

לע"נ
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' משה
בן הרב נפתלי ע"ה גרינברג
גלב"ע י' תמוז ה'תשע"ג
תנצ"ב

נדפס ע"י בנו הרה"ת ר' ישראל מרדכי
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REB ITCHE GOLDIN, PARIS 5707*.

REB ITCHE GOLDIN

THE PARAGON OF DEVOTION AND SACRIFICE

In the early years of the Communist regime, as the Yevsektzia started mercilessly persecuting every institution of organized Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union, the Frierdiker Rebbe called nine *temimim* for a meeting in Moscow. Together they forged a *krisas bris*—a covenant to ensure Yiddishkeit continued to thrive at all costs; with *mesiras nefesh*, until the last drop of blood. They divided the responsibilities for different regions between themselves and through their tireless efforts and self-sacrifice, hundreds of *chadarim*, *talmud Torahs* and *mikvaos* were established throughout the country, making an everlasting impact on Russian Jewry.

The full list of these nine *temimim* is unknown to us, however, there were several legendary Chassidim who were rumored to have partaken in that historic meeting. One of them is Harav Yitzchok Aharon Goldin, known in Lubavitch as Itche Rogatchover or Reb Itche Goldin. His unconditional devotion to the Rebbeim placed him at the epicenter of the battle for Yiddishkeit in Soviet Russia and upon reaching the free world his devotion to the work of Lubavitch continued unabated, with great humility.

Following are snippets of the life and times of this unassuming yet giant of a man, whose devotion to the Rebbeim knew no bounds.



JEM 103457

REB ITCHE GOLDIN, RIGHT, LOOKS ON AS THE REBBE ESCORTS THE GUESTS LEAVING HOME AFTER SPENDING TISHREI WITH THE REBBE, 5721*.

TOMCHEI TEMIMIM

Yitzchok Aharon Goldin was born to his parents Yaakov Moshe and Miriam in the city of Rogatchov in the year 5660*. He enrolled in Tomchei Temimim, first in Shtzedrin and later on in Lubavitch, when he was 14-years-old. The Rebbe Rashab moved the yeshiva from Lubavitch to Kremenchug in 5678* and Itche Rogatchover continued learning there until the Frierdiker Rebbe moved the yeshiva to Rostov, in the summer of 5680*, following the *histalkus* of the Rebbe Rashab.

Reb Itche was from the first *temimim* to reach Rostov. One day while learning in the *zal* with five other *bochurim*, Rashag, the recently appointed *menahel* of the yeshiva, approached him and requested he become the *segan menahel* of the yeshiva.

Reb Itche refused because he wanted to continue learning and davening undisturbed.

“I will expel you from Tomchei Temimim,” said Rashag.

“You are not in charge,” he replied. “Only the one who accepted me in Tomchei Temimim can throw me out. You don’t have that authority.”

Rashag then told him to go to the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Upon entering the room, the Frierdiker Rebbe was beaming and said, “Nu, Yitzchok. What do you think about my idea?”

Reb Itche started begging to be excused from the position. “For a full year I have been wandering and unable to learn and daven properly. I am only 20 years old and I want to learn very much. What will become of me if I don’t learn now?”

“Yitzchok, you are a *prat* (individual) and Tomchei Temimim is a *klal* (community) and the needs of the *klal* outweigh the needs of the *prat*.”



THE VAAD OF TOMCHEI TEMIMIM IN PARIS, CIRCA 1908*. RIGHT-LEFT: REB ITCHE GOLDIN, REB SHLOMO CHAIM KESSELMAN, REB NACHUM SHMARYAHU SASONKIN, REB BENTZION SHEMTOV (STANDING), REB ELIYAHU PLOTKIN, REB YISROEL NOACH BLINITZKY, REB PERETZ MOCHKIN, REB ISSER KLUWGANT, REB YITZCHOK MINKOWITZ.

When Reb Itche continued to beg, the Frierdiker Rebbe said. “I worked in Tomchei Temimim for 23 years and lost nothing. I only gained. I promise you that you will lose nothing and you will only gain. Do not do this because you are forced to. You must do it joyfully.”

As the *segan menahel* of the yeshiva, Reb Itche assumed financial responsibility for the yeshiva. He spent days and nights procuring the necessary funds and arranging all the physical needs for the dozens of *temimim* who were streaming to Rostov. Within a few weeks there were 80 *bochurim* learning in Rostov and Reb Itche arranged for their lodging, clothing and food.

The workload was overwhelming and the Frierdiker Rebbe told Reb Itche that he had an open door policy. At any time during the day, whenever needed he was welcome to enter the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room to consult with him.

Since the finances of the yeshiva were non-existent, employing married men to serve in the *hanhala* was impossible, and three *bochurim* were appointed to the positions of *mashpia* (Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman), and *mashgichim* for Chassidus (Reb Chaim

Meir Lis) and *nigleh* (Reb Chaim Eliezer Hurwitz)—all without salaries.

The Frierdiker Rebbe commented about this state of affairs that “during war-time mobilized soldiers become officers.” (*Bochurim* who should still be students in the yeshiva are serving in the *hanhala*.)

Reb Alter Simchovitch, an exceptional older *tomim* from Lubavitch was then living in Rostov and he was the best candidate to serve as *mashpia* of the yeshiva. But there was no money to pay for his salary.

After a short while Reb Itche asked the Frierdiker Rebbe to hire Reb Alter. When the Frierdiker Rebbe asked how his salary will be covered, Reb Itche responded, “If there is a Tomchei Temimim, Hashem will help that there should be sufficient money for his salary. The *mashpia* is the epicenter of Tomchei Temimim and without a proper *mashpia*, there is no purpose in the yeshiva.”

Based on his recommendation, the Frierdiker Rebbe agreed to the plan.

Reb Itche approached Reb Alter as he was selling “*kvas*” (a Russian beverage) to passersby in the market and said, “Reb Alter, what is the *tachlis* of all this? You would be better off as *mashpia* in Tomchei Temimim.”

“I wish I can do that, but my children are begging me for bread all day,” he replied.

“The [Frierdiker] Rebbe agreed to hire you in Tomchei Temimim.” Reb Alter joyfully agreed, on condition that Reb Itche assumed personal responsibility for his salary.¹

On Erev Yom Kippur the Frierdiker Rebbe called for Reb Itche and in a very serious tone said to him: “You are very busy with Tomchei Temimim. You are not learning properly or davening properly. May Hashem help you that whatever refinement you would have attained through your davening and learning should happen as if you were actually doing so. And it should be with a true *hisorerus teshuva*.”²

MESHAMEISH BAKODESH

The devastation of World War I and the Communist Revolution ushered in an era of unprecedented starvation and illness, and in the month of Cheshvan 5681*, the Frierdiker Rebbe, most of *beis harav*, and many of the *temimim* became very ill. For several weeks the Frierdiker Rebbe was bedridden and Reb Itche was among a select group of *temimim* charged with the monumental responsibility to serve as *meshamshim bakodesh*—the Frierdiker Rebbe’s personal attendants during this grave time.

Reb Itche was on duty in the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room during the night, and throughout the day he would comb the city for the necessary medicines. It was an impossible job, but he quickly learned which medicines could be found at which pharmacies.

During those nights serving the Frierdiker Rebbe he merited to many conversations that he later transcribed upon the Rebbe’s specific request. (See sidebar)

WHAT THE FRIERDIKER REBBE SAID...

≡ During the final period of my father's (Rebbe Rashab) life he was in fairly good health, but he suffered terribly from the communal tragedies (the Communist persecution). One time I entered his room on a regular weekday and he was saying Tehillim. "You have seen his davening on Rosh Hashanah. His cries on Rosh Hashanah do not compare to how he was crying while he said Tehillim that time."

≡ When my father was a young child (younger than 5) he once gave advice to the Tzemach Tzedek. On Thursdays he would go to the Tzemach Tzedek to receive a *pitak* (a coin worth 5 *kopeks*). He once entered the *yechidus* room when there were many people waiting to enter and said, "Zaide, give me the *pitak*."

After giving him the coin, the Tzemach Tzedek said to him, "What do all these people want from me? I have no more strength."

"Zaide, Hashem has many more Yidden than you (to take care of) and he doesn't complain."

"How can you compare me to Hashem? Hashem has the Torah!"

"Zaide, you don't have Torah? Tell all these Yidden that you have no Torah and they will all run away from you!"

≡ Once my father sent me to speak to one of the great enemies of Torah-true Yiddishkeit. The man started to shout that he will destroy every vestige of Yiddishkeit and in response to every threat I responded, "He is laughing."

The man became annoyed and asked, "Who is laughing?"

I responded "יֵשֵׁב בְּשֵׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק—The One who sits in Heaven is laughing."³

The man exploded and slapped me in the face.

"This will cost you dearly!" I said to him.

A little while later the man lost his hand...

≡ When we were in Vienna for the winter of 5663*, my father and I would learn Tur and Beis Yosef together.

No one knew who we were, and some elderly Jews would approach my father every day and ask "Yungerman, perhaps you have some tobacco for us?" and my father would give them tobacco for their pipes.

One day, one of the elderly men said to my father, "Yungerman, yungerman. What will be? [What you are learning] is only good for your head. What will be with your heart?"

My father asked, "Nu, what should I learn for my heart?"

"We have a precious *sefer*'l. It's called Likkutei Amarim." The man showed him a small Tanya.

My father took the Tanya, looked at it and said, "Yes, it is a very good *sefer*'l."

≡ After the Frierdiker Rebbe's health was restored, he called for Reb Itche and asked him if he had seen three bundles of paper with golden edges. He had not seen them and did not know where they were and the Frierdiker Rebbe was very distraught. Reb Itche finally asked Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka about them, she showed him where they were and he immediately brought them to the Frierdiker Rebbe.

The Frierdiker Rebbe then shared with him that when the Rebbe Rashab was in Carlsbad for the hot baths (due to health reasons), they gave the patients anything they wished upon leaving the hot bath, even "a plate from Heaven."⁴ The Rebbe Rashab requested three bundles of paper and used them to transcribed three new ideas of Chassidus that are not discussed anywhere else.

"Now you can appreciate why these papers are so precious to me."

In appreciation for his finding them, the Frierdiker Rebbe showed Reb Itche the holy handwritings of all the Rebbeim that were on the shelf. "This is from the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe, the Mitteler Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe Maharash—and my father's handwriting you are familiar with."

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pages 19-2*



REB ITCHE GOLDIN, SECOND FROM RIGHT, AT THE GROUP PHOTO OF THE BAIS RIVKAH SCHOOL, CROWN HEIGHTS.

After the Frierdiker Rebbe's recovery, the battle for the preservation of Yiddishkeit in Soviet Russia began in earnest and Reb Itche threw himself into this holy work with great devotion. In 5687*, the same year as the Frierdiker Rebbe's arrest and miraculous liberation on Yud-Beis Tammuz, Reb Itche was amongst a group of Chassidim that were arrested and exiled for three years to Siberia.

Upon his release, Reb Itche continued to be an integral figure of the underground Lubavitch network until the Stalinist purges of 5695* when he was arrested once again and sentenced to several years of exile in Siberia.

During the intervals between his own prison sentences, he was known to care deeply for the families of imprisoned Chassidim and would visit them regularly, giving them much needed material and spiritual support despite the grave danger this posed.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

During World War II, hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews escaped the murderous Nazis, *ym"s*, by fleeing to Soviet Russia. After the war, the Soviets announced that, although leaving the Soviet Union was strictly forbidden, Polish refugees would be allowed to return to their homeland.

Many Polish Jews had survived the war but unfortunately there were many who succumbed to the cold,

starvation and unbearable suffering and had died during that time. Lubavitcher Chassidim, who had spent the war years in the eastern regions of the Soviet Empire, saw a golden opportunity to leave the despicable land in which they faced non-stop persecution. By co-opting the identities of the deceased Polish Jews they could take advantage of the crack that had opened in the Iron Curtain.

This daring and covert operation, colloquially known as the "*Eshalonen*" (trains) was coordinated by a group of heroic Chassidim, who managed to pull it off with ingenuity, bravery, sheer will power and many miracles. The route to freedom ran through Lvov (Lemberg) which was the final train stop in Soviet Russia, through Lodz, Poland, on to Prague, Czechoslovakia and finally reaching the numerous Displaced Persons camps in Germany and Austria. The greatest danger for the escapees was crossing the border from Russia to Poland and huge sums of money were needed to bribe the numerous officials along the border to turn a blind eye to what was going on.

Reb Itche, his wife Basya and his daughter Sara were among the first Chassidim to leave Russia through this method, but instead of continuing on to the safety of the DP camps in Germany, he remained in Lodz and then in Prague to coordinate the efforts with the Chassidim in Russia

to enable many hundreds of more Lubavitcher families to escape.

Money was the most important necessity. Reb Itche borrowed huge sums to keep the operation alive, and to provide for the refugees once they had managed to escape. As the point man for the Russian Chassidim and their connection to the Frierdiker Rebbe in America, he bore sole responsibility for many difficult decisions that needed to be made in real time, especially when he was unable to communicate with the Frierdiker Rebbe. He suffered terribly from the stress and great danger he experienced on a daily basis, from his creditors and the authorities.

He was instructed by the Frierdiker Rebbe to remain at his post in Prague [even though Czechoslovakia was already under Soviet influence], in order to greet the escaping Chassidim and ensure their safe transfer to free countries.

When the Soviets shut down the escape route and arrested the remaining Chassidim in Lvov, Reb Itche and his family joined the Chassidim who had settled in Paris and immediately set about establishing *chadarim* and *talmud Torahs* for the local children.

THE BEST LIFE

On Chof-Daled Teves 5708*, Reb Itche merited to receive a letter from the Rebbe in response to his notification that the final group of Lubavitcher families had received the necessary papers to continue traveling from Poland to freedom. The Rebbe added a few lines requesting that Reb Itche become involved in the activities of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch and Machne Yisroel.⁵

In a letter dated 4 Elul 5710* the Rebbe emphasizes that in addition to his work on behalf of *maamed*, it is important for Reb Itche to report

about his activities in connection with hafatzas hamaayanos.

Although maamed is very special... it is crucial for the temimim who are the elderly Chassidim to serve as an example for others and need to be a "city with everything." If haskalah is necessary—here is haskalah. If avoda is needed—here is avoda. If practical activities are needed—I have maaseh bepoel as well.⁶

Shortly afterwards, on 28 Cheshvan 5711*, the Rebbe responded to his report.

With great pleasure I read your report about your work in establishing talmud Torahs and arranging for melamdin to learn with children in their homes.

I also received your letter from before Rosh Hashanah in which you write briefly about your life story. Since you merited to serve the [Friediker] Rebbe in Rostov in 5681, I request you transcribe **everything** you remember from that time period and I will be very grateful to you for this. The more details the better. I hope you remember these moments well and will fulfill my request.*

In response to some details in your letter:

(a) At the conclusion of your life story you write "all my days were bad." This expression comes after you write that you learned in Tomchei Temimim for six years, merited to serve the [Friediker] Rebbe in his private affairs... Merited to fulfill the [Friediker] Rebbe's wishes through your involvement in community work, and even when you were imprisoned for six years the [Friediker] Rebbe had an impact through you since you were involved in hafatzas hamaayanos and strengthening Yiddishkeit [while in prison]. If after all this you claim to have had a bad life—I do not know what is good in this world.

(b) I was pleased to read your report from before Yom Tov about your work in Paris and Meitz with regard to chinuch... I was therefore disappointed to read in your letter I received today

"IF AFTER ALL THIS YOU CLAIM TO HAVE HAD A BAD LIFE—I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOOD IN THIS WORLD."



REB ITCHE GOLDIN GREETES ISRAELI PRESIDENT ZALMAN SHAZAR AT THE PLAZA HOTEL IN NEW YORK CITY AS PART OF A DELEGATION OF CHASSIDIM PRIOR TO HIS YECHIDUS WITH THE REBBE, 13 AV 5726*. ALSO IN THE DELEGATION: REB CHAIM MORDECHAI AIZIK HODAKOV, REB SHMUEL LEVITIN, REB MOSHE LEIB RODSTEIN, AND RABBI YEHUDA KRINSKY.

that [this year] you opened only one cheder with eight students. I hope that this number is only temporary and that very soon you will report that the number of students surpasses the number of students that were enrolled at the end of this past summer.⁷

Less than a month later, the Rebbe writes to Reb Itche, "I was pleased to read in your report that in addition

to the students of the Talmud Torah, there are 113 children learning with melamdin in their homes and that you opened another cheder."⁸

LIVING BY THE REBBE

On Sunday, 22 Teves 5711*, Reb Itche and his wife emigrated to America and he became a permanent fixture of 770 life, full of vibrance

and good cheer, exuding a unique Chassidisher warmth and total devotion to the Rebbe and the Rebbe's *inyonim*. He was an exemplary *chassidisher yid* without frills. His grandson, Mr. Yossi Shtetin, relates that he would always say, "I want to live by the Rebbe and die by the Rebbe."

He corresponded with his dear friend Reb Zalmen Serebryanski (with whom he had worked closely during the "Eshalonen" operation), who was living in Australia, describing life by the Rebbe.

Sunday, Bechukosai 5711*

... Now, I give thanks to Hashem that the Frierdiker Rebbe left a memale makom (the Rebbe). Everything continues as before. People are going in for yechidus and there are mammarim from time to time...

Rashag asked me to work in Tomchei Temimim, but I did not want to for several reasons. I was also offered a job in Merkos. After all the job offers I went into yechidus and the Rebbe told me that for certain reasons he wants me to continue doing shechita.

Two months after I arrived here I found a job shechting chickens three times a week and I make a suitable salary... We have an apartment, not an "American style" one, but enough for me. Three bedrooms, kitchen and restroom. I don't need anything larger, not like the

Americans that want to put one foot in one room the second foot in another room and have another room to spend time after eating by day and another by night—I'm not looking for this.

Tuesday, Vaeschanan 5711*

May Hashem help that the Rebbe should lead us to greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu. This is what the Rebbe speaks about all the time. I thank Hashem that the Frierdiker Rebbe left us his memale makom (the Rebbe) in every detail mamash!

My dear friend! It is impossible to describe the spiritual pleasure, when gazing upon the Rebbe Shlita's face, you can see א פר"י ליכין א צובר אכענעם איש אלוקי—a joyful yet broken G-dly man. I have no words to describe this to you. And words are insufficient to express our thanksgiving to Hashem for this. I now appreciate how discreet one is able to be...

Sunday, 7 Shevat 5712*

... Hashem should strengthen [the Rebbe's] health. We need to beg Hashem that he be healthy. His work and successes defy human capacity. Once when I was in yechidus I mentioned that for many years Chassidim would mention the Frierdiker Rebbe's name and mother's name in middle of the bracha of Shema Koleinu during Shemone Esrei, and now we are doing the same for the Rebbe Shlita. I asked if this is appropriate.

The Rebbe asked, "Certainly you are doing this after al teshiveinu [the spot in Shema Koleinu where one is allowed to include personal requests. - ed]." When I responded in the affirmative, he said "A groisen yasher koiach!" and added, "If Chassidim are doing this, there is certainly a source for it."

Therefore I am revealing to you my dear friend that we must daven for the Rebbe's health. He fasts a lot, sleeps no more than two or three hours a night. On Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday he receives people for yechidus from 8:00 p.m. until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. On the rest of the nights he sees groups of students.

Whoever goes into him once בלייבט ער זיינער—remains his forever."

TISHREI 5712*

In an emotional letter to Reb Zalmen Serebryansky, Reb Itche described his first Tishrei with the Rebbe.

... On Erev Yom Kippur, right before Kol Nidrei the Rebbe called us all to his room for a bracha. Upon entering the Rebbe gazed at everyone and then I saw him look directly at me for a while. I could not contain myself and wished to cry, but I controlled myself and closed my eyes. When I opened them I saw the Rebbe still looking at me. He then gave us a bracha... and started crying. Zalmen! You cannot imagine what was going on in those moments. Everything exactly as it was by the Frierdiker Rebbe and we must give praise to Hashem for His abundant kindness...

... After hakafos on Simchas Torah we remained [in 770] to continue singing and dancing. The Rebbe was in his room. Many Jews from other communities came as well and we were all dancing together on the street. Soon afterwards as we continued dancing in the zal we noticed that the Rebbe joined our dance and obviously the dancing became even stronger and faster. The Rebbe then announced we will repeat Atah Haraisa and hakafos, and that anyone that did



REB ITCHE GOLDIN (SECOND FROM RIGHT) JOINING A CHASSIDISHER DANCE.

“WHEN I OPENED THEM I SAW THE REBBE STILL LOOKING AT ME. HE THEN GAVE US A BRACHA... YOU CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THOSE MOMENTS.”



not recite a possuk earlier or hold a Torah by hakafos should do so now.

You can imagine what was going on. It was a very small crowd since the Americans had gone home to eat and sleep and only the temimim and the Russian Chassidim remained... During the final hakafa the Rebbe danced with great intensity. I was standing near the Rebbe, and the Rebbe knows my health condition and that I was dancing with my final strength. The Rebbe held me with his holy hands throughout the dancing and this supported me so that my dancing should not affect my health. It defies description...

The Rebbe announced that we should all say l'chaim and then went back to his room. We stood next to the window and heard him being maavir the sedra of Vezos Habracha...

BEIS RIVKAH

In 5714* the fledgling Beis Rivkah school for girls was in a serious financial crisis and the Rebbe instructed Reb Itche to assume full responsibility for the school as its

administrator. In his passionate and humble manner, Reb Itche devoted every waking moment to the success of Beis Rivkah until his final days.

He would knock on doors of Jewish homes and convince parents to send their girls—tuition free. A Holocaust survivor had wished to send her daughter to a different girls' school but had no money for tuition. The administration of that school suggested she send her daughter to public school and when she would have sufficient funds enroll her in their school.

“I did not survive the war to send my daughter to public school,” she said. When she approached Beis Rivkah, Reb Itche accepted the girl into the school without charging a penny. It was very difficult, but he managed to keep the school together throughout those very difficult years.

Once, the Rebbe said to Reb Zalman Gourarie in *yechidus* that everyone needs to be told what to do and to receive honor for their accomplishments, but there are only

three Chassidim that are completely *ibergegeben* (devoted). They do not wait to receive orders nor seek recognition. Reb Itche was one of them.

On Shemini Atzeres 5729*, Reb Itche was feeling very ill and his wife discouraged him from going to 770 for *hakafos*. Refusing to miss *hakafos* by the Rebbe he walked to 770 despite his condition. During *Atah Hareisa*, when the *gabbai* called upon Reb Itche to recite a *possuk* in honor of Beis Rivkah, he was no longer in the room. Standing at the doorway of 770 he suffered a heart attack and passed away a short while later.

When his *matzeiva* was installed, at the bottom there was an inscription that read, “At Rest.” The Rebbe noticed this when he was at the Ohel and sent a message to Reb Zalman Butman, a dear friend of Reb Itche and a member of the Chevre Kaddisha: “Reb Itche was a *chassidisher Yid* and he does not need the ‘At Rest.’”

Reb Zalman saw to it that this was corrected immediately.

On the day Reb Itche arrived in America in Teves 5711* he entered the Rebbe's room for his first *yechidus* and was there for close to 30 minutes. Afterwards he sobbed bitter tears for a long while. One of the things he revealed from that *yechidus* was that the Rebbe cried and said, “מ'דארף זען צוריקבריינגען דעם רבין—we need to bring the [Frierdiker] Rebbe back...” T

1. Toldos Chabad B'Rusya Hasovyetis page 244.
2. Sefer HaSichos Rayatz 5681 page 22.
3. Tehillim 2:4.
4. An old Yiddish expression for “the best goods.”
5. Igros Kodesh vol. 2, p. 288.
6. Ibid vol. 3 p. 408.
7. Ibid. vol. 4 p. 54.
8. Ibid. p. 83.
9. Yemei Bereishis p. 343.