

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A dirt road winds through a field of dry, brown grass. In the foreground, a wooden building with a dark roof is partially visible. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky.

# RECHOVOS HANAHAR

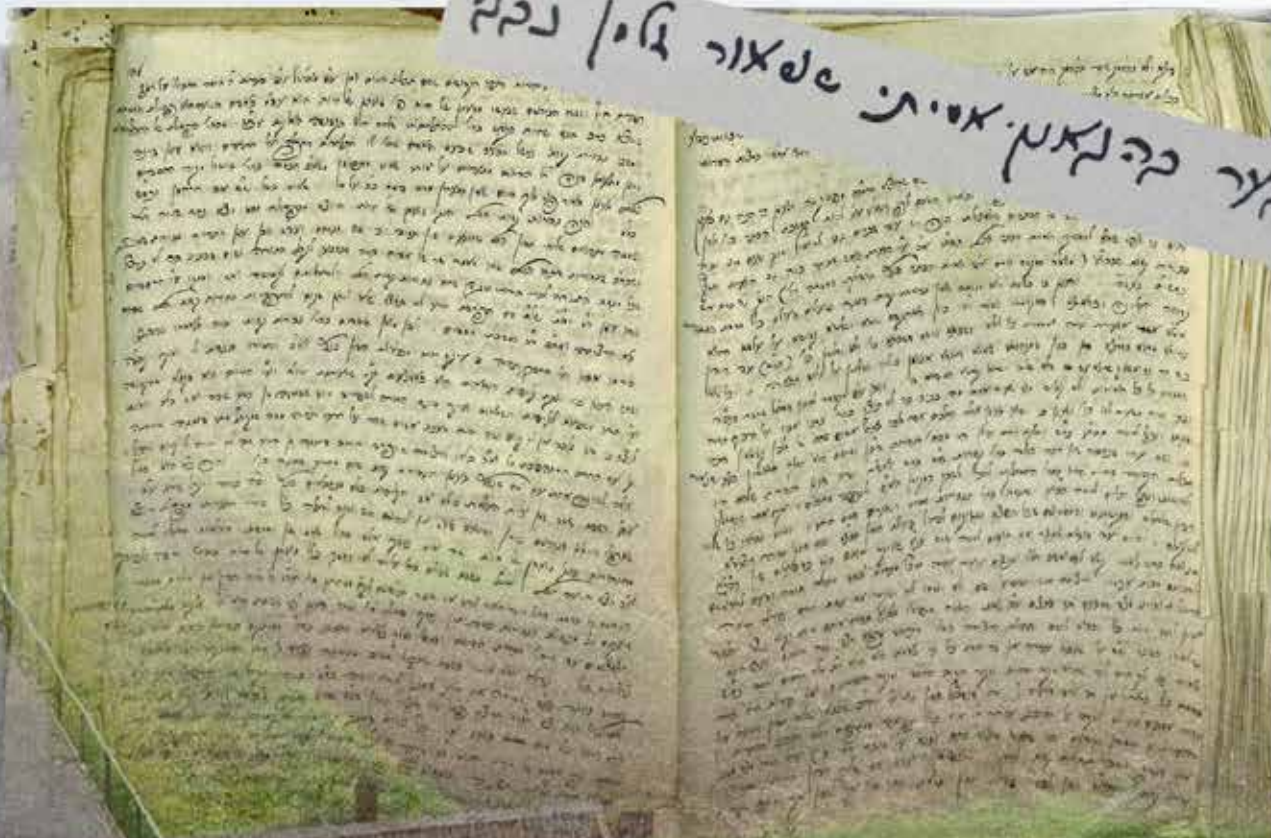
## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MITTELER REBBE

The dates of Tes-Yud Kislev mark the Mittlerer Rebbe's birthday and yom hilula (on Tes), and his chag hageulah (on Yud). We present a glimpse of the fascinating story of his nesius.

**BY: RABBI MENDY GREENBERG**



# בוקר בקהילת אייזיק שטארק גאס נח"ל



לזכות החייל בצבאות ה' מנחם מענדל שיחי' גולדברג,  
 לרגל ה'אפשרונו' שלו ב' כסלו תשפ"ד י"ה ר' שיגדל  
 להיות חייל ויגרום נח"ל כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו  
 מוקדש ע"י הוריו  
 הרה"ת ר' שמעון בן-ציון וזוגתו מרת  
 ח' מושקא שיחיו גולדברג  
 שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר בפסיפיק פליסיידו, קלפורניא

# A New Situation

The Mittler Rebbe's leadership began amidst the tumult of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. At the time of the Alter Rebbe's *histalkus*, the Mittler Rebbe was in Kremenchug, Ukraine, where the Alter Rebbe had sent him to search for a suitable place to settle. Upon receiving news of the *histalkus*, the Mittler Rebbe embarked on the several-month long journey back to Belarus, stopping along the way to deliver *maamarim* and meet with Chassidim in *yechidus*.<sup>1</sup>

For Jews in Czarist Russia, this was a challenging period. Both the Russian and French armies had wreaked havoc throughout the country, leaving villages in ruins and many without a livelihood. Moreover, the Czarist government was growing increasingly hostile towards the Jewish community.

The opposition from the misnagdim remained intense, leading to conflicts in shuls and communities across the region. Even among Chassidim themselves, disputes arose over the merits of Chabad over Chagas. And within Chabad, there was a question of succession between the Mittler Rebbe and Reb Aharon Shtrasheler.

The Mittler Rebbe acted swiftly, issuing directives to strengthen Chassidim and their communities. One of his earliest *takkanos* was prohibiting Chassidim from entering the misnagdim's shuls, so as not to cause unnecessary conflict. Chassidim were encouraged to establish their own *batei midrash* and, if necessary, to daven privately at home, hearing *krias hatorah* while standing outside the non-Chassidic shuls.

"I knew a chossid of the Mittler Rebbe," the Frierdiker Rebbe once said, "who davened without a minyan for five consecutive years—aside for Elul and Tishrei in Lubavitch—because his hometown of Lida did not have a Chassidisher Beis Midrash."<sup>2</sup>

These efforts dramatically reduced the tensions between Chassidim and misnagdim, and fostered a stronger sense of community among the Chassidim gathering in their own spaces.

The Mittler Rebbe traveled extensively, visiting Chassidim to deliver *maamarim* and receive them for *yechidus*. Many of the transcripts of the Mittler Rebbe's *maamarim* note the locations of their recital; in the early years of his *nesius*, we find the Mittler Rebbe visiting towns and cities throughout Belarus, and sometimes even the much-farther Ukraine.

A printing campaign of massive proportions was also undertaken. In the days of the Alter Rebbe, the Tanya was the only *sefer* available in published form. The Mittler Rebbe worked incessantly to publish more and more.

In just the first three years of his *nesius*, he published nine volumes of the Alter Rebbe's Torah: the Tanya with *Igeres*

THE FIRST PRINT OF THE SEFER SHAAREI ORAH PUBLISHED IN 5582



FIRST VOLUME OF A LARGE SET OF THE MITTLER REBBE'S MAAMORIM PUBLISHED BY KEHOS IN 5749

*Hakodesh*, the *Siddur im Da'ch*, *Biurei Hazohar*, and the six volumes of *Shulchan Aruch*.

Over the next six years, he would publish his own Chassidus, releasing a new *sefer* at least once each year: the two sections of *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Derech Chaim*, *Shaar Ha'emunah v'Shaar Hayichud*, *Imrei Binah*, *Ateres Rosh* and *Shaarei Orah*.

The volume and pace of his publishing activities would not be rivaled for over a century, until the establishment of Kehos by the Frierdiker Rebbe, headed by the Rebbe in 5702. For generations, these *sefarim* made up most of the Chassidic bookshelf.<sup>3</sup>

## The Never Ending Fountain

A respected professor, the most famous doctor in the Vitebsk region, was once riding his horse through a small town on his way to treat the local landowner who had fallen ill. As he rode through the quiet streets, he came across an intriguing scene.

Hundreds of Yidden crowded a courtyard to hear a long address from a dignified looking individual in the center of the crowd. They stood in absolute silence; not a cough, not a sneeze, not even a breath was heard. Fascinated, the professor stood there for several minutes. Suddenly, he realized



something incredible—his own chronic cough had been silenced as well.

He soon proceeded to the landowner, who explained to him that this was no ordinary speaker; he had witnessed the delivery of Torah teachings by the Rebbe, Reb Dovber Shneuri, who had settled in the town of Lubavitch several years prior.<sup>4</sup>

Over the 14 years of his leadership, from תקע"ג through תקפ"ח, the Mittler Rebbe delivered an incredible amount of *maamarim*. Sometimes he would deliver two or three in a single Shabbos, each between forty-five minutes and an hour long. Even on Yom Kippur—there were years when he delivered a *maamar* on Yom Kippur morning, again at the end of the fast, and a third time the following morning. On occasion, he would suddenly emerge from his room to deliver a new *maamar* at four in the morning.<sup>5</sup>

The Rebbe often remarked that the Mittler Rebbe's Chassidus is known as "*rechovos hanahar*" (like the wide flow of a river); in contrast to the succinct writing of the Alter Rebbe, the Mittler Rebbe's Torah is lengthy and clear, every point broadly elaborated and clarified.

The volume of his many *maamarim* alone, occupies nineteen volumes published by Kehos, not including the many *sefarim* published separately. Even in the final moments before his *histalkus*, when his holy body seemed to possess no energy at all, he continued to teach Chassidus until his final breath in this world. The Tzemach Tzedek famously quipped that if his finger were cut, it wouldn't be blood emerging, but Chassidus instead.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to his predecessors, the Alter Rebbe, the Maggid and the Baal Shem Tov, the Mittler Rebbe transcribed his own *maamarim* often writing them at far greater length than his oral delivery. Chassidim related that he wrote so quickly, the ink of the first line on the page was often still wet when he finished writing the last.<sup>7</sup>

The Rebbe once pointed to a strange fact about the Mittler Rebbe's Chassidus: Despite the immense amount he wrote, very few original *kisvei yad* remain in the Rebbe's library. The reason, the Rebbe explained, seems to again be associated with the Mittler Rebbe's intense dedication to spreading Chassidus:

When the Mittler Rebbe established the Chabad *yishuv* in Chevron, he chose several Chassidim to be its founders. The Chassidim protested; "What will be with Chassidus?" (i.e., their visits to hear Chassidus from the Rebbe). In response, the Mittler Rebbe promised to personally send them *ksavim*. The Rebbe noted that in fact, numerous *kisvei yad* were discovered in the possession of grandchildren of the Chevron Chassidim.<sup>8</sup>

When the Mittler Rebbe was asked, "Why is so much more revelation necessary now than in previous generations?"

## THE SHTENDER

As a youngster, the Rebbe Maharash once asked his older brother the Maharil, "Why are you nicknamed 'the shtender'?"

"Because," the Maharil responded, "our grandfather the Mittler Rebbe would lean on me when reciting Chassidus in the fields."

"How long would he lean on you?" the Rebbe Maharash asked.

"For an hour or two," the Maharil responded.

The Rebbe Maharash found that difficult to believe. "For just one or two hours they wouldn't have called you shtender," he argued.

"Sometimes, it was three or four hours," he said.

The Rebbe Maharash wasn't satisfied; even that wouldn't suffice to earn him such a nickname. Finally, the Maharil admitted the full extent of his role; "It once happened," he said, "that he leaned on me for eighteen hours!"<sup>10</sup>

he answered with a *marshal*:

"An ill person is told to lessen his consumption of ordinary foods, and given medication. A very sick person is given stronger medication—with potentially harmful side-effects, and someone who is near death is given the most powerful drugs, with the hope that a single drop might enter his body and have the desired effect.

"Previous generations lived on higher levels of spirituality, and didn't need to engage with Kabbala at all... For our orphaned generation, however, it is necessary to 'spill' Chassidus in volume, in the hope that it will reach the person's *pintele yid*..."<sup>9</sup>

## Personal Responsibility

The Mittler Rebbe wasn't content delivering Chassidus himself. Every chossid visiting Lubavitch was expected, on his return trip, to publicly review the *maamarim* they had heard in Lubavitch at every shul along the way.

One chossid famously got himself into 'hot water' by obeying the Mittler Rebbe's instruction:

Reb Moshe Yitzchak of Yas<sup>11</sup> once began *chazering* Chassidus in the shul of the famed Apter Rav, unaware that the Apter Rav was an avowed opponent of Chabad's broad dissemination of Chassidus. Hearing the teachings, the Rav

exclaimed: “הגם לכבוש את המלכה עמי בבית—are you attempting to conquer the queen with me in the house?!”<sup>12</sup> He went on to indicate that Reb Moshe Yitzchak would not survive the year.

Reb Moshe Yitzchak immediately returned to Lubavitch and recounted the story to the Mittlerer Rebbe. The Rebbe asked, “Did you G-d forbid [intentionally] disrespect the tzaddik of Apta?” “No,” responded Reb Moshe Yitzchak. “I didn’t even know that it was his *beis midrash*...”

The Mittlerer Rebbe reassured Reb Moshe Yitzchak that he would live out his allotted years. This did little to calm him, however. The Rebbe leaned on the table for some time, and then said, “You will outlive him.” Still, Reb Moshe Yitzchak’s mind was not put at ease, for the tzaddik of Apta was much older than he was. Again the Rebbe leaned on the table and then said, “You will outlive his children.” Reb Moshe Yitzchak lived to the ripe old age of 102.<sup>13</sup>

One chossid felt that the positive response to his delivery of Chassidus was detrimental to his spiritual growth; he was gaining *yeshus*, he told the Mittlerer Rebbe. The Rebbe wasn’t impressed. “*A tzibele zol fun dir veren, uber Chassidus zolst du chazeren*, even if you become an onion, you should continue repeating Chassidus,” he told him.<sup>14</sup>

## A Thirst For Chassidus

The Mittlerer Rebbe was born on Tes Kislev תקל”ד, just under a year after the *histalkus* of the Mezritcher Maggid. After being blessed only with daughters, the Alter Rebbe had asked the Maggid for a *bracha* to have a son, and the Mittlerer Rebbe was named in his memory.

The Mittlerer Rebbe’s first *melamed* would complain that the young boy always wanted him to teach more and more, while the other children were falling behind. As was typical in those days, the *melamed* taught an older class and a younger class, and one would review their studies while the other learned new material. The Mittlerer Rebbe simply participated in both.<sup>15</sup>

When his Bar Mitzvah approached, the Alter Rebbe temporarily lifted the *Takanos Liozna* (which restricted the Chassidim’s visits with the Alter Rebbe to once a year) and allowed all Chassidim to participate in the grand celebration.<sup>16</sup> Around that time, his *melamed* realized that the Mittlerer Rebbe had suddenly outpaced him, and he no longer understood him. The Mittlerer Rebbe explained to him that it was a result of his *hanochas tefillin*—it had caused him a *psichas halev v’homoach* (“opening” of his heart and mind), and his learning was now on a higher level.<sup>17</sup>

From a very young age, the Mittlerer Rebbe displayed extreme sensitivity to *ruchniusdiker* matters, and due to his weak heart and lungs, he often fell ill from distress.<sup>18</sup>

## FROM ONE END OF THE SHUL TO THE OTHER

When the Tzemach Tzedek assumed the *nesius*, he told Chassidim that it was on condition that he not be disturbed from his Torah learning.

“What about your father-in-law, the Mittlerer Rebbe?” he was asked.

“How can you compare me to him?” the Tzemach Tzedek replied. “Walking from one end of the Beis Midrash to the other, he would review an entire *Masechta*!”

*Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeshev, 5731*

One year, the Alter Rebbe, who would usually *lein* on Shabbos, was out of town during Shabbos Parshas Ki Savo, and an ordinary *baal koreh* read in his place. Hearing the *Tochecha*, the Mittlerer Rebbe—not yet bar mitzvah—fell so ill that the Alter Rebbe questioned whether he should be allowed to fast on Yom Kippur!

When asked, “Don’t you hear this same parshah every year?,” the Mittlerer Rebbe responded, “*Az der tatte leint, hert zich nit kein klalos*, when father reads the Torah, no curses are heard!”<sup>19</sup>

On another occasion, Reb Shlomo Karliner came to visit the Alter Rebbe while the Mittlerer Rebbe and Reb Aharon Strasheler were learning together in the outer room. Hearing a heated discussion, the Mittlerer Rebbe lay down on the floor next to the door, and heard the Alter Rebbe exclaim, “*It’s ossur al pi Torah!*” Soon, the door opened and Reb Shlomo Karliner emerged, responding to the Alter Rebbe with a very sharp expression.

Shocked at the harshness of his words, the Mittlerer Rebbe fainted, and remained ill for several months. The Alter Rebbe later shared that the *Talmidei Hamaggid* had wanted to declare a *cherem* on the Gra, and the Alter Rebbe opposed the endeavor.<sup>20</sup>

As a young man, the Mittlerer Rebbe famously did everything possible to hear additional *maamarim* from his father, and often went to great lengths to do so. Seeing that Chassidus so enlivened him, the Alter Rebbe would often come to his room and privately say a *maamar* for him when he was ill.<sup>21</sup>

When asked about a shidduch, the Mittlerer Rebbe said that he had no preference—whichever option could be finished quicker was preferential, because he wanted to hear the Chassidus that the Alter Rebbe would deliver at the *t’naim*.

As repeated by Reb Ezriel Zelig Slonim, the Mittler Rebbe was so enthusiastic about the opportunity that he put on his Shabbos clothes and stood next to the Alter Rebbe's room in anticipation. When the *shadchan* emerged and informed him that the Alter Rebbe had rejected the proposal, he was sorely disappointed. "Oy, if only he would have agreed—we would have been able to hear Chassidus this very night..."

## Who Will Succeed Him?

When the Alter Rebbe passed away on Chof-Daled Teves תקק"ג, some Chassidim felt that the *nesius* should be passed to a talmid of the Alter Rebbe, not a biological son. They chose to follow Reb Aharon Strasheler, the most prominent of the Alter Rebbe's talmidim, whose style closely resembled the Alter Rebbe's.

In response, two letters were circulated among Chassidim from those closest to the Alter Rebbe—his younger brother Reb Yehudah Leib, and the *chozer* Reb Pinchas Reizes of Shklov.

Reb Pinchas Reizes argued that the Alter Rebbe had, in no uncertain terms, designated the Mittler Rebbe as his successor. He shared that at the wedding of the Mittler Rebbe's daughter to Reb Yaakov Yisrael Cherkasser, the Alter Rebbe had called him and the Mittler Rebbe into a private room, and said that inasmuch as the Mittler Rebbe's life was dedicated to spreading Chassidus and guiding the Chassidim, he requests that after his passing, *pidyonos* be given to the Mittler Rebbe and no one else.

Reb Pinchas also noted a well-known fact: The Mittler Rebbe had long been involved in guiding the Chassidim and serving as a liaison between the Alter Rebbe and Chassidim.<sup>22</sup>

In the Alter Rebbe's "*Takanos Liozna*," the Mittler Rebbe is given the role of explaining Chassidus to those with questions, at the young age of twenty-seven. He is mentioned by the Alter Rebbe even earlier, when he was only twenty-two, as an intermediary between the Rebbe and Chassidim. In the first *michtav klali* after the Alter Rebbe's *histalkus*, the Mittler Rebbe writes of his presence in the Alter Rebbe's inner circle even earlier, "for over twenty years,"<sup>23</sup> i.e., from before age twenty. In fact, as noted by the Rebbe in *Shalshelos Hayachas*, his first appointment was when he was just sixteen years of age, when he was appointed to guide the younger Chassidim.

The early appointment of the Mittler Rebbe was not without controversy; when Reb Avraham Kalisker wrote a letter to the Alter Rebbe opposing the publication of Tanya, he also mentioned the appointment of the Mittler Rebbe: "I am worried for your progeny... you are placing him in a great *nisayon*, like a ship in the sea which needs experienced navigators to be saved from the trap of *gaavah* and *gadlus*..."<sup>24</sup>



THE MITTELER REBBE'S TZIYON IN NIEZHIN, AS IT APPEARED IN 1918.



THE TZIYON AND SURROUNDING BUILDING TODAY, AFTER EXTENSIVE RENOVATIONS

These responsibilities came to a head in the Alter Rebbe's final years, when he was also tasked with saying Chassidus. There were instances when both the Alter Rebbe and the Mittler Rebbe would say Chassidus on the same Shabbos! Sometimes, the Alter Rebbe himself would listen in to his son's recitals.<sup>25</sup>

On one occasion, Reb Yehudah Leib related in his letter, the Alter Rebbe heard that the Mittler Rebbe had revealed something that his father had chosen to conceal, but his reaction was, "What can I do? *Dor dor ve'dorshav*, each generation has its teachers. Perhaps his generation has reached a level where they are worthy of it."<sup>26</sup>

## Like A Pillar

As mentioned, the Alter Rebbe used to *lein* from the Torah each week. Chassidim might have expected the Mittler Rebbe to follow suit, but he did not such thing. In fact, he would even avoid receiving *aliyos*, doing so only once a year on Simchas Torah, during *kol hane'arim*—so great was the shame he felt when standing before a Sefer Torah.

On one occasion, he recited the Haftorah, but became so overwhelmed with emotion that he read from both columns of the *Sefer Haftorahs* as a single line. Even during his year of *aveilus*, he avoided davening for the *amud*, and sufficed with reciting kaddish instead.

This wasn't the only area in which the Mittler Rebbe differed dramatically from his father.

In moments of *dveikus*, the Alter Rebbe was accustomed to

strong displays of emotion. He would sometimes even roll on the floor in the intensity of the moment. The Mittlerer Rebbe, on the other hand, displayed no emotion at all.

His chossid, Reb Yaakov Kadaner, described it as follows:

“One Rosh Hashanah, he davened *shemoneh esreh* for three hours, yet I did not see a single movement. He stood like an iron pillar built into the ground... As he made his way out of shul, it was difficult to look at his holy face, aflame with holiness.

“Seeing the attendant with the Rebbe’s wet garment, the Chassidim told him not to hold it with his hands as water would certainly be squeezed out of the garment, a prohibition on Yom Tov. After Musaf, the Rebbe changed his shirt again as it was again soaking wet, although, amazingly, throughout his davening he was completely still.”

In his letters to Chassidim, the Mittlerer Rebbe opposed the notion that one needed to display physical expressions of emotion during davening. In one letter, he criticized the behavior as follows: “Some of *anash* seem to think that one cannot achieve *hisbonenus* without walking to and fro, from corner to corner, pacing intensely as if deeply engrossed in *hisbonenus*... Would anyone suggest that in worldly matters too, running to and fro is a way to reach deep contemplation?”

Physical expressions of emotion, the Mittlerer Rebbe explains, should emerge naturally from one’s *hisbonenus*, but the *hisbonenus* itself should be done in a calm, collected manner, sitting in one place.<sup>27</sup>

The intensity of the Mittlerer Rebbe’s *hisbonenus* was famous; his *meshares* would sometimes let Chassidim into the room where the Rebbe davened. The Chassidim would see the Rebbe standing still, eyes open, but noticing nothing.<sup>28</sup>

Once when the Mittlerer Rebbe was young, his father passed his home on the way to mikvah and noticed him standing at the window smoking a pipe, deep in thought. The Alter Rebbe reached inside, removed the pipe from his mouth, and continued walking. On his return from the mikveh, the Mittlerer Rebbe was still standing in the same position—completely oblivious to the fact that the pipe was no longer there.<sup>29</sup>

He would often need to be reminded to eat and sleep, but, as his father noted, he never needed to be reminded to recite the long *Vehu Rachum* on Mondays and Thursdays, or *Yaale V’Yavo* on Rosh Chodesh, since “when he davens, he sees matters as they are *l’malah* (on high).”<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most famous story is one the Rebbe repeated on several occasions:

“The Mittlerer Rebbe was once deep in study in his room, when his small baby fell out of the cradle and began to cry. He didn’t notice anything, but the Alter Rebbe—learning on the top floor—heard the cries, paused his learning, and soothed the baby back to sleep.

## THE WAGON DRIVER’S OPINION

During a journey, the Tzemach Tzedek’s gentile wagon driver said to him, “Rebbe, your predecessor was greater than you!”

“How do you know?” the Tzemach Tzedek asked.

“At our first stop on this journey,” he explained, “you gave me money for some vodka. When we stopped a second time, I asked for money again, but you said—correctly—that the change from the first stop should suffice for another purchase. But the old Rebbe never mentioned the change...”

It was, in fact, well-known that, like the *amora* Rabbi Menachem ben Sumai, the Mittlerer Rebbe never looked at the face of a coin (Pesachim 104a).

(Likkutei Sippurim pg. 135)

“Afterwards, the Alter Rebbe admonished his son. ‘Az a Yiddish kind veint, darf men derheren, when a Jewish child cries, one needs to hear...’”

The lesson, the Rebbe repeated from the Frierdiker Rebbe, is that no matter how lofty our own *avodah*, when a Jewish *neschama* cries out, we need to hear, and heed, the call.<sup>31</sup>

## The Banishments

In the final years of the Alter Rebbe’s *nesius*, the Czar’s government released a series of laws restricting Jewish life. Most significant was the ban on leasing taverns and selling vodka, a trade which had been a staple of Jewish livelihood for centuries.

At first, local landowners evaded the new laws—the local peasants hired in place of the Jewish lessees would just drink all the vodka themselves—but as the decades passed, the government enforced the law with increasingly effective measures.

In the final years of the Mittlerer Rebbe’s *nesius*, Jews were banished from the taverns and small villages altogether. From Nissan to Elul of תקפ”ג, in the regions of Mohilev and Vitebsk surrounding Lubavitch, over twenty thousand Jews lost their homes. By the next year, the number had passed



forty thousand. Destitute families arrived in towns and cities in droves and lived in the local shuls; infections were rampant, and many succumbed to their illnesses.

The difficult situation raised questions about the future of Jews in Russia altogether; “Who knows what will be in the end,” the Mitteler Rebbe writes; “should we *chas veshalom* be banished to distant lands...”<sup>32</sup>

The Mitteler Rebbe worked incessantly to better the lives of his Jewish brethren. In those days, the antisemitic tropes saw Jews as sly businessmen taking advantage of the peasants, so the Rebbe promoted agricultural work instead, telling Chassidim that working the fields was nothing to be ashamed of—after all, that was our primary occupation in our homeland of Eretz Yisrael.

Reaching out to the government, the Mitteler Rebbe arranged for the establishment of agricultural colonies in the areas surrounding Cherson in Southern Ukraine, allowing thousands of Jews to find their livelihood. The government even provided horses for the journey and permission to graze the animals in government fields along the way. In light of the distance from Lubavitch, the Mitteler Rebbe appointed special *Mashpi'im*, most notably Reb Hillel Paritcher, to travel throughout the colonies and invigorate the Jews living there.

One couple that moved to the new colonies was Reb Yehudah Leib and Feiga Lavut, with their young child Avraham Dovid—the Rebbe’s great-great-grandfather who would later become the rav of the Chassidim in the area and patriarch of the Rebbe’s family, many members of whom served as Rabbanim throughout the colonies and nearby cities.<sup>33</sup> He authored the earliest work on the Alter Rebbe’s Siddur, the Sha’ar Hakollel.

The Mitteler Rebbe also sought to better the spiritual state of Chassidim; he wrote letters of encouragement, directing the Chassidim to focus inward despite the difficulties, and issued specific directives about the appropriate *sedarim* of davening and Torah learning.

One important enactment was that every chossid, without fail, find time each evening to learn Torah in the Beis Midrash. “Those who are overly occupied with commerce,” the Rebbe writes, “should hire someone to learn in their stead—so it should be as if they themselves participated.”

During that period, the Mitteler Rebbe began publishing *Toras Chaim* on the weekly parshah. Instead of releasing it all at once, he released it in short installments, selling each for the small sum of eight kopeks. Over time, every chassid could collect all the pieces and bind them into one Sefer. This was apparently due to the difficult economic situation; despite the hardships, the Rebbe went to every length to help Chassidim continue growing in Chassidus.<sup>34</sup>

## The Arrest and Liberation

After ten years of *nesius*, in his fiftieth year, the Rebbe’s health began to falter. Traveling to Chassidim became difficult, and the recital of Maamarim was somewhat curtailed. Chassidim were asked to avoid unnecessary trips to Lubavitch, and especially, to avoid bringing negative news that would cause him distress.

In search of a cure, the Mitteler Rebbe embarked on a long journey over the summer of תקפ"ה to visit the doctors and spas in Germany. During his journey, he wrote several fascinating letters home, describing the Jews of Ashkenaz and his visit to Reb Akiva Eiger.

Unbeknownst to Chassidim, other developments were taking place in Vitebsk, the seat of the regional government. A *mesirah* had been filed with the governor claiming that the Mitteler Rebbe had amassed a large sum of illegal funds. In those days, a Rav was permitted to tax his community only in the context of the legally recognized *kahal* structure. The Mitteler Rebbe was not the official rabbi of a community. This implied that his collection of funds was illegal.

The main accusation rested on a private letter by the Mitteler Rebbe to Reb Pinchas Reizes about the *maamad*-funds raised after the Alter Rebbe’s *histalkus*, in which he asked that the information be kept secret. The secrecy raised eyebrows, as did a deliberate mistranslation by the *moser* which quadrupled the amount of money raised.

After Sukkos תקפ"ו, the Mitteler Rebbe was brought to



PHOTOS SHOW JEWS WORKING IN THE AGRICULTURAL COLONIES IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE



Vitebsk for questioning. The arrest quickly raised alarm among Chassidim, but after a few weeks, they were able to arrange for conditions to be eased; the governor soon allowed the Rebbe to daven with a minyan and deliver Chassidus, and his imprisonment became a form of house arrest.

The Mittler Rebbe soon proved the truth about the allegations: firstly, it was a much smaller sum than stated, secondly, it was collected voluntarily, in a legal and straightforward manner. The secrecy was due to sensitivities as to who the money was being distributed.

Investigators were sent to confirm the Mittler Rebbe's defense; townspeople in Lubavitch were questioned, the *chatzer* was paid a visit, and several other Chassidim were detained. Reb Aharon Strasheler was implicated in the case as well. Finally, on 10 Kislev, the first stage of the investigations was concluded, and the Rebbe was free to return home. Thousands of Chassidim celebrated his release, but the joy was marred by the fact that a final ruling hadn't been issued; the case would continue to be debated and appealed at higher levels of government. The final acquittal wasn't issued until 21 Kislev תקפ"ח, twelve days after the Mittler Rebbe's passing.

## The Source of Life

In the summer of תקפ"ז, worrying news arrived in Lubavitch; there was a possibility that the case-file would be sent to Petersburg, the capital, which could entail a much harsher judgment. The Mittler Rebbe decided to travel to Haditch for the Yomim Noraim, to be near the Ohel of his father, the Alter Rebbe.

A large group of Chassidim gathered in the town for the duration of the visit; the Mittler Rebbe delivered many *maamarim* in the shul near the Ohel, and spent many hours sequestered at the *tziyun*. Throughout this time, the Rebbe was very solemn, and alluded to a period of *dinim*, judgment, which Chassidim later realized were references to the *histalkus*.

After the Yomim Tovim, the Mittler Rebbe and his large entourage began the journey back to Lubavitch, but at the town of Niezhin, the Rebbe fell ill. His health continued to deteriorate; by the eve of Tes Kislev, the Rebbe's fifty-fourth birthday, the situation was dire.

The following events were described in a letter by Reb Moshe Vilenker and other Chassidim, written at the behest of the Mittler Rebbe's son, Reb Nochum:

"Let us share a bit of the Rebbe's immense, wondrous *kedusha* that we witnessed during the *histalkus*. We heard words of *divrei Elokim chaim*—he literally did not finish reciting the word 'chaim,' in the posuk '*ki imcha mekor chaim*,' when a short time later, his holy soul ascended..."

"In the evening, the Rebbe learned Mishnayos *Kodshim* with incredible joy and *dveikus*, and told us to be joyful as well, because *simchah* sweetens judgment. About four hours before day break, he began to faint, but he regained consciousness a short while later and delivered Chassidus several times, for about an hour and a half, revealing the deepest secrets of the Torah amid genuine joy, until the very moment of his passing, as day broke on Tes Kislev. The Aron Kodesh was entombed here, in Niezhin."<sup>35</sup> **T**

1. For the story of the Alter Rebbe's fight against Napoleon, see "A Battle of Good vs. Evil," *Derher Teves* 5779. For the story of the *histalkus*, see "Memaleh Mekomo," *Derher Shevat* 5779.
2. Kuntres Toras Hachassidus pg. 8
3. For more on the history of printing Chassidus, see "Wellsprings Unleashed," *Derher Teves* 5778.
4. This story was retold in several versions. See, for example, *Toras Menachem* vol. 2 pg. 178.
5. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 1 pg. 394. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 199. To read about the Rebbe's unique commemoration of this custom, see "Three Maamarim and Stories," *Derher Vayetze* 5773.
6. *Toras Menachem* vol. 54 pg. 295.
7. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 363.
8. *Toras Menachem* vol. 49 pg. 111.
9. Migdal Oz pg. 309.
10. Likkutei Sipurim pg. 137
11. See *Derher*, Shevat 5780 pg. 22.
12. Megillas Esther 7:8.
13. Likkutei Sippurim pg. 136. Otzar Sipurei Chabad vol. 16 pg. 62
14. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 8 pg. 288.
15. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 21.
16. *Ibid* 31.
17. Migdal Oz pg. 185, from Reb Ezriel Zelig Slonim.
18. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 39.
19. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 338 See also Rosh Chodesh Elul 5742.
20. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 176
21. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 44.
22. *Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtza'i* pg. 290.
23. *Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtza'i* pg. 7
24. *Ibid*. 8
25. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 198.
26. *Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtza'i* pg. 291.
27. *Igros Kodesh* pg. 268.
28. Likkutei Sippurim pg. 141.
29. *Ibid* pg. 87.
30. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 315.
31. 10 Kislev 5713, and many other occasions.
32. *Igros Kodesh* pg. 22.
33. See *Derher* Elul 5781.
34. A recently published sefer by Kehos details a list of all the Mittler Rebbe's *maamorim*, with comprehensive bibliography and annotation: *Maftaiach Sifrei Maamorei Udrushei Admur Haemtzoee Udfuseihem*.
35. *Igros Kodesh* pg. 327.