

# Timely Titles



## BEIS REBBI



Yud-Gimmel Cheshvan is the yahrtzeit of the renowned Chossid, Reb Chaim Meir Hillman of Liepli. An accomplished author and historian, Reb Chaim Meir was involved in the publication of many Chassidic works and writings, and is most famous for authoring the foundational biographical work "Beis Rebbi."

# First published in 5662,

Beis Rebbi is the foremost comprehensive biography of the first Rabbeim of Chabad. An exceedingly thorough work, the author, Reb Chaim Meir Hillman, spent 13 years of intensive research preparing this book to ensure accuracy and to verify every detail. The book's status as a classic authority is a testament to this. Referenced countless times and quoted extensively in many Chabad *sefarim*, particularly the Friediker Rebbe's *sichos*, Beis Rebbi is an essential read when studying the origins and evolution of Chassidus Chabad.

This exhaustive treatment of the Alter Rebbe, Mitteler Rebbe, and Tzemach Tzedek, examines their family origins, ancestors and descendants, teachers and students, colleagues and compilations. It explores everything that transpired in their lifetimes—from their birth until their *histalkus*, as well as the wonders that Hashem did for them and their adherents. It also tells the sordid story of the slander and sorrow that the Alter Rebbe endured at the hands of his opponents, and affirms the correct version of events to set the record straight. The cut off point in the timeline of this book is the generation of the Tzemach Tzedek's grandsons.



## OVERVIEW



**Beis Rebbi** is composed of three sections, covering the Alter Rebbe, Mitteler Rebbe, and the Tzemach Tzedek respectively. Each section is preceded by a brief introduction, the first being a larger general introduction.

👉 **General Introduction:** Here the author outlines the objective of the book and underscores its necessity. First he testifies to the accuracy of his work and the trustworthiness of his sources, challenging the reader to verify any of his claims. He then explains the demand for a book of this kind, contrasting it with similar existing works that were poorly researched or reflect a hostile bias. Unlike the other authors, Reb Chaim Meir asserts that he did not rely on unfounded

rumors or hearsay. Also of note, is the author's sensitivity to mitigate any conflict that may arise from the book. Considering that the book delves into the controversy of *misnagdim* and their attitude towards Chassidus, the author includes a disclaimer to ensure that we don't point any fingers in haste. He states that the *gedolim* who were proponents of the opposition were well-intentioned but were unfortunately misled by malicious forces. Accordingly, we may not speak ill of them as they were virtuous people.

👉 **The Alter Rebbe (Rabbeinu Hazaken):** The lion's share of the book, over the span of 28 chapters the author weaves a beautiful tapestry that takes us through the life and times of the Alter Rebbe. Begin-

ning with his family background, we follow the Alter Rebbe's childhood and journey to Mezritch and note his many accomplishments. As the precise dates are unknown, the author estimates the duration of the Alter Rebbe's *nesius* to be more than 30 years (5540\*-5573\*), but he concludes that it was only largely underway from 5548\* (this was later confirmed by the Rebbe Rashab in *Toras Shalom*<sup>1</sup>). The author recounts many novel teachings, customs and halachic rulings that the Alter Rebbe introduced to his Chassidim, many of which disturbed the *misnagdim* and provoked their ire. This flows into the episode of the slander and imprisonment of the Alter Rebbe and his ultimate release on Yud-Tes Kislev. In order to present everything on a backdrop of necessary historical context, the author fills us in on the lives of his teachers and provides us with numerous mini-biographies of the Alter Rebbe's colleagues and disciples. Another closing chapter outlines the *sefarim* that the Alter Rebbe produced, namely; the Tanya, Shulchan Aruch, Sid-dur, Torah Ohr, Likkutei Torah and Biurei Hazohar.

👉 **Introduction to Part Two:** Treading carefully, the author delicately addresses the uncomfortable schism between the Mitteler Rebbe and Reb Aharon of Strashelye, attributing Reb Aharon's splinter to divine orchestration. He warns us not to pass judgment on Reb Aharon and other great Chassidim who diverged from the path of the Mitteler Rebbe, as it was all the doing of the Satan who chose to sow the seeds of disharmony amongst the best and finest. Ultimately, many of those who veered off the path of the Mitteler Rebbe eventually regretted their decision, and sought to return to the Mitteler Rebbe.

👉 **The Mitteler Rebbe (Admur Ha'emtzei):** Over the course of eight chapters, the author paints a picture of the life of the Mitteler Rebbe. From his youth we are privy to his greatness and we follow his *nesius* through its challenges from within as well as its external opposition. Just like the Alter Rebbe, the Mitteler Rebbe endured a similar slander which led to his imprisonment in Vitebsk, and his release is celebrated on Yud Kislev. Once again, the author concludes with several chapters enumerating his descendants, famous disciples, and *sefarim*.

👉 **Introduction to Part Three:** Out of his characteristic sensitivity, the author apologizes for omitting details about certain family branches, reiterating that he only included information from trustworthy sources. He also excuses himself for not writing about all of the Tzemach Tzedek's grandchildren, choosing to include only those who were rabbonim, as it wouldn't be feasible to bring them all.

👉 **The Tzemach Tzedek:** In a similar vein to the above two sections, over 11 chapters the author encapsulates the life and generation of the Tzemach Tzedek, from his youth and *nesius* in Lubavitch to his diplomatic endeavors and political advocacy in S. Petersburg. Moving on to the Tzemach Tzedek's Torah, the author details his efforts to transcribe and publish Chassidus and notes his incredible contributions in all facets of Torah. In the closing chapters, the author elaborates about the "seven branches of the menorah" (—the Tzemach Tzedek's six sons and his grandson Reb Shlomo Zalman of Kapust), provides brief biographies of several notable grandchildren and Chassidim, and mentions the *sefarim* he published.

## BACKGROUND

In the early 5600s\* there was a dearth of reliable biographical information about the inception and development of Chassidus Chabad. Printed material was scarce and most of the existing works were colored by agendas and riddled with inaccuracies.

As a result, many people were ignorant or misinformed about the basic history and evolution of Chassidus Chabad, particularly in matters concerning *misnagdim* and the circumstances of the Alter Rebbe's arrest and liberation.

To remedy this and to fill the void of what was sorely lacking, Reb Chaim Meir Hillman set out to compile a thorough treatment of the early Chabad dynasty.

Building on documents, letters, and manuscripts he avidly collected, he began to fashion a clear and cohesive narrative that chartered the life and times of the first three Rebbeim. Another primary source of information was a grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek, Reb Shlomo Zalman of Kapust. Formally a Chossid of Kapust affiliation, Reb Chaim Meir spent much time extracting testimony from him and meticulously recorded every detail.

Finally, in 5662\*, he released “Beis Rebbi.” An instant classic, it quickly became clear that Reb Chaim Meir had trailblazed a new path in the genre of Chasidic biographies.

In the following years, this edition was reprinted several times. Then in 5664\*, a new edition was published, this time translated into Yiddish by a certain Yehoshua Mezach (Chaimowitz). This Yiddish edition was reviewed by Reb Chaim Meir who even included additional information based on newly discovered material, but altogether it is an incomplete translation as there is a significant amount of material that can only be found in the original. This Yiddish edition was further printed several times, and then later by Kehos with some modifications.

Most recently, a new revised edition was published by Maayonotecha in 5774\* and has been reprinted several times since. This edition was worked on by Levi Holtzman, with the primary goal to make it more accessible to a broader audience. In it, he clarifies and explains many concepts and expressions that are unfamiliar to the modern reader. But most significantly, this edition cross-references many later Chabad sources, primarily the writings of the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe, which shed light on many important details. These extensive footnotes often clarify, corroborate, and add important context to many of the stories recorded in the book.

In 5781\*, a Russian edition of Beis Rebbi was produced by the shliach to Haditch, Rabbi Shneur Deitsch, and was published in honor of Chof-Daled Teves (the Alter Rebbe’s *yahrzeit*).

Regarding another expanded edition that is in the works: For many years, the famed researcher and historian Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine worked tirelessly, studying this book. Over time, he amassed a great wealth of information to complement the book, including copious corrections, comparisons, and commentary. Many of these findings were first published in var-



THE MOST  
RECENT  
EDITION OF  
BEIS REBBI

ious publications, and were intended to be released as part of a new expanded edition of the book. Although Rabbi Mondshine passed away before completing this long-awaited edition, the manuscript is currently being worked on and is expected to be released in the near future.

Much ink has been spilled as to the exact level of accuracy and reliability of Beis Rebbi. The common consensus is that it can usually be relied upon. Some explain that the inaccuracies that crept in are mostly in the sections that address the Maggid and earlier, as the author was only able to obtain information about that period from second or third-hand sources, whereas about later generations he was able to personally verify.

Similarly, the Rebbe once told Reb Yisroel Jacobson regarding the author of the Beis Rebbi: “About the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, others have written better, but when it comes to the Alter Rebbe he is remarkably superior.”<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the Rebbe once said in the name of the Frierdiker Rebbe “that his stories are accurate.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the Rebbe once expressed, “Regarding the *sefer* Beis Rebbi, it is evident from the way he writes how precise and deliberate he is with everything.”<sup>4</sup>

1. Sefer Hasichos Toras Shalom pg. 82.
2. See Zikaron l’Bnei Yisroel pg. 203.
3. Toras Menachem 5732 vol. 68 pg. 329.
4. Toras Menachem 5742 vol. 2 pg. 1058.

# A LEAF FROM THE BOOK

## CHAPTER 10: THE ALTER REBBE

### INNOVATIONS DURING HIS TENURE OF RABBONUS : ESTABLISHING COMMUNAL CUSTOMS

In his new position he began to introduce wondrous things that even his predecessors had not fathomed. Firstly, he forged the proper path of *avodas Hashem* based on the teachings of his holy masters and the increased wisdom he was granted. This is seen clearly in his holy *sefer* “Likkutei Amarim” also known as the “Tanya Kadisha.”

He also accustomed the community to daven with the nusach of the Arizal. After several years he printed a special siddur, written exceedingly carefully and is renowned for its unique precision in the amounts of words and letters. This siddur was eagerly adopted by many as it was the “fine flour” of all the nuschaos. Even those who were previously accustomed to other nuschaos, adjusted to and supported the new siddur.

בית רבי

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### פרק י'

#### • החידושים שחידש בימי רבנותו • הנהגותיו שהנהיג לאנ"ש

ויהי כאשר ישב על כסא קדשו, התחיל לחדש ענינים נוראים ונפלאים אשר לא שערום כו', (כי אף גם רבותיו הקדושים, שכל רו לא אנס להו, מקום הניחו לו להתגדר כו'). ראשית דבר, בירר וליבן דרכי העבודה בדרך נפלא, על-פי קבלתו מרבתיו הקדושים נ"ע, ואשר עוד הוסיף לו השי"ת חכמה ותבונה על דעתו, רוח יתירה אשתכחת ביה, וכמו שכתוב "יהיב חוכמתא לחכימין כו'", וכנראה בעליל בדרושו וביחוד בספרו הקדוש "לקוטי אמרים" הנקרא בשם "תניא קדישא".

גם הרגיל לאנ"ש להתפלל בנוסח הקדוש האריז"ל, וברבות השנים הדפיס סידור מיוחד, ובסידורו זה הפליא לעשות במספר התיבות ובמנין האותיות ודקדוק התנועות, את הכל עשה יפה בעטו בדקדוק גדול מאד, והסידור נתקבל מאד בעולם, כי הוא סולת נקיה מכל הנוסחאות,<sup>3</sup> ואף גם המתפללים בנוסחות אחרות כפי שהורגלו מנעורם,

א. אמירתו ד"ח היה מבהיל מאד וכל העומדים שם היו לחרדת אלקים ועל עמדם היו נעשים בעלי תשובה גמורים והיו מתלהבים לעבודת ה' באופן נורא מאד. ובאיזה ענין שהיה מדבר, היה מחזיק אז במדרגה זו: אם מענין אהבה רבה, היה לו אז אהבה רבה וכו'.

גם תפלתו היה מבהיל מאד. נכדו אדמו"ר בעל צמח צדק נ"ע אמר עליו, שהיה לו הצמאון ליכלל בעצמותו, וכך היה מרגלא בפומיה ברביקותו, "איך וויל ניט דיין גן'ערן, איך וויל ניט דיין עולם-הבא, איך וויל נאר דרך אליין" (= איני חפץ בגן'ערן שלך, איני חפץ בעולם-הבא שלך, חפץ אני רק בך עצמך) (כן כתב נכדו הנ"ל בדרוש מצות התפלה [דרך מצותיך, דרוש שרש מצות התפלה בסופו]). וכשהיה מתפלל ביחוד היה מתפלל בחשאי, ובצבור היה מרעיש עולמות כו', והיה מאריך מאד עד שעה ב' אחר חצות היום, ובראש-השנה ויום-כיפור בלילה היה מאריך יותר ויותר. בעת תפלתו היה מכה בידיו בכותל, עד שהיה נוזל דם מידיו והוא לא היה מרגיש כלל, ועל-כן תקנו על הכותל בגדים רכים כו'.

ב. כשסידר סידורו, היו לפניו ששים סידורים מנוסחות שונות וקיבץ סולת נקיה מכולם.<sup>4</sup>

84. הערה זו הובאה גם לקמן פרק כז, הערה יד. וראה שם הערה 376.

מעריצים ומקדישים אותו.<sup>85</sup>

את התפילין תיקן על-פי קבלת הראשונים וקבלת האריז"ל, בכתיבתן ותיקונן והנחתן (כמו בכריכות הרצועה ובהקשר ובהראשים מהשי"ן שכתפילין של ראש כו'). גם הנהיג לאנ"ש להניח תפילין דרבינו תם, על-פי דעת האריז"ל ששני הדעות אמת ושניהם מוכרחים כו'. וגם שלא להניח תפילין בחול-המועד, על-פי דעת הזוהר הקדוש והמקובלים וגם על-פי נגלה יציבא מילתא.<sup>86</sup>

את שולחנו הטהור שהתחיל לחבר במיזעריטש כנזכר לעיל, השלימו אחר פטירת הרב המגיד נ"ע, ואחר רוב שנים הגיהו ותקנו באופן היותר נאות ושלם והוסיף בו עוד איזה הלכות.<sup>87</sup> גם התחיל לעשות בו מהדורא בתרא, ונמצא רק על ד' סימנים. וגם בסידורו עשה מהדורה בתרא על כמה דינים על-פי הכרעת המקובלים. גם תיקן נוסח שטר מכירת חמץ באופן היותר מועיל, על-פי דעת גדולי הראשונים, ונלאו כל חכמי לב ולא מצאו כל אנשי חיל ידיהם, לעמוד על עומק דבריו בזה.<sup>88</sup>

גם תיקן שהסכינים של שחיטה יהיו מלוטשים דוקא, וזה נשאר לחוק עתה אצל כל אחינו בני ישראל, גם המגידים כו'. גם תיקן מקוואות החמות, שגורל התיקון בזה אין לשער. וגם הרגיל לאנ"ש בטבילה קודם התפלה למען תהיה התפלה בטוהרה כו'.<sup>89</sup>

ג. עיין לקמן [פרק כז, במדור 'סידור רבינו הזקן'] בהסכמות על הסידור מהרבנים דטשערנאוויץ ופאליטישען.

ד. יש על זה קונטרס מיוחד מהגאון הקדוש בעל משנת הסידים, נקרא בשם "תפילין דמארי עלמא", ובו יוכיח בעומקה של הלכה מהמשנה והתלמוד בבלי וירושלמי ומהמדרש והזוהר, האיסור להניחם בחול-המועד. יעויין שם כי טוב הוא.

ה. עיין לעיל [פרק ג] בהעתק ההקדמה מבניו הקדושים.

ו. עיין בספר 'שארית יהודה' מאחיו הגאון זלה"ה, בהשו"ת שבסוף הספר, יעויין שם.

ז. עיין לקמן [פרק כ] בהאגרות ממנו על דבר זה.

ח. עיין בספר 'צמח צדק' יורה-דעה [סימן קעו, ח"ג אות ב], שרבינו התפאר בג' דברים שחידש, ואחד מהם הוא מקוואות החמות, יעויין שם.<sup>85</sup>

85. ולא נתפרש שם מה הם שני הדברים הנוספים בהם התפאר רבינו הזקן, אבל באחד מכתבי תיד מצויין על הגליון שהם: סכינים מלוטשים ולהרבות בצדקה (הובא ונסמן בספר 'תקוני מקוואות' [קה"ת תשנ"ח], עמוד יז בהערות).

86. ראה לקוטי תורה פרשת תבא מג, ב: "ג' דברים הם להסיר כל המונעים בתפלה: מקוה... הצדקה... עסק ולימוד דברי מוסר".

In addition, he instituted that tefillin should be in accordance with the Arizal, in the way they are written, prepared and laid. He also introduced the custom of laying Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin, based on the opinion of the Arizal that both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam's opinions are correct. He also declared that one should refrain from laying tefillin on Chol Hamoed, which is primarily based on the Zohar and Kabbalah but also sourced in the revealed dimension of Torah.

He had begun his Shulchan Aruch in Mezritch and completed it after the passing of the Maggid. After several years he revised and improved it, adding more *halachos*. After that, he began a second edition, of which we only have the first four *simanim*. He also made a second edition of his siddur, emending many laws due to incorporating the opinions of *mekubalim*. He also drafted a template for the document of selling the chametz in a way that is most effective according to the opinions of the great *rishonim*.

He also enacted that knives for shechitah must have a tapered blade, and this ruling stands strong to this day, even amongst our opponents. Another enactment was that the mikvaos should be hot, which was an incredible accomplishment. He also encouraged many to immerse in the mikveh prior to davening, in order to daven in a state of ritual purity.