

Timely Titles

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נדפס ע"י ולזכות

הרה"ת ר' צבי יוסף
וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
שפאלטר

ASHKAVTA D'REBBI



Beis Nissan 5680* was the *histalkus* of the Rebbe Rashab. An extraordinarily fascinating period in history, personal recollections of this sublime saga and the tumultuous events leading up to this date were recorded and transcribed in diary form, titled Ashkavta D'Rebbi.



"I am going to heaven, but I am leaving my writings with you. Take me into the zol, and we will be together."

Reb Moshe Dovber (Berel) Rivkin was an exceptional student in Tomchei Temimim, who merited to be the personal attendant of the Rebbe Rashab during the turbulent weeks before his passing. To be chosen for this task was considered a rare honor and indeed he was shown a great deal of affection while serving in this capacity. Unbeknownst to him at the time, he would accompany the Rebbe Rashab from the onset of his illness until he was finally laid to rest in Rostov.

During this time, Reb Berel observed many interesting habits and customs of the Rebbe Rashab and frequently discussed them with him in order to understand the halachic and Kabbalistic significance of these practices. When he later transcribed his powerful experiences into a personal memoir, he included insightful notes in the margins based on these learned discussions.

An unusual combination of history and *halacha*, this account of the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus* is of twofold importance. Firstly, from a historical perspective, the author's account is considered a reliable testimony as it contains the first-hand experiences of someone intimately involved in the events. In addition, the secondary facet of this work, which consists of a collection of learned analyses on various customs found in the footnotes, became an authoritative halachic source in its own right. Together, these two elements comprise the distinctive work known as "Kuntres Ashkavta D'Rebbi."¹



OVERVIEW



Kuntres Ashkavta D'Rebbi is structured in a diary-like narrative format with numerous footnotes and sidebars scattered throughout. It also contains a section featuring selected copies of documents, including the will of the Rebbe Rashab and interesting letters, as well as an appendix with three essays on *halacha*. The book begins with a foreword, an index of uncommon abbreviations, and comprehensive tables of contents for the diary, footnotes, and letters.

👉 **Ashkavta D'Rebbi:** This is the central text in this book. In this section, the author reflects on what transpired during that fateful period. As this was written months later, the author's perspective is imbued with a sense of foreboding as he describes the events, for while at the time the Chassidim were oblivious and did not read the telltale signs, with the clarity of hindsight the author was able to foreshadow what was to come. The story begins with an unexpected and illegal Purim farbrengen in which the Rebbe Rashab regaled the Chassidim in an extraordinarily joyous mood. Miraculously, the farbrengen prevails despite a dangerously close brush with the authorities. Soon after, the Rebbe Rashab falls gravely ill and is bedridden for a number of weeks. The author and the Rebbe Rashab's son, the Friediker Rebbe, attend to him and provide devoted care during this time. Despite the presence of typhus in the area (the author later contracts it himself), the physicians are unsure of the Rebbe Rashab's diagnosis as he exhibits unusual symptoms. Throughout his illness, the Rebbe Rashab is very serious and deeply contemplative. The author details the timeline of the Rebbe Rashab's illness until the climactic moment when his soul finally ascends to Heaven. The author continues to describe the aftermath of the *histalkus*, including the burial process, the period of grieving, and notable events from the subsequent months when the Friediker Rebbe assumed the mantle of *nesius*.

👉 **Ha'aros:** Scattered throughout the book are many footnotes that elucidate terms and concepts, providing valuable context. Some of these are quite lengthy and delve into the reasoning for certain Lubavitch customs. The most noteworthy ones address customs that the author observed the Rebbe Rashab being meticulous about while sick, and discussed with him to clarify their halachic and Kabbalistic significance. These halachic discussions can be studied independently of the book, and are often referenced in later Chabad *halacha sefarim*. The subjects addressed include the various nuances in the Rebbe Rashab's daily routine when laying tefillin and tzitzis, *halachos* related to the *seudah*, and other behaviors during davening. Some of these analyses were shown to the Rebbe and received his endorsement. However, most of them were not formally



REB MOSHE DOVBER RIVKIN (STANDING ON THE RIGHT) PICTURED WITH MEMBERS OF THE HANHALA OF YESHIVAS TORAS EMES IN YERUSHALAYIM IN 5684 - REB ZALMAN HAVLIN IN THE CENTER AND REB MOSHE ARYEH LEIB SHAPIRA SITTING LEFT.

validated by the Rebbe, so the author invites the reader to approach his conclusions with caution and not feel obligated to accept them as definitive.

👉 **Chelek Ha'Haatakos:** In this section, the author has curated a number of interesting documents related to the Rebbe Rashab. This includes a portion of the

Rebbe Rashab's will to *anash* and his son, the Frierdiker Rebbe, concerning Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim and other Chabad institutions, which was made public a month after the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus*. In addition, the author was granted permission to publish several sections of the Rebbe Rashab's will which were not previously released to the general public. As the author was fortunate to be from the select few who were shown the entire will, he utilized the opportunity to memorize it and later transcribed it almost verbatim to keep a copy for himself. Additionally, there are accurate

copies of fiery letters from the Frierdiker Rebbe to the Temimim and *anash* that he composed in the wake of the *histalkus* of his father. At the Rebbe's urging, a facsimile of an emotionally charged farewell letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe to the author is also included in this book, located just before this section.

📌 **Shlosa Kuntreisim B'halacha:** Here, the author appended to his book three essays on miscellaneous halachic topics, dedicated as a tribute to his older and younger brothers who were murdered *al kiddush Hashem* by the Nazis.

BACKGROUND

From when Reb Moshe Dovber Rivkin chronicled his recollections, it took 33 years for these notes to see the light of day.

Penned a mere six months after the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus*, while his memories were fresh and his feelings still raw, these notes capture the depth of the powerful experience of his time spent tending to the Rebbe Rashab in his final days. The style of writing betrays its purpose; that is, a personal diary, a repository for the author alone to hold on to his intimate recollections and treasure them. Despite adorning it with a title and a cover page, he still did not intend to even show it to anyone, let alone publish it.

And so it remained. For 30 years no one was privy to the diary and its contents, with the exception of the Frierdiker Rebbe, to whom the author once divulged its existence and loaned it for a few days, which the Frierdiker Rebbe greatly appreciated.

Since then, the manuscript accompanied the author throughout all his sojourns as he fled from country to country in Europe until he finally settled in America in the summer of 5688*.

In 5695*, Reb Yechezkel (Chatche) Feigin, the *mazkir* of the Frierdiker Rebbe and editor of the Chassidus column in Hatomim journal, requested that the author extend his manuscript to the journal so they could feature it as a serial, either in its entirety or at least selected parts. However, this did not come to fruition as the author recalled those few days that the manuscript was in the possession of the Frierdiker Rebbe; it evoked such strong emotions and intense grief that

his tears caused further damage to the already fragile manuscript. Thus, out of sensitivity for the Frierdiker Rebbe, the author decided against featuring his memoir as he didn't want to cause him unnecessary anguish.



*📅 5688-1928, 5695-1935

After the Friediker Rebbe's *histalkus*, the Rebbe repeatedly encouraged the author to publish the manuscript and offer the masses a glimpse into the experiences recorded in his memoirs. The Rebbe's words prompted the author to contemplate and marvel at the *hashgacha pratis* of the preservation of this particular manuscript. Despite the tumultuous travels and the ravages of world wars, this document had somehow managed to remain intact, doggedly accompanying him throughout it all, while so many other important documents, manuscripts of Chassidus from earlier Rebbeim were lost, and all of his possessions destroyed. Thus the author came to believe that perhaps the miraculous preservation of this manuscript was meant for the benefit of the masses, and so he graciously acquiesced to have it copied and published.

Written in the summer of 5680*, the memoir was left untouched with no stylistic changes, edits, or modifications made to the text. This was in order to preserve the authentic flavor and to capture the spirit of the first person observer's poignant impressions of the *histalkus*. For this reason, nothing was omitted or added before publishing.² Even minor details trivial or insignificant to the overall storyline were left intact, as the author treasured everything that made him reminisce of those precious days. For the author, revisiting these memoirs brings to life in vivid detail those harrowing moments at the Rebbe Rashab's bedside, the sublime experience as the Rebbe Rashab returned his pure soul to its maker. It is the author's hope that the reader will be able to transcend the text and allow his imagination to conjure up what it must have felt like to witness such a powerful event. It's important to note that when the author wrote these memoirs, they were only for his own personal reflection and not intended for a wider audience. As a result, he didn't take care to use language familiar to everyone. The goal was simply to engrave the sights and feelings into his memory.

When preparing the manuscript for publication, the author included extensive notes in the margins which expound on the background and rationales behind the Rebbe Rashab's precise behaviors. He understood that every subtle nuance in the customs of the Rabbeim is worthy of scrutiny and wanted to provide additional insight. As the author relates, during a conversation one summer evening in 5677*, the Friediker Rebbe discussed his father's meticulous behavior and he explained how every particularity was deliberate, and a stringent effort to satisfy every possible opinion in *halacha* or Kabbalah, even those which were not codified as the final *halacha*. Many of these behaviors could often be mistaken for ordinary habits, but they always had a deeper significance.



THE TZIYUN OF THE REBBE RASHAB.

Published by the Ezra press affiliate 'Balshon' in 5713, the *kuntres* has since been reprinted several times, and recently, it was translated into English by Shmuel Kesselman and published by the Rabbinical College of Australia and New Zealand in honor of Beis Nissan 5780.

In a letter from Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik to the author, he marvels at the paradoxical synthesis of keen analytical insight and strict halachic rationale with the emotional depth and characteristic Chassidic warmth that is displayed in the book. This delicate balance is evident when the author attempts to justify the actions of Kohanim who faced a difficult dilemma being wary of ritual impurity but nonetheless desired to pray by the gravesite of a *tzaddik*. **T**

1. The term Ashkavta D'Rebbi is a reference to the funeral of Rebbi Yehuda HaNasi mentioned in Kesubos 103b.

2. Reb Dovid Raskin reveals in a letter that Reb Berel Rivkin confirmed to him that a name was added to the Rebbe Rashab while he was ill, but was dropped after the *histalkus*. Rabbi Rivkin explained that he didn't include this information in Ashkavta D'Rebbi because it was composed solely on his notes from that time.

A LEAF FROM THE BOOK

ASHKAVTA D'REBBI
An excerpt of the levaya

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פני רבנו נ"ע כעת הטהרה, ועד כי נסתם הגולל ה' כמו חי, וכעין צחוק קל על פניו*. אשר כל הנכחים עמדו מתפלאים ע"ו.

אח"כ הליבו והעמיפו אותו בהטליה (הטליה של ש"ק אשר ה' מתפלל בו בהימים האחרונים כנ"ל) ואח"כ העמיפו בהסדין ג"כ כמובן מפתח נקי, וקודם שלקחו גופו הק' לשא, נגשה הרבנית שליט"א ונכדותיו יהיו בכבי גורא כו' וקרעו להרבנית קריעה כדיון.

ואח"כ לקחו גופו הק' לשא למנוחת עולמים, וגם נושאי המטה והלופיהן היו רק התמימים, ואחדים יח"ס מוקני אנ"ש. ואני נשאתי המטה כל הדרך בלי הפסק עד הקבר, וכמוכּן לא יכולתי וגם דעתי לא ה' לזה לראות העולם המשתתפים בהלוי, אבל ספרו אח"כ שממש כל תושבי העיר איש לא נעדר מלהשתתף בהלוי.

כשכאו על הביה"ק העמידו המטה אצל הקבר, וכעת שהורידו גופו הק' בקבר, אמר כק"ש לג' אנשים שעמדו אז אצלו, (כמדומה הראב"פ והר"א קרטיק ועוד אחד) ועשאן כו"ד. שהוא מתנה בפניהם שהמקום הזה הוא קונה בשביל אביו הק' על תנאי, שיהי' הרשות בידי לפנות עצמות הקדושים אצל קברי אבותיו הק' נ"ע בליובאוויטש, (ע"י תשובת הת"ס חלק ששי סי' ל"ז שאלה כזה אודות הגאון ר' מרדכי באנעט נ"ע מניקלשבורג, ע"ד לפנותו מליכטנשטאד לניקלשבורג, ע"י"ש היטב בהיתר הב' שהוא פשוט להתיר מחמת שכנו של הגרמ"ב ו"ל התנה קודם הקבורה בפירוש שהוא קונה המקום וקברו בליכטנשטאד על תנאי שיהי' מותר לפנותו, וע"י"ש עוד התרים ששייכים גם כאן) ואחרי אשר נסתם הגולל אמר כק"ש ק"י כדיון.

כשכאו חורה מהלוי' לבית רבינו, וכק"ש והרבנית שליט"א נכנסו בהקאביניעט — חדר רבנו — חלצו נעליהם כדיון והביאו להם לשם סעודת הבראה, וטעמו, כן כל אנ"ש באו ג"כ מהלוי' לבית

ה ע ר ו ת

בליובאוויטש וראסטאו אשר אהלי קברי רבוה"ק נ"ע הם בהתחלת הביה"ק, ולא היו צריכים לעבור דרך שאר קברי הביה"ק. לא נהגו באמת ליטול הידים, דעל קברי צדיקים בעצמם אין ר"ר. אבל בכנון ציון קבר כ"ק אדמו"נ"ע פה בני יארק שהוא בתוך הביה"ק, ועד שמגיעים אל הציון צריכים לעבור דרך שאר קברי הביה"ק. אף אם אינם עוברים בקירוב ד"א אל הקברים. בוודאי צריכים ליטול הידים ג"ש כדיון הולך בין המתים המבואר בשו"ע וכנ"ל. ומה"ט כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א נוהג באמת ליטול הידים קודם שנכנס בביתו. בכל פעם שבא מהשתטחות על ציון חותנו כ"ק אדמו"ר נבג"מ, ודי בהערה זאת]

(*) באורא בהתלקותו של הרשבי איותא שלאחר ההתלקותו הרי פניו חייבין. ומטבא ברודש האחרון הלאה דרשבי, כי ע"ו ה"ט פגד התלמה התענג כו"ר.

During the *taharah*, we were struck by the radiant and seemingly alive appearance of the Rebbe Rashab's face, which even bore a hint of a smile until the moment it was covered for the final time.

The Rebbe Rashab's body was then wrapped in his Shabbos tallis and additional layers of linen shrouds, and moments before the body was to be carried out, the Rebbetzin and other family members approached the table to tear *kriah*.

The body was then transported to the cemetery. Since I held on to the coffin all the way to the grave, I didn't notice (nor did I have the presence of mind to notice) who attended the funeral, but I was told that everyone was present, with no one missing.

As the Rebbe Rashab's body was lowered into the grave, the Rayatz formed a Beis Din with three Chassidim (Reb Avrohom Boruch Pevzner, Reb Eliezer Karasik and one other) and declared before them that the Rebbe was being buried there on the condition that his body could be relocated to Lubavitch in the future. Following that, the pit was filled and the Rayatz said *kaddish*.

רבינו, ובחדר האוכל הסמוך להקאביניעט הלצו כולם נעליהם כדון תלמיד על רבו, וישבו על הרצפה כחצי שעה, ובין כה הגיע זמן תפלת מנחה וכק"ש התפלל לפני התיבה באריכות גדולה ובכבדות משונות כו', ואח"כ מעריב. ואנ"ש הלכו להם. ואני ועוד אחרים (הר"ם גו"א ואחיו הרר"ש — המל"ח כק"ש — והר"י לעווין) נשארו ללון שם בבית רבינו, ואני לנתי שם כל השבוע.

אחר תפלת מעריב, כשכל אנ"ש עזבו חדר רנ"ע והלכו לביתם, עכבני כק"ש להשאר עמו עוד בחדר רנ"ע. ודבר עמדי הרכה כשעתים, וככה בכבדות נוראות, ותוכן הדבורים הי' שעתה הוא רואה עין בעין כי מאחרי המועדים התכוון למועד היי החיים כו', וכל דבוריו עמו כמשך החורף הי' ענין צוואה אליו מרם הסתלקותו, והוא לא עלה על דעתו שכר נורא כזה, ובתוך אריכות הדבורים צעק כקול מר צורח ובכבדות משונות כזה"ל: „גוואלד, גוואלד, ואו איז געווען מיון פארשטאנד, א גאנץ ווינטער האט ער מיר געזאגט אזוי קלאר און דייטליך אז ער ווערט נסתלק, און איך האב ניט פארשטאנען, והן הן הדברים אשר כתב אח"כ גם באגרותיו הראשונות לאנ"ש והתמיסים אחרי ההסתלקות, אשר אי"ה נעתיקם להלן 30).

תפלת כק"ש לפני התיבה כל הזמן הוא באריכות גדולה ודביקות נפלאה ובכבדות משונות, אשר פועל התעוררות והתרנשות הנפש על כל המתפללים בהמנין שלו כמו בתפלת יו"פ ממש. ומתוך אחת השיחות ששוחח עמי כק"ש קודם תה"ש, הכנתי מתוך דבריו — אף שלא אמר זה בפירוש — שבתפלותיו כעת בשנת האבילות, הוא מכוון הכוונות שעפ"י הקבלה, המבואר בהסודורים שעם כוונות ובפע"ה עפ"י קבלת האריו"ל. ונוסח ניגון התפלה שלו לפני התיבה, הוא ממש כמו של אביו הק' נ"ע.

בש"ק צו (הוא יום האחרון שנשלם השבועה) אחר מנחה, וכל אנ"ש היו בחדר האוכל (הסמוך להקאביניעט חדר רנ"ע) וחכו על תפלת מעריב, וכק"ש הי' לבדו בהקאביניעט, נקראתי לכק"ש בוקאד ביניעט ע"י אחד המשמשים, וכאשר נכנסתי, התחיל לדבר אלי בלב

ה ע ר ו ת

30) איזה חדשים אחרי ההסתלקות דבר עמדי כ"ק אדמו"ע עוד בענין זה באריכות יותר, ואמר אלי או שבמשך החורף תר"ם, דבר רנ"ע עמדו הרבה, וזאת לפני טבעות ומות ומדריגת בפרטית מכא"א ממש מאנ"ש, ומשום צורך הוראת שעה אז. שהי' נוגע אלי ביהודי. גלה לי אז מקצת מהדבורים שרנ"ע אמר לו אודותי, וגם התום באוצרותי מכתבי כ"ק אדמו"ע אלי, כולם בכת"ק משנת רפ"ד מלענינגראד, אשר בהם מוזכר כ"ק דברי רנ"ע אליו אודותי, בהנוגע לפרט וענין מיוחד, ואני תפלה שהדבורים יהיו שמורים וערוכים בנפשי עד עולם.

After the funeral, the Rayatz and the Rebbetzin went to the Rebbe Rashab's office, where they removed their shoes as per the *halacha*, and partook in a meal following the funeral. The rest of the community returned to the house also, and they too removed their shoes and sat on the floor for about half an hour. The Rayatz was *chazan* for Mincha and Maariv, and he davened at great length sobbing heavily throughout. Afterwards, many of the Chassidim went home. A select few Chassidim including myself, remained at the house and slept there for the duration of the week of *shivah*.

Following Maariv, when most of the Chassidim had gone on their way, I remained in the Rebbe Rashab's office with the Rayatz. We spoke for quite an extensive period of time and amongst other things he bemoaned his lack of foresight, "Now, I look back and I can see that the Rebbe was preparing for this event. Over the last few months he told me many things that were a 'will' of sorts. I did not dream that this was his intention in telling me these matters." The Rayatz raised his tone and in a broken voice lamented, "*Gevald gevald*, where was my intuition?! The entire winter the Rebbe had been telling me so clearly and pointedly that he will be *nistalek*, and I did not realize it."

In the forthcoming weeks, the Rayatz was *chazan* for all of the *tefillos* and he recited *kaddish*. He davened at length, with great fervor, devotion and flowing tears. His *tefillos* caused all those surrounding him to feel a spiritual awakening and an emotional connection to Hashem. When he davened, all those davening with him felt like one would feel on Yom Kippur. The Rayatz later implied that during the year of mourning he davened with the intentions spelled out by the Arizal in the books of Kabbalah. The tune in which he davened was identical to that of the Rebbe Rashab.