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הרה"ת הרב שלום דוב בער וילדיהם שיחיו
שוחאט

A TOWERING GIANT

THE STORY OF THE REBBE'S FATHER,
HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK, AND HIS RISE TO
LEADERSHIP IN A SPIRITUALLY DARK TIME.

IN HONOR OF THE YOM HAHILUA,
CHOF MENACHEM-AV.¹

EARLY YEARS

Harav Levi Yitzchok Schneerson was born on Yud-Ches Nissan 5638*, in the town of Podrovnah (near Gomel), to Reb Baruch Shneur, (a great-grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek), and Rebbetzin Zelda Rochel Schneerson. He was the oldest of four children, and was named after his paternal grandfather, who passed away at the young age of 44.

Already as a small child, Harav Levi Yitzchok showed signs of greatness. As the Frierdiker Rebbe would later write, “From a young age, his extraordinary talents were already apparent.” His teacher was his great-uncle, Reb Yoel Chaikin.

On Yud-Gimmel Sivan 5660*, at the age of 22, he married Rebbetzin Chana, the daughter of Reb Meir Shlomo Yanovski, the rav of Nikolayev. By that time, Harav Levi Yitzchok was already known for his vast knowledge in Kabbalah and *halacha*. The Rebbe Rashab was the one to suggest the *shidduch* and gave Harav Levi Yitzchok much personal guidance regarding his preparations for his *chasunah*.

After their *chasunah*, Harav Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana remained in Nikolayev for almost a decade. Harav Levi Yitzchok would spend most of his day learning, financially supported by his father-in-law. During those years, Harav Levi Yitzchok received his *semicha* from some of the Torah giants of the day, including Reb Chaim Brisker and Reb Elya Chaim Meizlish of Lodz.

Reb Shmuel Grossman, who learned as a *chavrusa* with Harav Levi Yitzchok at that time, related: “Harav Levi Yitzchok would learn 18 hours a day. At five in the morning, he would finally stop his learning to recite the morning Shema while wearing tefillin, and only then retire for the ‘night.’ By nine o’clock in the morning, he was already davening Shacharis with the *minyán*.”

From 5662*, Harav Levi Yitzchok attended all the conferences arranged by the Rebbe Rashab. One of the initiatives in which he took a large part was “Operation Matzah,” the project to arrange matzah for the Jewish soldiers fighting in the war between Japan and Russia in the years 5664*-5*.



FACSIMILE OF A LETTER FROM THE REBBE RASHAB TO HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK'S FATHER, WISHING MAZEL TOV ON HIS SON'S SHIDDUCH.

RABBANUS

“It was the eighth year that we were living in the home of my parents, who supported us while my husband studied Torah full-time. The time had come to think about seeking a source of livelihood.”

This is how Rebbetzin Chana, in her memoirs, describes her family’s situation in 5668*. Harav Levi Yitzchok and Reb-



HARAV MEIR SHLOMO HALEVI YANOVSKY (5620* - 5693*).

betzin Chana were already parents to two young sons, the Rebbe and Reb Dovber. They were all living together in the small home of Rebbetzin Chana’s father, Harav Meir Shlomo.

Although they received offers for positions of *rabbanus* in various cities, none seemed to work out, until one day, Harav Levi Yitzchok was offered to become a rav in Yekaterinoslav.

Yekaterinoslav, later called Dnepropetrovsk, was a large city with a colorful range of nationalities. Yidden began moving to the city in the mid 5500s; by the time of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s appointment, a bit over 100 years later, they numbered over 40,000 souls — almost 40 percent of the general population — making up the third-largest ethnic group in the city, second only to Ukrainians and Russians.

The general relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish population was a positive one but that had a dire effect on the Yidden’s spiritual condition. Russian culture made deep inroads in the Jewish community, and Russian became the language spoken in many homes, a result of their children attending the non-Jewish public schools. The rich and the middle class assimilated almost entirely, and cases of conversion were not unheard of.

As the years passed, antisemitism took a turn for the worse. The Jews were persecuted at every turn and the authorities hampered the efforts of the Jewish youth to enroll in schools of higher learning. As a result, the phenomenon of conversion began to rise rapidly. It was during this difficult period — when the persecution was worsening and the Yidden were on an extreme spiritual low — that Harav Levi Yitzchok received the offer to become a rav in Yekaterinoslav.

THE CHASSIDIM HAD THEIR EYES SET ON HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK. THE REBBE RASHAB HIMSELF INSTRUCTED HIM TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION AND ACTIVELY WORKED TO CONVINCING THE LEADERS OF THE CITY TO APPOINT HIM.

CONTROVERSY

Those who supported Harav Levi Yitzchok's candidacy knew that he was the only person who would be able to deal with the issues that plagued the city. With his knowledge, Chassidus, strength of character and talents, they recognized that he would be the best choice to captain the Jewish ship that was being shaken to no end.

During the years preceding the appointment of Harav Levi Yitzchok, several well-known and distinguished rabbonim, many of them Chassidim, served the community faithfully.

The city itself was divided into several parts, with different rabbonim for each side of town. One rav was for the center of town, another served the Yidden living in the neighborhoods bordering the Dnieper river, and as the city continued to grow, a brand new Jewish neighborhood was established and a rav was needed there as well.

In the year 5668*, over the course of five months, three of the four Rabbonim fell ill and passed away. Until their passing, peace had reigned in the city. Now that new rabbonim

were to be appointed, major disagreements broke out and the city became divided into different camps: Chassidim, *misnagdim*, and *maskilim*.

The Chassidim had their eyes set on Harav Levi Yitzchok. The Rebbe Rashab himself instructed him to apply for the position and actively worked to convince the leaders of the city to appoint him. The *misnagdim*, *maskilim*, Zionists, and high society, on the other hand, fought to appoint an *olam'she rav*, Rabbi Pinchas Gelman. The opposition to Harav Levi Yitzchok's appointment was not simply out of high regard for Rabbi Gelman; many of the opponents simply could not bear the thought that a Chossid might once again be appointed to lead the city's Jews.

Ultimately, the warring sides reached an agreement; Rabbi Gelman would become rav in the neighborhoods adjacent to the river, and Harav Levi Yitzchok would move to the new neighborhood. This arrangement continued until the passing of the senior rav, Rabbi Zakheim, who served the Jewish community in the center of the city. After his passing, Rabbi Gelman moved to take his place, and Harav Levi Yitzchok transferred to Rabbi Gelman's neighborhood. After the passing of Rabbi Gelman, Harav Levi Yitzchok was called to the center of the city. From then on, he was the only, uncontested rav of Yekaterinoslav and the light of his wisdom and leadership shined far and wide.

FIRST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Once appointed, Harav Levi Yitzchok began working tirelessly to strengthen Yiddishkeit in the city. The prevailing attitude in the community council and the influential class was one of apathy and indifference to all things Jewish, and Harav Levi Yitzchok had to work extra hard to bring about basic changes in Jewish life.

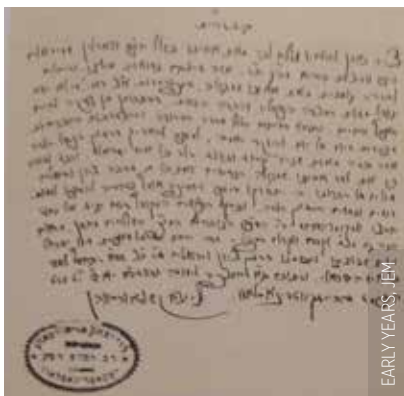


HOME OF REB MEIR SHLOMO WHERE HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK LIVED WITH HIS FAMILY FOR MOST OF THEIR YEARS IN NIKOLAYEV. THE REBBE'S BRIS TOOK PLACE HERE.

HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK TOOK THE PODIUM, AND STATED IN NO UNCER- TAIN TERMS THAT IT WAS FORBIDDEN TO SIGN THE DOCUMENT, WHICH WAS BUILT ENTIRELY ON LIES AND DECEIT.

One of his first endeavors was regarding a basic element of Jewish living: The *mikveh* of Yekaterinoslav had grown old and unfit for use, and Harav Levi Yitzchok made it a priority to correct its sorry state.

He gathered the community leaders and told them about the severity of the issue, but they resisted, claiming that there weren't adequate funds in the community coffers. The new young rabbi stood up to his full height, took off his new cloak which he had just begun wearing in honor of his distinguished appointment, and said: "Here you have this garment which costs a significant sum. With its worth, we can begin building a *mikveh*."



EARLIEST EXTANT LETTER OF HARAV LEVI
YITZCHOK AS RAV OF YEKATERINOSLAV.

The formerly apathetic community leaders were impressed with his sincerity, and they immediately committed to correcting the issues with the *mikveh*.

Harav Levi Yitzchok's efforts to influence the Yidden of the

city did not sit well with many of his opponents; some of them looked for every opportunity to challenge him and hinder his activities.

However, as the years passed, support for the new rav began to grow. Little by little, the influential Jews of the city were won over by Harav Levi Yitzchok's sincerity and steadfastness in Yiddishkeit. One would have thought that his fearlessness and steadfastness would have gained him staunch enemies, but the very opposite was true. Many who had opposed his nomination now visited his office, often seeking his guidance and counsel, and his sermons on Yomim Tovim began to draw increasingly large crowds.

COMMUNISM

As World War I came to an end, Russia underwent significant changes. The Czar was deposed, and the Bolsheviks came to power. They lost no time implementing their plans and promoting their way of life. Within a short time, all religions came under intense persecution. A special organization was created specifically to combat Yiddishkeit; run entirely by Yidden, they went about fulfilling their task ferociously, attempting to impede the progress of any religious institution or individual, all in the name of freedom and equality.

It was during these hard years that Harav Levi Yitzchok's strength of character came out in an entirely new light. Until then, he may have had to deal with opposition and annoyances, but now, insisting on principles was a matter of life or death. No imagination was necessary to figure out what the government might do to someone who stood up to them. Many rabbonim were exiled to Siberia and many others were killed outright; no one could know who was next on the black list in the offices of the NKVD.

THE CONFERENCE

An important conference was to take place in Kharkov and Harav Levi Yitzchok's presence was imperative. Global figures had denounced Soviet Russia for its persecution of religion and had awakened a storm of protest from people the world over. The Soviet leadership did not appreciate the tarnished image that the denunciation had generated and was attempting to mend it by publishing declarations by rabbinic leaders stating that there is no religious persecution in Russia.

One such letter had already been published, as a result of a conference of rabbonim in Minsk. Seeing their success, they were now attempting a similar gathering in Kharkov and hoped for the presence of the distinguished rabbis of Ukraine. This conference, they knew, would not be complete without Harav Levi Yitzchok. They were also aware that the rav of Yekaterinoslav was a hard nut to crack, and would need extra



A RECENTLY DISCOVERED PHOTO OF REBBETZIN CHANA. CIRCA 1930*.

“encouragement” for his presence to be secured.

The NKVD called Harav Levi Yitzchok to their headquarters to explain to him how important the meeting was to the government, and they offered him a first-class ticket to Kharkov.

“No, thank you,” Harav Levi Yitzchok told the officer, “I can travel on

my own dime.” The officer stared at him, shell-shocked. These were the offices of the NKVD, where nobody spoke like that. Nonetheless, the officer swallowed the insult and was content with the fact that Harav Levi Yitzchok had agreed to travel there in the first place.

Arriving at the conference, the rabbonim noticed a stranger among them. The NKVD had placed an informer to report on all their conversations, and the rabbonim were obviously not comfortable speaking their minds.

One person stood out. Harav Levi Yitzchok took the podium, and stated in no uncertain terms that it was forbidden to sign the document, which was built entirely on lies and deceit.

Seeing the disaster that the conference would amount to, the minister of education invited Harav Levi Yitzchok for a conversation, where he reminded him of the importance and significance the government saw in the success of the conference, and made him aware of the severity of his actions.

The private talk had no effect. Harav Levi Yitzchok refused to back down; he intensified his efforts to ruin the conference, and even sent a secret message to the international press, making them aware of the government’s actions. The conference was a failure, and the Soviets were once again shamed in the international press when the stories broke.

As Communism began to spread its wings over Russia, those involved in furthering Yiddishkeit throughout the Soviet Union began to be arrested; some of them were sent to Siberia and were never heard from again. In that climate, many rabbonim began to fear for their lives, hoping that dreadful day would never come upon them. One by one, many prominent rabbonim left the country.

By this time, it became clear that Harav Levi Yitzchok was the leader of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union, the

rav and *posek* everyone looked up to and respected. After the Frierdiker Rebbe was forced to leave Russia and was living in Riga, Harav Levi Yitzchok became the sole descendant of the Alter Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek leading Russian Jewry.

Harav Levi Yitzchok did not feel that his public support of Torah and mitzvos was something that should be unique to his status as rav. When the Russian government took a census asking citizens if they believe in Hashem, Harav Levi Yitzchok personally went from shul to shul and any gathering place in between, encouraging all Jews to unabashedly declare their belief in Hashem, stating that it is forbidden for a Jew to disconnect himself from Hashem, even for a short moment.

In her memoirs, Rebbetzin Chana wrote about the effect that the *drasha* had on one particular individual:

“His words had such a remarkable impact, that one individual with a position in a government office, whose wife had already written on the form that he was a nonbeliever, went to the statistics office and asked for the erroneous information to be corrected—that he was, in fact, a believer. Very pleased that he had mustered the courage to do this, the fellow came to thank the rav for having influenced him so.”

MATZOS: THE LAST BATTLE

Freedom of religion was one of the mottos of the USSR. As part of the PR campaign to prove this, they would allow the baking of matzah to take place. Since all bakeries—like

In an edit of the Rebbe on the Der Yiddishe Heim newspaper, the Rebbe wrote that Harav Levi Yitzchok was a most devoted Chossid of the Rebbe Rashab with whom he had close personal ties⁴.

Harav Levi Yitzchok would go to Lubavitch every year for Shavuot and sometimes for Tishrei. When he would visit, he was a guest at the Rebbe Rashab’s table, and would test and farbreng with the bochurim of Tomchei Temimim.

The Rebbe Rashab said about Harav Levi Yitzchok, Reb Menachem Mendel Chein, and Reb Chaim Shlomo Zalman Yosef Schneerson: “With these three I will pride myself, in this world and the next.”

Harav Levi Yitzchok was known for his special style in Torah⁵. When asked where he received this way of learning and being *mechadesh* in Torah, he responded that the general style he received from his Rebbe, the Rebbe Rashab, and based on his guidelines built his own edifice.

all businesses—were government-run, they were the ones to actually facilitate the baking and the distribution. This was at the very same time that they were arresting rabbonim and Chassidim, and repressing religion in general.

Baking matzos was not enough. They understood that Yidden will only buy matzos with a proper *hechsher* and being that the Yekaterinoslav region was an outsourcer for wheat throughout the country, they wanted the local rabbi, Harav Levi Yitzchok, to certify that the matzos were baked properly and were kosher for Pesach.

As per their custom, the authorities initially attempted to receive Harav Levi Yitzchok's certification by means of intimidation. It was only when they saw that their efforts bore no fruit that they agreed to Harav Levi Yitzchok's demand: He would be ready to certify the matzah if the government would give him and his *meshgichim* full discretion in running the bakeries. If the government was willing to comply, he would happily give the *hechsher*. If not, he would publicize that the matzos were *chametz* and forbidden for consumption on Pesach.

Surprisingly, they agreed, and on more than one occasion, kosher for Passover matzos were shipped throughout the entire region, giving the oppressed Yidden a chance to properly celebrate the festival of freedom.

In 5699*, Harav Levi Yitzchok once again organized these shipments. Seeing opposition from the government, he decided to travel and obtain an appointment with Mikhail Kalinin, the president of the Soviet Union. As an outcome of their meeting, Mr. Kalinin gave an order that the baking of matzos should continue undisturbed.

Superhuman effort was put into the baking. Obtaining the necessary permits, koshering the bakeries, and dealing with the government bureaucrats throughout the entire process was a backbreaking process, which negatively affected Harav Levi Yitzchok's health. But all that was insignificant in comparison to the spiritual pleasure that he felt. His face shone

from pure happiness, knowing that he gave Yidden the ability to have a kosher and happy Pesach.

This happiness was too much for the government to bear. The final straw had been added to the camel's back, and it was decided that the rav will not be allowed to reap the fruits of his labor.²

FINAL FARBRENGEN

Around Purim time, about a month before Harav Levi Yitzchok's arrest, two young men were noticed spending hours each day around his house, keeping tabs of who came and went, how long they were there for, and where they went afterward.

On Purim that year, there was a big farbrengen held in the rav's home with many in attendance, young and old, including many who were prohibited to be there and were endangering their lives by doing so.

Harav Levi Yitzchok shared many Torah thoughts with great fervor, and the room was filled with an uplifting atmosphere. In the middle of the farbrengen, out of great excitement, the crowd burst into dancing, despite the grave danger it entailed.

As the farbrengen came to a close, the crowd began to leave slowly, a few at a time, trying not to arouse suspicion. At that moment, Rebbetzin Chana noticed those two young fellows there again. There was no doubt in everyone's minds that they were hired by the NKVD to keep an eye on Harav Levi Yitzchok.

THE ARREST

It was three o'clock in the morning on 9 Nissan 5699*; knocks were heard at the Schneerson home on 13 Barikadna Street. Rebbetzin Chana opened the door and was greeted by four agents of the NKVD standing opposite her.



THE SHUL OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK, WHERE HE DAVENED UNTIL IT WAS SHUT DOWN BY THE COMMUNISTS IN 5695*, AS IT APPEARED DURING THE SOVIET REGIME AND HOW IT APPEARS TODAY AFTER ITS RESTORATION.



“Where is Rabbi Schneerson?” one of them asked.

As Rebbetzin Chana went to notify her husband of the uninvited guests, the four men entered the house, stationed guards at each door, and began a search. Rifling through the thousands of folios of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s written works on Kabbalah, *halacha*, and rabbinic correspondence, they confiscated his rabbinic ordination certificates and a petition from the community of Yafo in Eretz Yisrael that he emigrate and serve as their chief rabbi sent with visas for the entire family. They also took many rare and priceless artifacts, including *kisvei yad* of the previous Rabbeim.

After three hours of searching through the entire house, one of the guards announced:

“Rabbi Schneerson, get dressed and come with us.”

As it was right before Pesach, Harav Levi Yitzchok asked if he could take a small package of matzah with him, and they agreed.

It was six o’clock in the morning. Harav Levi Yitzchok was under arrest for his activities on behalf of Judaism in the Soviet Union.

As he was leaving the house, he turned to those who had gathered around and said:

“I am now being taken away, and our sages teach us that ‘one should depart from his friend with a Torah thought.’ I will now share with you one last teaching.” With that, he shared a *dvar Torah* with those standing around.

Mr. Yisroel Adamski, who was a child at the time, recalls the events of the following day:

“The news of the arrest began to slowly spread amongst the Jewish community. The next morning, as everyone came to shul to daven, the public learned about the arrest. Many Jews in the community were terribly angered, and some tried to arrange protests, but the NKVD, armed with heavy weapons, rushed to control the scene.

“I am certain that if a protest would have been arranged, many of the non-Jewish residents of the city would have taken part as well; he was loved by all. But the fear was great...”

NOT INTIMIDATED

Harav Levi Yitzchok was first brought and imprisoned at the NKVD headquarters in Yekaterinoslav. Later, he was transferred to the “Narkumvski” jail in Kiev, where he was placed amongst the worst criminals. It was there that the interrogations began.

Reb Aharon Yaakov Diskin was in the same jail as Harav Levi Yitzchok. He described the torture and suffering Harav Levi Yitzchok went through:

“Who could stand through these hardships? Only very few, one of those was Harav Levi Yitzchok. He wouldn’t admit, he wouldn’t say he was guilty. He was moved to Kiev



THE FINAL RESIDENCE OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK IN YEKATERINOSLAV, WHERE HIS ARREST TOOK PLACE.

in the hope that the ‘experts’ would squeeze his signature out of him.

“For the NKVD, he was a prized possession; a famous rav who was a *mechutan* to the Lubavitcher Rebbe — whom they hated with a passion and were forced to banish from the Soviet Union.

“However, no matter what they tried, Harav Levi Yitzchok never gave in and due to his steadfastness many people were saved. He was from the very few to be able to withstand their fire of *Gehinom* and not be broken...”

After many months of failed attempts, not being able to break Harav Levi Yitzchok’s spirit, he was transferred back to Yekaterinoslav where they attempted a new technique: They confronted him with other arrested Chasidim, who confirmed all of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s crimes in front of him, hoping he would give in and admit to the charges against him. However, try as they may, Harav Levi Yitzchok refused to give in.

TRIAL AND SENTENCE

The government wanted to put Harav Levi Yitzchok on a public trial, but because they couldn’t get incriminating evidence out of him and he wouldn’t admit his guilt, it was called off.

Rebbetzin Chana describes in her diary the procedure of the court case against Harav Levi Yitzchok:

“The NKVD tried very hard to find proof of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s crimes against the government, claiming that it’s for this reason that he has so many contacts with various people outside the country, including his *mechutan* the Friediker Rebbe. He should therefore be judged accordingly as someone who is rebelling against the government.

“However, with not enough evidence against him, he couldn’t be charged for such crimes. With no other option they were forced to sentence him to be exiled far away, with

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A FASCINATING MANUSCRIPT WRITTEN BY HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AFTER ARRIVING IN CHI'ILI, KAZAKHSTAN, ANALYZING HOW EACH ASPECT OF HIS ARREST HAS SPIRITUAL MEANING AND CONNECTS WITH THE SOURCE OF HIS NESHAMAH.

no other Jewish people around, so that he could no longer be of influence on anyone...”

Towards the end of the month of Kislev, Rebbetzin Chana received an order to appear in the NKVD headquarters. On the designated day, she made her way to the NKVD building, with hopes of finally being able to see her husband for the first time since his arrest, almost nine months prior.

After waiting for about an hour, she was summoned to a room where she found four officers sitting behind a table. One of them announced:

“Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson is sentenced to five years of exile in eastern Asia.”

With tears in her eyes, Rebbetzin Chana began to plead with them. “How can someone as weak as him survive?!”

They replied, “His place of exile isn’t so bad, and he will also be able to keep his citizenship. He just has to move his place of residence there.”

She was also informed that before his departure to his *galus*, she would be granted the opportunity to meet him and say her goodbyes.

Rebbetzin Chana continued to plead with the officer; “He’s old and weak, and the long journey will be hard for him!”

They replied, “Being that he is older, he will receive better treatment for the journey.”

When she asked about preparing food for him, they told her that all this time they had been feeding him, and he had been eating what they gave. However, later on, an officer told her to prepare a package of food, saying, “It’s actually not true; during all these months, not one parcel of food we gave him entered his mouth!”

A day was set for Rebbetzin Chana to meet with Harav Levi Yitzchok for the first time since his arrest.

Rebbetzin Chana made her way to the respective meeting area. Reflecting on his state of health at that meeting, she would later write, “I couldn’t imagine that just a few short months could affect his health and wellbeing so much.”

“Baruch Hashem we can finally meet,” were Harav Levi Yitzchok’s first words. “Please tell me, was Rosh Chodesh Kislev one day or two days this year? I need to know because soon is Chanukah...”

JOURNEY TO GALUS

As much as Rebbetzin Chana tried to find out the exact date Harav Levi Yitzchok would be transferred, she was unsuccessful. A short time later, she was notified that he was in Kharkov. She traveled to Kharkov, and was once again granted permission to see her husband before his long and bitter journey to *galus*.

The month-long journey was hard and tiring for Harav Levi Yitzchok, but he later said that the hardest part of the



THE TYPE OF MUD AND CLAY HOME THAT HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AND REBBETZIN CHANA LIVED IN DURING THE DIFFICULT YEARS OF EXILE IN CHI'ILI, KAZAKHSTAN.

journey was not being able to wash *negel vasser* in the morning. For 11 days straight, they didn't receive any water. The little they did supply was so minimal that it was barely enough to quench their thirst, but nevertheless, he used what he did receive for *negel vasser*. He would even exchange the little amount of food he had with the guard for just a few more drops of water to wash his hands!

Reb Avraham Baruch Pevzner was arrested a few months before Harav Levi Yitzchok, and was transported to Kazakhstan alongside him. He would later describe his experience:

"On my way to Kazakhstan, I was together with Harav Levi Yitzchok. We were on the same cart on the train, but we weren't allowed to speak to each other; we communicated through head motions and signals. Harav Levi Yitzchok was extremely weak after his many months of torture.

"For part of the journey, we had to walk on foot. There were a few times that Harav Levi Yitzchok collapsed in his place as a result of weakness, and each time the evil guards would send their dogs at him to force him to get up and continue walking."

ARRIVAL IN KAZAKHSTAN

Chi'ili, the name of a remote town in Kazakhstan in far east Asia, brings back bitter memories to many who were there.

In this town, the houses were made of mud and clay and did not protect their inhabitants from the extreme cold, snow, and strong winds. The ground itself was muddy and would never dry up, making it hard to walk. With every step, one's feet would get stuck in the mud and it was difficult to get them out. Mosquitos were everywhere; in the streets, houses, kitchens, closets, food, and drink. During the summer, when the cold abated somewhat, the heat would cause an awful stench to rise from the ground, also being the cause of extreme illness.

This uninhabitable town is where Harav Levi Yitzchok

arrived on 19 Shevat 5700*. It was late at night, totally dark, cold, and pouring rain. Not a single person was outside, besides for another Yid who was also exiled there.

To remain outside for too long would be life-threatening; they needed to find shelter fast. They began knocking on door after door, hoping to find a Jewish home that would take them in.

Eventually, they found a house with a dim light shining. Being left with no other option, they gave it a try and knocked on the door. Seeing their poor condition, the homeowner let them in. He gave them a place to lay down, prepared a hot

BEILIS TRIAL

Not too long after Harav Levi Yitzchok became rav, the Beilis blood libel began.

The body of a young Christian boy was "found" near a factory. A Yid named Mendel Beilis, who worked at the factory, was immediately accused of the crime and arrested.



MENDEL BEILIS

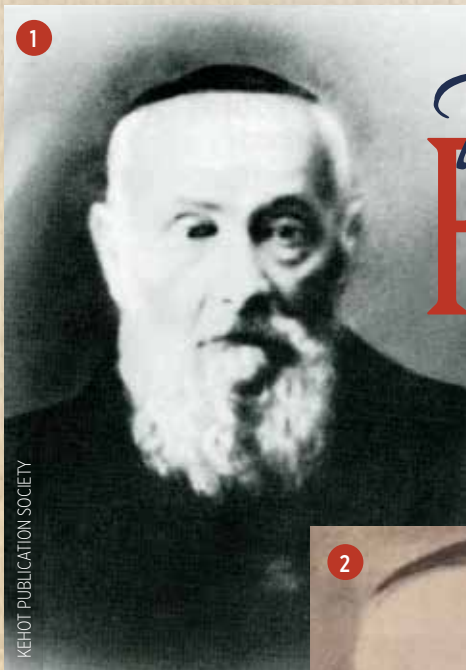
Unlike previous blood libels throughout Jewish history, this libel was specifically against Chassidim and the Rebbe.

It was known to everyone that Torah doesn't require the Jews to use Christian blood in their matzah; but, they claimed, although most Jews don't, there is one group that does: the group called "Chassidim." They have their own rituals according to the teachings of Kabbalah which require them to use blood in their matzah, was the claim.

The Rebbe Rashab got personally involved in the case, appointing the lawyers and pulling connections with the government to disprove this libel.

Since this was a libel specifically targeted at Chassidim, the Rebbe Rashab appointed Harav Levi Yitzchok to join the team as an expert in Kabbalah. Harav Levi Yitzchok did so, explaining and proving the prohibition of using blood according to Kabbalah.

The process of the trial lasted for close to three years. Mendel Beilis was eventually declared innocent and set free, due to the lack of evidence. The crisis was averted.



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The PHOTOGRAPHS of HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK



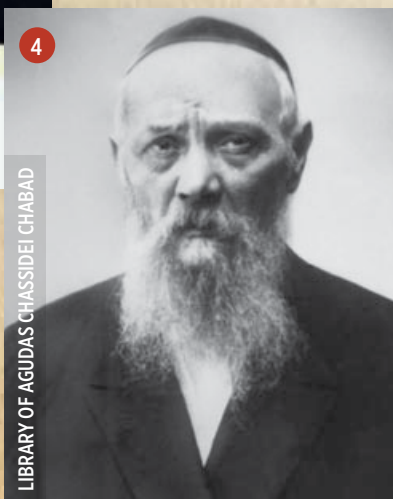
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KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



3

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD



4

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

1. IN 5712*, A FEW YEARS AFTER COMING TO AMERICA, REBBETZIN CHANA GAVE REB MOSHE GRONER A PHOTO OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK TO BE RESTORED. THE PHOTO WAS LIKELY TAKEN IN CHI'ILI, KAZAKHSTAN, AND WAS TORN, SO THAT ONLY HALF OF HIS FACE WAS VISIBLE.

HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK WAS UNRECOGNIZABLE AFTER UNDERGOING SUCH SUFFERING.

IN 5730*, WHEN THE FIRST VOLUME OF LIKKUTEI LEVI YITZCHOK WAS PRINTED, THE REBBE PROVIDED THE PHOTO AND REQUESTED THAT IT BE PUBLISHED IN THE SEFER.

2. THIS PHOTO OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK WAS GIVEN TO THE REBBE IN 5736* AND WAS PUBLISHED IN THE FIRST EDITION OF TOLDOS LEVI YITZCHOK THE FOLLOWING YEAR. IT WAS SUBSEQUENTLY USED IN MANY PUBLICATIONS.

3. THIS PHOTO WAS BROUGHT TO THE REBBE IN 5726* BY REB MOSHE VISHEDSKI. IT SEEMS TO BE THE ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH; REB MOSHE GOT IT FROM REB HIRSHEL RABINOVITCH WHO HELPED THE REBBE'S FATHER AND MOTHER DURING THOSE DIFFICULT TIMES IN KAZAKHSTAN. PERHAPS REBBETZIN CHANA HANDED THE PHOTO TO REB HIRSHEL FOR SAFEKEEPING AND PERHAPS THIS IS THE PHOTO ABOUT WHICH REBBETZIN CHANA WRITES IN HER MEMOIRS THAT SHE HAD TO LEAVE BEHIND IN RUSSIA.

REB MOSHE'S SON RECOUNTS THAT ON THIS PHOTO THE REBBE WROTE "ב"תאא?" (- MY FATHER?) THIS PICTURE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE SEFER "MIBEIS HAGENAZIM."

4. THIS PICTURE OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK, WHICH BY NOW IS THE MOST FAMOUS, WAS DISCOVERED IN 5751*. PRESENTED HERE IS THE ORIGINAL PHOTO THAT WAS PART OF THE INTERROGATION FILE OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK IN 5699*. ON THE PHOTO, THE REBBE INSCRIBED THE WORD "ב"תאא" - WITHOUT THE QUESTION MARK THIS TIME. THE PHOTO WAS RESTORED, WITH THE REBBE'S PERMISSION, IN TIME FOR THE PUBLISHING OF THE NEW SEFER TORAS MENACHEM - TIFERES LEVI YITZCHOK ON SHEMOS, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN HONOR OF VOV TISHREI 5752. AT THE REBBE'S BEHEST, THE ORIGINAL PHOTO OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK (FIRST PUBLISHED IN LIKKUTEI LEVI YITZCHOK) WAS ALSO PUBLISHED, ILLUSTRATING THE EFFECT THAT THE YEARS OF GALUS HAD ON HIM.

drink for them, and they were able to sleep for a few hours.

The next morning, Harav Levi Yitzchok sent a telegram to Rebbetzin Chana to notify her where he was and to ask for his tallis and tefillin, various *sefarim*, and food. When she received this telegram, she immediately prepared a package and about three weeks later, it finally arrived. Rebbetzin Chana recorded what she heard from her husband: “The excitement of finally being able to put on tefillin for the first time in almost a year was indescribable!”

Rebbetzin Chana herself immediately began making preparations for the long journey to Kazakhstan.

One of the major difficulties for Harav Levi Yitzchok was obtaining food. To receive the small portion of food that was provided by the government, one needed to work. However, due to his poor condition, he was unable to work and only after much effort was he able to receive an exemption.

Although Harav Levi Yitzchok went through much suffering and was physically weak, he nevertheless retained his regal appearance. Many of the locals noticed his greatness and began treating him with respect, allowing him to skip the line where everyone would wait for many hours to receive their portion of food, and helping in other ways as well.

REBBETZIN CHANA'S ARRIVAL

After making all the proper arrangements, Rebbetzin Chana began the long journey to Kazakhstan about a week after Purim. Many Chassidim helped along the way, providing her with whatever she needed and helping to carry her belongings. Towards the end of Adar, she arrived in the town of Chi'ili, finally reunited with her husband.

Once she arrived, she was able to once again help Harav Levi Yitzchok. A week before Pesach, Rebbetzin Chana traveled to a nearby town Kyzylorda to obtain ink and paper for Harav Levi Yitzchok to write his *chidushei Torah*. She later described:

“The excitement he had upon receiving ink was indescribable. The joy of receiving writing utensils brought him more joy than when he received a piece of bread after long months of hunger!”

YIDDISHKEIT IN CHI'ILI

As time went on, more and more Yidden were exiled to these faraway towns. Word began to spread about Harav Levi Yitzchok's presence and many Yidden began to make their way there from nearby towns, some risking their lives doing so, to help out Harav Levi Yitzchok in any way they could. They would help him physically, and would walk away

uplifted and inspired.

Celebrating Yom Tov alone in this remote town was a unique challenge of its own. To fully appreciate the way Harav Levi Yitzchok would celebrate Yomim Tovim alone, one must read the diaries of Rebbetzin Chana.

However, Tishrei of 5704* was a different experience altogether. As the crowd of Jewish refugees grew, a *minyan* was arranged for the Yomim Tovim.

It was a very diverse crowd, of all ages and different backgrounds. Many of them being simple Yidden, weren't necessarily so involved with Yiddishkeit, but when Tishrei came around, everyone took part in the celebration.

There was a small crowd, and none of them were able to act as *chazan*, *ba'al Koreh*, or *ba'al toke'ah*. Although he was weak, Harav Levi Yitzchok filled all these positions with tremendous joy and excitement to once again be able to daven with a *minyan*, despite the harsh times and conditions.

When it came to Sukkos and Simchas Torah they rejoiced, dancing together, completely forgetting about the world around them! Harav Levi Yitzchok himself would lead the *farbrengen* as he had done years before; one wouldn't be able to imagine he was suffering...

Harav Levi Yitzchok did whatever he could to help and assist his fellow Yidden, whether by teaching them Torah, giving them hope and inspiration, and, whenever needed, he would arrange a proper Jewish burial.

ALMA-ATA

As Harav Levi Yitzchak's five-year sentence was nearing its end, his physical condition began to deteriorate. Though he was unaware of it, a serious illness was spreading through his body, severely weakening him. Meanwhile, friends in the closest large city, Alma Ata, resolved to secure the rav's release. Due to the war and his status as a “counterrevolutionary,” returning to Yekaterinoslav was out of the question. They contributed thousands of rubles, giving away most of their own assets, to acquire the proper permits for the relocation. After six weeks fraught with setbacks and obstacles, they were finally able to obtain the release documents.

Immediately after Pesach, Harav Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chana left Chi'ili and arrived in Alma Ata.

A reception was held at the home of one of the community

Although being a Lubavitcher Chosid in the Soviet Union was the biggest crime, Harav Levi Yitzchok in his first statement of his interrogation, without being asked, declared that he was a member of the Chabad movement.⁶

* 5704-1943



THE TZIYUN OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AS IT APPEARED BEFORE THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION AND TODAY.

leaders. The news of the rav's move to Alma-Ata had spread throughout the city. Fearing that it would attract unwanted attention, certain officials had to be paid off and many precautions were taken.

In this large city, Harav Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chana's living conditions improved somewhat and they were able to work more vigorously to help others in need, while the community provided the rav with his physical and financial needs in a generous manner.

Many of the non-Jewish leaders of the city held highly of Harav Levi Yitzchok and treated him with great respect, often turning to him for help and guidance.

ILLNESS

After Shavuot, the rav's illness began to take a toll on him and the pain began to worsen. A physician examined the rav and treated him regularly.

Seeing that there was no improvement in the rav's condition, a well-known professor was called. After much pleading and hearing of the rav's condition, he agreed to make the trip to Alma-Ata to treat Harav Levi Yitzchok.

Upon seeing the rav, the professor diagnosed Harav Levi Yitzchok with a very severe disease.

The professor continued to treat Harav Levi Yitzchok for the next few weeks and he later commented that throughout all his years, he had never before encountered such an extraordinary person.

However, the rav's condition continued to worsen to the point where he was bedridden. Additional doctors came and examined him, but they all shook their heads in despair; they had no cure for his ailment.

FINAL MOMENTS

On Tuesday night, the eve of Chof Av, as Harav Levi Yitzchok was laying in bed, he asked for some water to wash

his hands, saying, "It is time to prepare for the journey to the other side..." Those were his last words spoken to those around, but his lips were continuously moving. Reb Hirshel Rabinowitz bent down and heard Harav Levi Yitzchok saying, עקבותיך לא נודעו...א,י, עקבות משיחא...עקבות משיחא

The next morning, his condition became critical, and before sunset his holy soul returned to its creator.

Rebbetzin Chana concludes her memories: "This is how his life ended. His path through life was a difficult one. He was always at war, never compromising his convictions, never going 'fifty-fifty.' It cost him dearly, but he never surrendered. At first this brought him many opponents, but eventually they became his followers and loyal friends."

The *levaya* took place the next day. The wooden chest that was used to hold Harav Levi Yitzchok's *sefarim*, and also served as the table upon which hundreds of pages of *chidushei Torah* were written, was used to build the *aron*.

Although participating in the *levaya* was a great risk, nobody had second thoughts about attending. Questions would have to be answered the next day, but none of that mattered at that moment³.

Harav Levi Yitzchok was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. **T**

1. This article is primarily based on the book "Toldos Levi Yitzchok." For the Rebbe's involvement in this book see "The Rebbe's Peulos in Memory of his Father," Derher Av 5773.

2. For a more comprehensive article about the rabbanus of Harav Levi Yitzchok see, "The Rav of Yekaterinoslav," Derher Av 5776.

3. For a more comprehensive article about the period of Alma Ata and the *histalkus* see, "The Histalkus of Reb Levi Yitzchok" Derher Av 5773.

4. See Derher Av 5774 p. 8.

5. For an article about the Torah of Harav Levi Yitzchok see, "Broad Perception and Meticulous Precision" Derher Av 5777.

6. See Toras Menachem vol. 45 pg. 222.