidim, and he asked the Rebbe to take on the *nesius* in order to hasten Moshiach’s arrival. The Rebbe

responded, “Yes, but you must see to help me out.”

While at the Ohel, the Rebbe was given a *pan kloli* addressed to the Frieddiker Rebbe, asking him to ensure that the Rebbe accept the *nesius* and have success in his role as Rebbe. Initially, the Rebbe refused to read it,

but when he finally did so, he shed bitter tears.

The Rebbe entered the farbrengen that night at 9:45 p.m. About an hour into the farbrengen, Reb Avraham Sender Nemtsov stood up and announced, “Everyone wants to hear a *maamar*. The *sichos* are good and



fine, but we want to hear Chassidus.” The shul fell completely silent. All eyes locked onto the Rebbe’s holy face. The people waited, their hearts trembling with excitement and anticipation.

It was 10:40 PM; the Rebbe opened the Friediker Rebbe’s *maamar* and began, “In the *maamar* that the Rebbe

distributed on the day of his *histalkus*, he begins with *Basi l’gani...*” Then, the Rebbe began to speak in the tune of a *maamar*.

Excitement spilled over in 770. People began pushing. And then a deep hush descended on the room and the Rebbe continued the *maamar*. The

Rebbe spoke about the *avoda* of *dor hashvi’i* and cried profusely. When he completed *se’if gimmel*, he said, “We will now take a break and say *l’chaim*.”

Rabbi Nemtsov jumped up onto the table and cried out, “We must say *Shehecheyanu*. Hashem has helped us: we have a Rebbe!” He then recited the *bracha* of *Shehecheyanu* with Hashem’s name and all present responded with a thunderous “Amen.” The Rebbe smiled and asked Rabbi Nemtsov to come down from the table. Following the *maamar*, Rabbi Nemtsov, in the name of the Chassidim blessed the Rebbe—in honor of the *nesius*—with *banei, chayei, umezonei*, and everyone again answered, “Amen.”

At 12:55 a.m., the Rebbe initiated the singing of *ki v’simcha*, and left the shul. The Chassidim continued to sing the *nigun* as they danced with great joy for a long while. T

1. See Igeres Hakodesh siman 15.
2. Sefer Hatoldos Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 41.
4. Ibid., p. 37.
5. Ibid., p. 4.
6. Hatomim, p. 140-142.
7. Sefer Hatoldos Admur Hazaken, vol. 2, p. 303.
8. Sefer Hatoldos Admur Hazaken, vol. 1, p. 252.
9. Otzar Sipurei Chabad vol. 16, p. 19-22.
10. Otzar Sipurei Chabad vol. 6, pp. 104-8. With corrected details from Reshimas Hayoman pp. 247-9.
11. Reshimas Hayoman, pp. 247-9.
12. Sefer Hatoldos Admur Maharash, pp. 13.
13. Otzar Sipurei Chabad vol. 8, p. 6.
14. Ibid., p. 8-10.
15. Sefer Hatoldos Admur Harashab, p. 26-35.
16. Translation by Sichos in English, “An End to Evil, Reishis Goyim Amalek.”
17. Otzar Sipurei Chabad vol. 11, p. 126.

