

# The Life of a Chossid

## Reb Mordechai Horodoker

Chossid of: The Alter Rebbe, the  
Mitteler Rebbe, the Tezmach Tzedek

Reb Mordechai Horodoker was born during the time of the Baal Shem Tov after his parents—who were married for a long time before having a child—were given a *bracha* by a *tzaddik nistar* named Reb Mordechai. The *tzaddik* instructed that their son be named after him—Mordechai—although he would still be alive when the child was born.

Much of Reb Mordechai's life story was written by the Frierdiker Rebbe in the *lange brief*, a lengthy letter to Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, dated 16 Shevat 5695\*,<sup>1</sup> and published in English with the title *The Making of Chassidim*, excerpts of which appear here.

Reb Mordechai was a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe. Soon after his marriage, as a young man of 18 or 19 years old, he traveled from Horodok to the Alter Rebbe in Liozna; this was during the last years before the Alter Rebbe's move from Liozna to Liadi.

Reb Mordechai began studying Chassidus while still quite young, before his marriage. He had a good Chassidic education, and would always associate with Chassidim; however, he came from mixed Chassidic origins. His father, Reb Simcha Zissel, had lived in Kalisk, and had for many years been a follower of the famous *tzaddik* Rabbi Avrohom of Kalisk.<sup>2</sup>

Reb Mordechai originally came from Horodok, and had been sent to Chashniki, Belarus, by the Mitteler Rebbe, who instructed the Chassidim in Chashniki to appoint him as their dean. There, he became known as Reb Mordechai

Mashpia. One of his more famous students was Reb Shmuel Dov Borisover, known as Rashdam,<sup>3</sup> who later related Reb Mordechai's life story.

Rashdam used to say that it was thanks to the Chossid Reb Mordechai Horodoker<sup>4</sup> that he too became a Chossid. At 13, he was brought to Minsk to study. After four years in Minsk, on his way home, he followed his parents' instructions to stop over in Chashniki to visit his uncle.

"When I arrived in Chashniki," Reb Shmuel Dov related, "I discovered a large group of young men, as well as some elderly men, studying Chassidus with understanding and diligence. After I had come to the large *beis midrash* a few times to study Gemara in the Minsker style, some people approached me to discuss what I was studying. In those days my haughtiness was still quite evident whenever I discussed my Torah studies, and I was eager to demonstrate my prowess with *pilpulim*.

"But the young folk soon made me sweat! They called me appropriate names, and within a week's time they stripped off the gross hide that I had grown in the Minsker yeshiva. Some young men began to befriend me and to study Chassidus with me. A new world opened up for me and I began laboring with my greatest abilities; every word was precious to me. Eventually I was admitted to the circle of Reb Mordechai Mashpia."<sup>5</sup>

Reb Mottel of Chernobyl once visited Chashniki, and Reb Mordechai went out to greet him, explaining that he

לזכות  
 ר' יצחק בנימין  
 וזוגתו מרת ח'י' רחל שיחיו  
 קאמען  
 לאות הוקרה על ההכנסת אורחים  
 וביתם הפתוח לרווחה  
 נדפס ע"י  
 הרה"ת ר' צבי הירש  
 וזוגתו מרת חנה רחל שיחיו  
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was doing so because the Alter Rebbe had referred to Reb Mottel as “*an eideler yungerman*—a refined young man.”

Reb Mottel performed a miracle, to which Reb Mordechai responded, “It’s not a miracle if you do it to someone else; a miracle must be done on oneself, and this—he cannot do.”

A debate followed between the two of them: Reb Mottel held that certain *neshamos* do not need to be improved, while Reb Mordechai held otherwise, for even the greatness of the *Avos* and of Moshe Rabbeinu was achieved through *avoda*.<sup>6</sup>

While Rashdam was in Chashniki, a great desire arose among the young scholars to travel to Lubavitch. But Reb Mordechai Mashpia dissuaded them, saying that because the Mitteler Rebbe had recently been denounced to the government and had been in prison, it was not a good time to travel to Lubavitch. A few weeks later, the news spread that the Mitteler Rebbe would be travelling to the Alter Rebbe’s *tziyun* in Haditch. The group from Chashniki secretly traveled to Zhlobin, along the Mitteler Rebbe’s route. To their disappointment, they learned that the Rebbe was only to be in town for one day and would not receive visitors.

“I had the good fortune,” related Rashdam, “to find favor with Reb Meir Tzvi the butler. He permitted me to assist him in bringing water and other simple tasks.” During the night, the Rebbe passed through the room Rashdam

was in. The next morning, the Rebbe sent for him. With trepidation, he entered the Rebbe’s holy chamber. Being completely overcome emotionally, all he could manage to say were the few words, “Rebbe! I want to be a Chossid,” after which he began to weep.

The holy Rebbe replied, “Chabad demands intellectual activity, understanding, and concentration. If you work hard, you will become a Chossid. *May Hashem yisbarach grant you long life.*” Reb Meir Tzvi cautioned him not to reveal to anyone that he had had the great privilege of going in to see the holy Rebbe.

After Rashdam arrived home in Chashniki, during a moment when no one else was present in the *beis midrash*, Reb Mordechai Mashpia said that he detected an aura of spiritual purity about him. Reb Mordechai commanded Rashdam to tell him what had happened to him, and he told him everything.<sup>7</sup> **T**

1. *Igros Kodesh RaYYaTz* vol. 3, p. 156.

2. *The Making of Chassidim*, prologue.

3. See ציר פון א חסיד, *Derher Adar I 5774*.

4. A prominent Chossid of the Mitteler Rebbe.

5. *Links in the Chassidic Legacy*, chapter titled “Rashdam,” translated from *Hatomim* no. 5 pp. 99-103.

6. *Reshimos* issue 179.

7. *Links in the Chassidic Legacy*, *ibid*.