

BEYOND CONCESSION

THE STRUGGLE
OF OUR RABBEIM
TO PRESERVE THE
PURITY OF JEWISH
EDUCATION¹

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לע"נ
יעקב ליבער בן גמליאל ליב ע"ה
נלב"ע ט"ו אייר ה'תשס"ד
תנ"צ'ב'ה'
נדפס ע"י בנו

הרה"ת ר' ישראל ליב וזוגתו מרת פרומא רחל
ומשפחתם שיחיו
רעזניק



“No!’ That is our undaunted, fearless answer, cried from the throats of people ready and willing for the ultimate self-sacrifice.

“No!’ That is our answer to the Board of Education’s plan, a threat to every yeshiva’s existence. No! We do not accept this mandate. No! This mandate is wrong. No! The half-in and half-out current crop of Jewish leaders cannot lead our battle for Torah. No! The rabbonim and *roshei yeshivos* cannot entrust this battle to anyone else!!

“No, no, and no!’ We do not accept this mandate! We have never accepted it: not from the Romans, not from the Greeks, and not from the Russian Czars. We will not accept it from the Board of Education!”

– *Hakria V’hakedusha*

Who was the subject of these impassioned words?

Was it a cry against the horrors of the Soviet Union? Against the wanton persecution of the dedicated, selfless teachers of the underground network of *chadarim* spearheaded by the Frierdiker Rebbe?

No. The year was 5702*. The location? Brooklyn, NY.

The Frierdiker Rebbe’s battle to preserve Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union was renowned throughout the Jewish world. Yet, that year there was another fiery battle, a staunch defense of the values of authentic Yiddishkeit, led by the Frierdiker Rebbe. Not against the

Communist *yevseksia*, who strived to make any Jewish education whatsoever completely forbidden. This time, the battle defended against something far more insidious: efforts, well-intentioned or otherwise, to modernize the education of our children. Instead of following the hallowed approach forged over the millenia, there were those who felt that things must change to account for the new world. “Let our children learn Torah,” these activists declared, “but let them also learn of science, of reason, of modern culture. It is time for us to fit in with the modern *zeitgeist*, and to become productive members of society.”

This battle was not the first. This campaign of the Frierdiker Rebbe continued a long tradition of Chabad Rabbeim, who staunchly defended *chinuch al taharas hakodesh*, a pure Torah education without compromise, imbued with wholesome *emunah*. Indeed, the consequences of these battles reverberate to this very day.

The Haskalah

How did it all start?

It was during the 5500s* that the Jews of Germany, were exposed to a corruptive influence: the *haskalah* movement. Followers of the *haskalah*, calling themselves



THE FRIEDIKER REBBE ADDRESSES THE TOMCHEI TEMIMIM DINNER, 29 SIVAN 5702.

KEHILOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

maskilim, wished to bring their Jewish brethren in line with the cutting edge of non-Jewish culture, science, and philosophy at that time, known as The Enlightenment. Their infamous motto, “Be a Jew at home and a human on the street,” sums it up succinctly.

The *haskalah* laid its first roots in Berlin, home to one of the primary *maskilim*, the infamous Moses Mendelsohn. The son of a *sofer stam*, he spent years studying Western philosophy and culture, and published a translation of Tanach in German that consciously discounted the concept of miracles and the principles of *emunah*. His teachings spread throughout Germany and France like a wildfire in a field of dry wheat. Yet, upon encountering the vast Jewish communities of Poland and Russia, its rapid spread was halted. The students of the Mezritcher Maggid in Poland and Russia led their Chassidim with wisdom and fiery determination, placing an impregnable wall in the *haskalah's* path.

As time went on, however, cracks began to appear. Certain like-minded individuals, especially the wealthy, were attracted to this new approach, though the masses remained true to Torah and mitzvos.

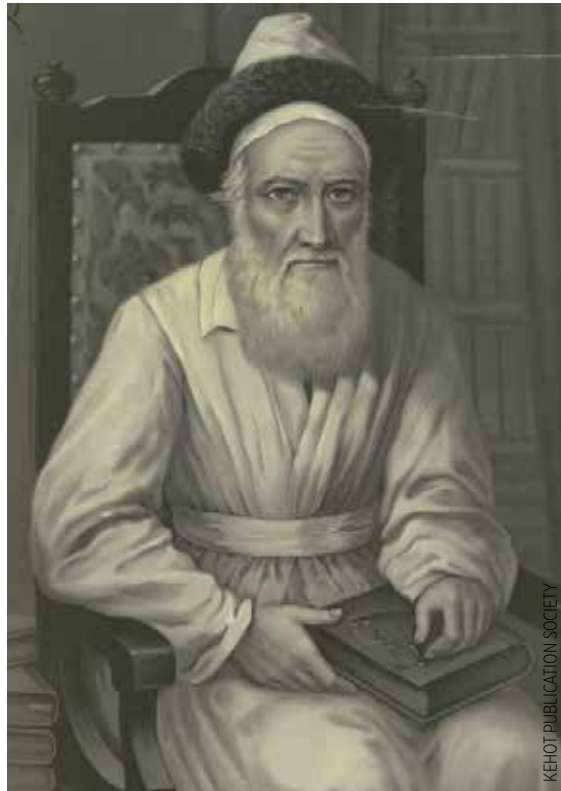
Which brings us to the first battle on our list: the Tzemach Tzedek's battle against the *haskalah*, particularly during the rabbinical conference of 5603*.

The Tzemach Tzedek and the Haskalah²

In the late 5590s*, the *maskilim* began to devote their efforts toward developing relationships with the Czarist ministers. They portrayed the Jews of Russia as backward, primitive, and opposed to the Czar's kindness and his generous efforts to enlighten them, especially the Chassidim and Rebbes, who cling to their backward rituals and faith (this at the same time that the infamous cantonist decree was issued, and the Czar's burning hate to Jews was well known). They would ridicule various mitzvos to the ministers, and even the way the Jews dressed, and suggested various strategies for the government to force the Jews to change. Many of the Jew-hating Czarist ministers eagerly took note of their plans.

A primary target of the *maskilim*? The *chadarim*.

Dr. Max Lilienthal (grandson of the infamous Shimon Hakofer who was unmasked by the Alter Rebbe) ran a school of the *haskalah* movement in Riga. He was



quite friendly with the Russian minister of education, and put much effort into persuading him to completely reform the *cheder* system. Children must be taught the language of the country, he argued, mathematics, geography and the like, as the only hope of freeing the primitive Jewish masses from their beliefs in witchcraft, superstition, and backward rituals.

The *maskilim* sent emissaries to assess the situation across the varied Jewish communities, and Dr. Lilienthal himself traveled across the shtetls and towns of Eastern Europe, promoting his views and his books on the subject. Wherever he or other *maskilim* arrived, the masses of Jews distanced themselves and refused to engage with them, while getting ahold of his books and destroying them.

The *maskilim* were furious. They soon recognized that the influence of the rabbonim over the Jewish population was a significant obstacle to their plans, especially the influence of the Tzemach Tzedek and the heartfelt dedication of his thousands of Chassidim. Without compelling the rabbonim and the Tzemach Tzedek to agree to their plans, there was no possibility that they would have any meaningful impact on the Jewish population.

* 5603-1843, 5590s-1830s



THE CITY OF S. PETERSBURG AROUND THE TIME THE TZEMACH TZEDEK WAS THERE FOR THE CONFERENCE.

The Conference

Thus, the *maskilim* persuaded their friends in government to call together a conference of the leaders of Russian Jewry, in Sivan of 5603*. Four representatives were chosen: The Tzemach Tzedek to represent Chasidim, Reb Yitzchok Volozhiner to represent the *misnagdim*, Reb Yisroel Halperin, to represent the Jewish business class, and Mr. Betzalel Stern on behalf of the *maskilim*.

The many items on the agenda were all resolved amicably, aside from the matter of children's education. The Tzemach Tzedek defended the way that children were taught in every detail, with regard to how to teach the Alef-Beis, what to daven with young children, and even with regard to what *bracha* small boys should say on their *tallis katan*. In the first meeting, the Russian official from the Ministry of Culture and Education demanded that the rabbonim sign a declaration proclaiming the Talmudic law that *dina dimalchusa dina*, the law of the government must be upheld. The Tzemach Tzedek replied, "Talmudic law does not need our signature. The concept that the government's law is valid applies to matters such as tax and general civil law to benefit the country's economy. It has no relation

to matters of Jewish religion and custom, where even the smallest things are considered Torah, and if those wishing to eradicate a custom intend to attack Yiddishkeit, one must observe these matters to the degree of willing to die for them."

The government officials were incensed. The Tzemach Tzedek was put under house arrest for three days, though with no effect on his willingness to fearlessly voice his opinion. Over the course of the conference he was arrested 22 times!

One time, a government minister subjected the Tzemach Tzedek to a hate-filled diatribe accusing him of revolution and treason and threatening him with the direst of consequences, yet the Rebbe remained steadfast. Even Mr. Betzalel Stern was awestruck at the Rebbe's composure, later saying, "Reb Shloime Shtadlan was known to make his visits to nobles with burial shrouds packed in his bag, in case he'd be arrested. Today certainly those who deal with ministers take their shrouds with themselves, but they leave their self-sacrifice at home. The Lubavitcher Rebbe left his shrouds at home and took his self-sacrifice with him."

The Tzemach Tzedek and the other representatives with him did their utmost to explain why there is no need to mandate secular education. In one letter, they explained that science and physics are unnecessary for

most people, while the necessary knowledge to behave as an upright Russian citizen or to be able to successfully earn a livelihood — every Jew comes to know.

The result of that conference was that the government did not mandate changes in any of the *chadarim*, and their mandates supporting compulsory education by the *maskilim* for children who were not in any other school were rarely enforced. The Tzemach Tzedek, on the other hand, launched a broad initiative to found *chadarim* and yeshivos in every Jewish community.

Over the next few years the threat of the *maskilim* was raised a few times, including a second conference of rabbis in 5608*, yet all throughout, the Tzemach Tzedek led the opposition with wisdom, tact, and unyielding strength. The *maskilim* put forward various seemingly innocuous proposals, such as issuing new, child-friendly books for schools to use for learning and davening that would only have “relevant,” enjoyable sections in them, while leaving out any part that is “uncomfortable,” seems to be inappropriate for children, or “not currently relevant.” As well, they wished for an official German translation (by Moses Mendelssohn) to be used.

The Tzemach Tzedek authored detailed written responses to each suggestion. He pointed out how the proposals ran counter to past agreements, where the Czar had agreed that *chadarim* may teach Torah as they always have. As for the merits of the suggestions themselves, the Tzemach Tzedek explained that picking and choosing certain parts of the Torah results from

the lack of belief in the entire Torah being Hashem’s wisdom; since it is all Hashem’s wisdom, every part of it is important. On the topic of the translation, any attempt to enforce the German translation would be counterproductive and needlessly onerous, seeing as both children and teachers do not speak that language. Also, the authorized German translation did not explain the Torah in line with Rashi’s commentary, while it was accepted at the conference of 5603*, with the Czar’s approval, that Rashi’s commentary would be the basis of children’s education.

The Tzemach Tzedek’s efforts succeeded. The result, again, was the freedom to teach Torah to children in time-honored tradition.

Yet, as the years moved on, the tentacles of *Haskalah* spread ever deeper into Russian Jewry, and the threat grew ever greater.

The Rebbe Rashab and Chevra Mefitzei Hahaskalah

In 5623*, a few wealthy Russian *maskilim* launched a new society called Chevra Mefitzei Hahaskalah, or Chamah for short, with the objective of spreading the enlightenment amongst the “backward and benighted” Jewish masses. Led by Baron Evzel Ginsburg and primarily based around a few families, at first Chamah had little impact on Russian Jewry. Yet, the members of Chamah were fanatically devoted to their cause, and under the new leadership of Evezel Ginzburg’s son, Horace (Naftoli) Ginzburg, and grandson David Ginzburg, their dedicated efforts penetrated deep into Jewish communal matters.

The Rebbe Rashab fought Chamah on a number of issues, describing them as an “open, festering wound.” One of the major issues was children’s education.

Most Jewish children at the time learned in *cheder*, where they were taught by dedicated *melamdin* and spent the day studying only Torah, in Yiddish. The law had always been that schools and teachers needed a permit from the regional government to teach, but no special diploma was required.

In 5653*, Chamah began advocating for all *chadarim* to teach the Russian language, and for all *melamdin* to



* 5608-1848, 5603-1843, 5623-1863, 5653-1893

have studied for a secular diploma. In addition, they launched a network of schools with secular studies and lessons in Russian across the Jewish communities.

Chamah's nefarious tactics to influence the youth were brilliantly considered. The Rebbe Rashab describes them, in a letter from around 5658*:

"They [Chamah] spread their poison by means of the schools and *talmudei Torah* they've established. They purposely call them *talmudei Torah*, so as to entrap new souls who... would not have sent their children to a secular school... Their teachers are Jewish heretics, denying Hashem and His Torah. When they learn with the youth, they instill in them the poison of heresy and atheism, completely devouring and destroying their souls..."

In Chamah's schools, children would study intoxicating-sounding secular studies, while their modern looking teachers would routinely laugh at every tenet of Yiddishkeit. In some places, even the Jewish studies teacher wore no yarmulke! Mitzvos were an object of ridicule, while the *cheder melamed* and his study of Talmud became every joke's favored punch line.

Some parents would send their children to the Chamah school in the morning and to *cheder* after school. This was of no help; after spending the day at the Chamah school, the children were exhausted and

had no energy left to study. Listening to their "outlandish-looking" *melamed* and learning subjects that their regular schoolteacher called cultish and irrelevant, had an increasingly shrinking impact.

All this was relevant to the Chamah schools in their own right. With their new initiative for *melamdim* to attain a university degree and for schools to teach Russian, they intended to bring the battle to the *cheder* itself.

In another letter, the Rebbe Rashab writes:

"[With regard to teaching Russian,] although the concept itself is not such a terrible decree, and it even has a positive side — it will diminish the effect of [Chamah's] independent schools, [since they will focus their efforts on the *chadarim* instead,] and it is better that the teaching of Russian take place in *cheder*, under the supervision of the *melamdim* — the terrible problem with this, Hashem protect us, is that Chamah will gain influence in the *chadarim* and *talmudei Torah*."

Forcing *melamdim* to study for a university degree would have the result that only teachers who were of the same ilk as the *maskilim* of Chamah would be allowed to teach. Overall, these initiatives had the potential to completely destroy the fabric of Yiddishe *chinuch*.

The Rebbe Rashab reached out to Jewish leaders across the country. He pushed for an organized fund



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to be set up and a designated representative to be appointed on behalf of the *frumme* world, to counter these varied initiatives. Indeed, the law regarding *chadarim* and *melamdim* was not changed until the fall of the Czar and the rise of Communism.

The Baron Hirsch Grant

Although Chamah's initiatives to insert themselves into the *cheder* system met the same fate as the *maskilim* in the times of the Tzemach Tzedek, they nevertheless invested huge sums of money into their own school network.

It was slightly before this time period that Czar Alexander II was assassinated (in 5641*). His death unleashed a wave of pogroms and Jewish persecution that profoundly affected the Jewish community structure of the Russian Empire. Thousands emigrated, while thousands more lost their livelihood. The traditional communal structure was shaking on its foundations, and there was a wide open breach for those with the resources to take advantage of it. Chamah leapt into the fray.

Many aid organizations were set up to help the millions of suffering Jews find a source of livelihood. Chamah, led and supported by some of the wealthiest Jews in Russia, was involved in these efforts — but used them as a springboard to launch their vision of a prosperous Russian Jewry, predicated on the Jewish population modernizing to adhere to the new spirit of enlightenment. Their schools were a fundamental part of this initiative.

With each passing year, and backed by the massive influx of money from Baron Ginzberg and his fellows, more and more Chamah schools were opened up and down the country. In 5659*, a Chamah school was even founded in the heart of Chassidus itself — in the town of Lubavitch. The Rebbe Rashab describes how he pleaded with Baron Ginzberg to “leave me Yavneh!”³ but to no avail. Indeed, this school would come to cause tremendous heartache to the Rebbe Rashab and Frierdiker Rebbe over the years.

Yet, despite this rapid growth and significant financial backing already in place, Chamah was held back by the huge costs of operating these schools. The schools were not yet that popular, and the burden of operating so many schools that could not cover themselves was growing too large for Chamah to swallow.

At this time, one of the primary Jewish aid



organizations was called the JCA (the Jewish Colonization Association). It had been founded by the famed Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch. He was fabulously wealthy and always kept his Jewish brothers and sisters close at heart, giving tens of millions of francs to various causes around the globe.

As the economic situation of the millions of Russian Jews worsened, the JCA launched many initiatives to help, such as building factories that would provide work for those in need, building homes for poor families, and the like.

The JCA maintained a Russian office based in Petersburg, headed by none other than Baron Horace Ginzburg.

In 5656*, Baron Hirsch died, leaving a large part of his estate to the JCA. Shortly afterward, in 5660*, news broke that Chamah had asked for, and been awarded with, a massive grant of 1,000,000 francs (roughly 400,000 ruble) for their school network. Bearing in mind that it cost approximately a few thousand ruble to start a school and about 6-800 ruble a year to keep a school running, this was a huge sum of money.

As the Rebbe Rashab writes, “With the power of Baron Hirsch’s vast wealth they can establish schools in every place, and will destroy the world G-d forbid...”

The Rebbe Rashab's response

Throughout the year 5660*, the Rebbe Rashab worked tirelessly to create and implement a plan of

* 5641-1881, 5659-1899, 5656-1896, 5660-1900



action. The Rebbe's circle of Chassidim who were active participants in advising and implementing the counter efforts included Reb Monish Moneszohn, Reb Yeshaya Berlin, and Reb Eliezer Moshe Madievsky. The issue was time. The JCA had only sent a small advance of money to date, and perhaps, with the right pressure, things could be salvaged.

After much groundwork and effort, the Rebbe Rashab responded by issuing a beautifully written letter to the JCA. In it, he described the desperate struggle the Jews of Russia have to put bread on the table, and the general appalling poverty in the overcrowded Pale of Settlement (the area of the Russian Empire where Jews were permitted to live), primarily due to the Russian Empire's restrictive policies. He described at length various ways they can be helped, whether with land grants for farms, factories to work in, or even building hospitals to care for their sick. Finally, he expounded on why the current plan, to fund Chamah, was in fact counterproductive, and even terribly harmful.

Among the points the Rebbe Rashab made is that:

1. Studying advanced studies fitting for a career as a doctor or the like is unhelpful for most children. There is no need or place for so many Jewish doctors or lawyers. To the contrary — learning a physical trade would be the most helpful, yet, children who have been exposed to higher secular studies have no wish

to perform menial labor. They look at the children of the wealthy and wish to pursue the same advanced studies, yet they end up starving and penniless, with no work available. Children exposed to such studies look down on their parents and dream of leaving home and rising in society, thus destroying vital familial bonds.

2. Basic knowledge of Russian, math and the like are already studied by Jewish children. Indeed, the Rebbe Rashab challenges the JCA to “find one youth across the entire country who cannot speak the country's language.” At the moment, it is simply that parents arrange for private tutoring in these necessary subjects for their children, and in such an environment the child remains in the cocoon of home, respectful of his parents.

3. More importantly, when being privately tutored the parents can monitor their child's studies and ensure that their teacher is a *yarei Shamayim*. By contrast, the schools of Chamah actively destroy any care and respect for Yiddishkeit and the traditions of the parents.

4. The above leads into the final point, where the Rebbe Rashab describes how a boy until around thirteen years old is, as yet, undefined, and his future character and trajectory depend on the influence of his teachers. The very first part of his development ought to be to instill within him the fundamental faith of a Jew and to arouse his Jewish spirit to daven, learn Torah and fulfill the mitzvot. He should be accustomed to the

daily mitzvos, so that immediately upon awakening he washes his hands and puts on his tzitzis to give thanks and bless Hashem, to daven and to say *brachos* and *kedushah* and to answer *amen*, to learn the forbidden and permissible; and all of this, if instilled properly, will last him for life. This is the exact opposite of the education offered to children in the Chamah schools.

The Rebbe Rashab's emissary, Reb Avrohm Abele Persohn, traveled to non-Chassidic Jewish leaders, such as Reb Chaim Brisker, Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, Reb Elya Chaim of Lodz, the Chofetz Chaim, Reb Azriel Hildesheimer from Germany, and others, and garnered similar letters from them. The letters were translated into English and French and presented to the JCA committee.

It took years, and there were multiple obstacles and setbacks. Yet, eventually the Rebbe Rashab succeeded: in 5663*, news broke that the JCA withheld the final 600,000 francs from the pledge, using them instead for other purposes.

Thus, the efforts of Chamah and their supporters were thwarted. The *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* continued on, until the outbreak of World War I and the rise of Communism (in 5674* and 5679* respectively) changed everything. At that point, it was no longer about secular studies, but about any Jewish education at all. The account of the Frierdiker Rebbe's efforts in this regard are well known and beyond the scope of this article.

The next stages in the battle for *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* took place in the free country of America, and in influencing the policies of the new state of Israel.

The Frierdiker Rebbe and the free countries

When the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in New York from a Europe torn apart, his famous statement, "*America is nit andersh*," that the Yiddishkeit of America is no different from that of *der alter heim* in Europe, was a shock to many. One of the early tests of this approach took place almost immediately upon his arrival.

Back in 5699 (1939), the New York Board of Education passed the following resolution:

"Voted, that private or parochial schools that operate with a program providing a session carried on in a foreign language during the forenoon, with only an

afternoon session in English, be advised that such practice violates the compulsory education law..."

Nevertheless, the existing yeshivos of New York at the time — which, though all offering secular education, reserved the morning hours for davening and study of Torah — explained that such a change could not be implemented so suddenly. The Board provided a year extension, and little more was heard of the matter until Adar 5702 (March 1942). The Educational Board reached out then to all existing yeshivos, noting that it appeared that a number of yeshivos had not complied with the above resolution and that hearings on the matter would soon commence.

The Frierdiker Rebbe was adamant that this regulation not be implemented. Using the *possuk* [regarding the mitzvah of *challah*] of "*Reishis arisosechem*," (lit. the first of your dough), the Frierdiker Rebbe explained it by relating the word *arisosechem* to a word for bed, *arisah*. In other words, the first thing one should do upon arising from bed should be connected with Torah and Yiddishkeit.

In a letter to the head of Agudas Harabbonim, Reb Yisroel Rosenberg, the Frierdiker Rebbe described this law as, "A terrifying and horrifying decree hovering over the heads of the Jewish people across the greater New York area..."

In the continuation of the letter, the Frierdiker Rebbe explained that aside from the demeaning lack of respect for *kedushah* that placing secular studies first conveys, allowing this law to pass [and thereby allowing the government a say over our religious studies] would utterly destroy the foundation of the New York yeshiva system, with unexpected and dire consequences.

The Frierdiker Rebbe goes on to point out that the operating committee, led by Reb Yitzchak Meir Bunim, was working hard and in the right direction, basing their position on American law itself, yet their approach was leading toward a path of compromise — which should be unacceptable to the yeshivos. Instead, it should be explained to the members of the Board of Education that moving secular studies to the morning is completely impossible, and demanding this demeans our people's religious feelings — and, "In every time and in every place, no one, not even those appointed by the government, has the right to demean the religious feelings of another, and certainly not in this free country; [certainly not] at a time when our brothers and sisters throughout the lands conquered by the 'Agagite' [i.e. the Nazis] are being killed, slaughtered, and murdered with tremendous cruelty; [certainly not] at a time when tremendous danger hovers over the holiness of

* 5663-1903, 5674-1914, 5679-1919

the land of our forefathers, may Hashem have mercy on it and on us; [certainly not] at a time when our Jewish brethren who live in this country place themselves in danger on the battlefields of land, sea and air...”

The Frierdiker Rebbe went on to ask that all Jews, no matter their group or party, should participate in thwarting this evil decree. Specifically, the Frierdiker Rebbe advised to arrange: 1. Mass, organized rallies with fiery, passionate speeches, 2. Public pamphlets in Yiddish and English about the matter, and 3. Well-explained articles in newspapers.

The Frierdiker Rebbe also wrote to Reb Eliezer Silver, one of the leaders of American Orthodoxy, and pushed for stronger action by the committee, while also asking Reb Nissan Telushkin to galvanize rabbonim to visit different shuls and thunder against the decree from the pulpit. That summer, the article in “Hakriah Vihakdusha” was published, with the ringing cry of the three “No’s!”

Reb Dovid Edelman was a *bochur* in 770 at that time. He later related how representatives of the Chassidim attempted to work things out with the Board of Education, to no avail. Finally, the Chassidim told the government officials, “In 5687 (1927), the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was imprisoned in Russia for his work at establishing

schools that the Soviet government didn’t approve of. The US Congress and President Hoover intervened and demanded that he be freed. Are you now going to arrest Rabbi Schneersohn and make America the laughingstock of the world?! The Russian government will publish the hypocrisy and irony of the matter. America demanded that we free him, and then two years after he’s in America, America imprisons him for the same crime...”⁴

Sure enough, the weight of public opinion and the arguments of the committees succeeded. In Tishrei 5703*, the Hapardes journal reported that an agreement with the state educational board was reached for yeshivos to continue with *limudei kodesh* in the mornings.

The Struggle in Israel

Shneur Zalman Rubashov, known as Zalman Shazar (the acronym of his full name) was born to a Lubavitch family in the town of Mir, on Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5650*.

Shazar is well known for his ardent Zionism. He was one of the original founders of the Socialist-Zionist political party *Mapai*, and was the editor of the Israeli newspaper *Davar*. After having served as a member of the Israeli Knesset and in various governments, he was appointed president of Israel in the year 5723*.

Along with all the above, Shazar is famous for his fervent dedication to the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe, and for his pride in his identity as a Chabad Chossid. He acted on behalf of the Rabbeim multiple times, and his visits with the Rebbe have been well-documented.

In 5709*, when the State of Israel was founded, Shazar was appointed minister of education.

At that time, 6,000 Jewish children between the grades of first through eighth were not attending any school, aside from the thousands of new children amongst the waves of immigrants arriving in the new country.

Minister Shazar drafted a bill calling for mandatory education, calling back to the times of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, when every town and village in Eretz Yisroel had a *melamed* of children. Indeed, on 18 Elul 5709*, a bill passed into law making school education for every child between the ages of 5 to 13 legally compulsory.

[The Rebbe actually referenced these efforts in a letter to Mr. Shazar, four years later, in connection with



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE WITH THE HEAD OF AGUDAS HARABBONIM OF NORTH AMERICA, RABBI ELIEZER SILVER, IN SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS. TAMMUZ 5690*



LEVI FREDIN VIA JEM 9772

PURITY

...With regard to educating boys and girls — we must give them all of Yiddishkeit from their earliest years, without compromise and without allowances for cutting corners.

If we want to ensure that “even when he grows old he will not stray from it,” we cannot rely on approaching him when he is mature and on the streets and telling him, “You’ve got to fight against [negative influences]. Don’t be frightened by any obstacles and challenges [to Yiddishkeit], you need to have *mesiras nefesh*!” If we want him to be able to stand up to these challenges when he “grows old,” we must begin when he is still a “youth.”

This is why *chachmei Yisrael* worked so hard and invested tremendous energy in ensuring that the education of Jewish boys and girls be completely pure, *al taharas hakodesh*.

They engaged in battle over every detail, even fighting to not give in on issues that didn’t seem so important — because they recognized that the years of education impact the boy or girl’s entire life. They recognized that we have to give them the strength and weapons they need to fight all the battles they’ll have throughout their life’s journey.

A person is compared to a tree... If we scratch a tree that has already grown, the scratch will only

be at that spot and it won’t cause any other harm. If we make a scratch in the seed being planted, though, that one scratch will likely cause the entire tree to be crippled.

The same is true regarding education:

A middle aged person... who imagines that he must compromise his way of life, only impacts a few years. He lived without compromise for forty years, so if he stumbles and compromises [his standards] for a year, the forty years he has behind him can give him the strength to soon forget about his compromise and hold on to a wholesome Yiddishkeit.

When we discuss the younger generation, though, wanting to bring them up relying on compromised [standards], we will have taken away their warmth and devotion to Yiddishkeit for the rest of their lives. Due to the “scratch” and damage formed in their youthful soul, it is likely that, *Rachmana litzlan*, they will grow up as a crippled Jew, a *ba’al mum*...

We need a youthful Jewish generation in this world, healthy Jewishly, Jews who are vibrant spiritually and consequently vibrant Jews physically. With that they will be able to take over the world not only for themselves, so that their own portion is a sanctuary for Hashem, but also for the middle and older generations....

Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 pg. 81



PRESIDENT SHAZAR CONVERSING WITH STUDENTS DURING A VISIT TO A CHABAD YESHIVA IN ERETZ YISROEL.

establishing a Chabad school network, writing, “And may the man who merited to establish mandatory education (*chinuch chovah*) also be meritorious in the area of education for mitzvos and Torah (*chinuch mitzvah v’Torah*).”]

However, the possibility that the new state policies on education would have a negative impact on *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* loomed large.

In Iyar 5709*, we find the Frierdiker Rebbe writing to Mr. Shazar, “Horrible rumors have reached my ears, indicating that perhaps, G-d forbid, the government will attempt to lay hands on kosher education in general, and especially on the learning and educational structure of the *yeshivos* and *chadarim*, which have been operating in the path of Torah from their very beginning until now, deviating neither right nor left, without compromising any spiritual standards despite various challenges.

“Even minor contemplation on past events, and on the degree of self-sacrifice with which our holy forefathers, of blessed memory, battled against allowing foreign hands to touch even the ‘tip of a *yud*’ of Judaism generally and especially of education, ought to be sufficient for one who has the capability to consider the generation, and not make any changes to education

contrary to the views of Torah.

“Without any doubt, your dear sensitive soul, rooted in storied Chassidim and men of good deeds, would not consent to participate in activities that are, G-d forbid, a destruction of the faith. My words are not directed toward you personally, but rather toward one with great influence over his surroundings. I lay out my entreaty to use this opportunity before you to be from those “who acquire their world in one moment,” and to push aside and eliminate any plan for an evil decree, G-d forbid, regarding kosher education.”

Rabbi Menachem Porush, one of the long-time activists of Agudas Yisrael, recounted:

“At that time, when there were concerns that the Ministry of Education would not allow the *chadarim* that only teach Torah to continue, I traveled to the United States. The Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, requested that I visit the Frierdiker Rebbe and ask him to influence Shazar not to inhibit, G-d forbid, with the *chadarim*.

“I indeed did so. The Frierdiker Rebbe asked that I visit him again before returning to Eretz Yisroel. When I visited him the second time, he asked me to tell Mr. Shazar, in his name, to fulfill the request of the Brisker Rav, and that he hopes that the Shazar-Rubashov family in Eretz Yisroel won’t embarrass the Rubashov family of Russia...”⁵

Sure enough, the efforts were successful. The *chadarim* network in Eretz Yisroel was able to continue operating as they always had been, completely independent of all outside influence.

Today, the struggle is not over. In every generation there are those who wish to “add” secular values to Yiddishkeit. Yet, as our Rabbeim taught us, the warmth and passion for Yiddishkeit must be instilled from the very first moments of life — and then *gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimena*, even when growing old it will not fade. **T**

1. This article contains a historical overview on the subject at hand. For a comprehensive look at what the Rabbeim say on secular studies, see “Purity of the Mind,” Derher Elul 5780.

2. The following account is taken primarily from the Kuntres of the Frierdiker Rebbe, “*HaTzemaich Tzedek U’tnuas HaHaskala*,” available also in English, “The Tzemaich Tzedek and the Haskalah Movement”.

3. A reference to the plea of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai from the Roman Emperor to spare the city of Yavneh and its scholars from destruction, Gemara Gittin 56b.

4. Published by Rabbi Sholom Ber Avtzon.

5. <https://jemtv.page.link/fmYW>