

לזכות  
עליזה תחי'  
שוחאט  
לרגל יום הולדתה - כ"ב טבת

ולזכות הוריה  
הרה"ת ר' שלום דוב בער וזוגתו מרת חיה מושקא שיחיו  
ולזכות אחיותיה ברכה ליפשא, שיינדל,  
ואחיה מנחם מענדל שיחיו

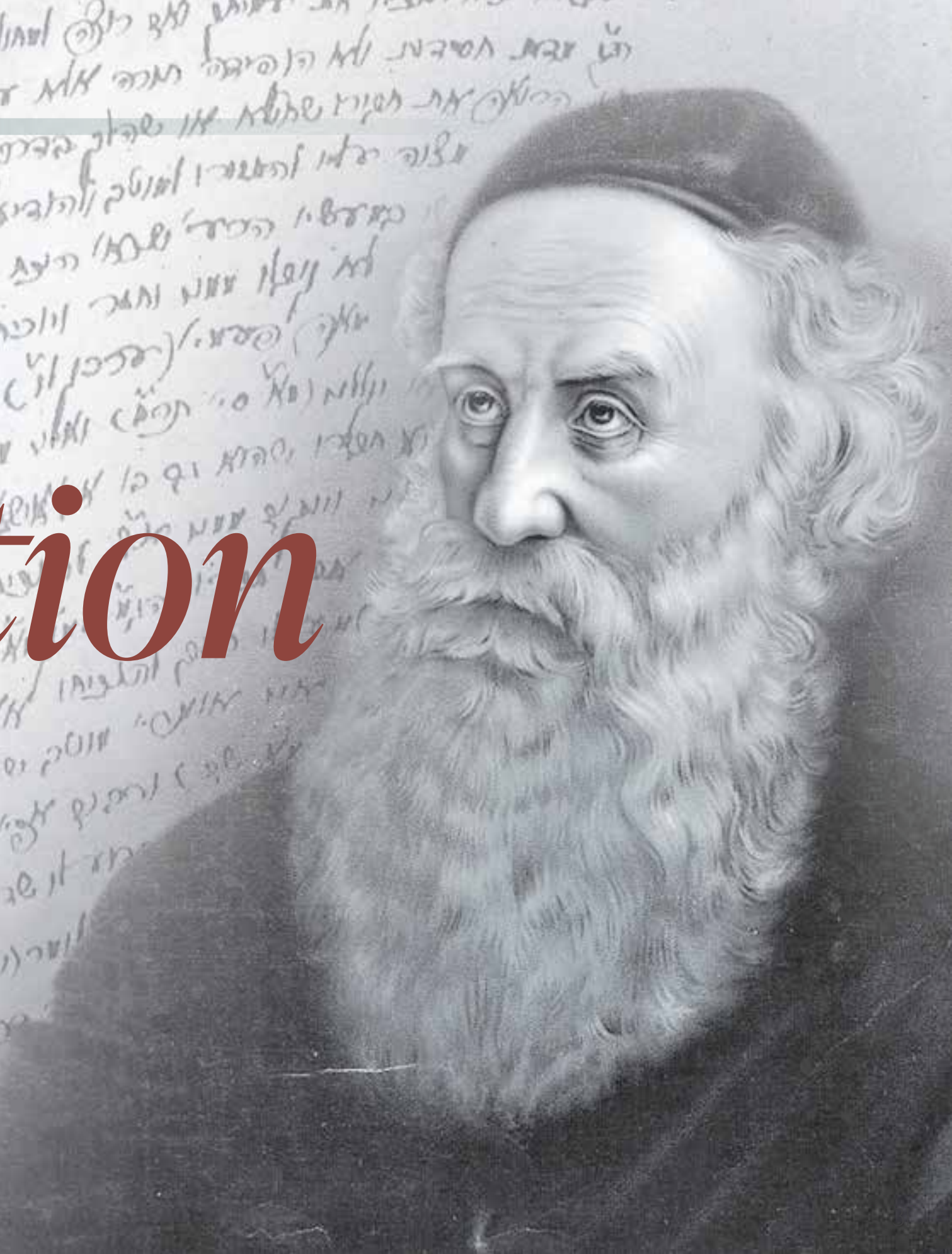
# Chassidus Proliferat

The Life and Times  
of the Alter Rebbe

*In honor of Chof Daled Teves, we present an overview of the Alter Rebbe's nesius.*

*This article is based on Sefer Hatoldos Admur HaZaken and Toldos Chabad B'Russia HaTzaris, unless otherwise indicated.*

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## To Visit Liozna

“In the early years of his *nesius*,” the Rebbe related, “the Alter Rebbe once opened the window and saw masses of Chassidim arriving for a gathering or a *yoma d’pagra*. He immediately closed the window and wanted to hide.

“The Rebbetzin asked, ‘What’s this all about?’

“The Alter Rebbe replied, ‘What do all these people want from me?’

“The Rebbetzin, realizing a quick response was needed, replied, ‘They want to hear what you heard from your Rebbe!’

“If so,’ the Alter Rebbe said, ‘*vel ich zogen un zogen*, I will speak and speak!’”<sup>1</sup>

The Liozna years—spanning approximately the initial two decades of the Alter Rebbe’s *nesius*—were a period of remarkable growth and expansion.

Following the Maggid’s passing, the Alter Rebbe’s colleagues gradually relocated from the White Russia region<sup>2</sup>; Reb Mendel Horodoker and Reb Avraham Kalisker had settled in Eretz Yisroel, Reb Levi Yitzchok of Pinsk and Reb Shlomo Karliner had moved to Berdichev and Ludmir in Ukraine, Reb Yisroel Polotzker and Reb Chaim Chaikel of Amdur passed away, and Reb Yissachar Ber of Lubavitch had willingly acknowledged the Alter Rebbe’s leadership. Consequently, the entire region, which had experienced fervent opposition to Chassidus, was now entrusted to the sole leadership of the Alter Rebbe.

In those early years, the distinctions between Chabad and Chagas Chassidus weren’t as clear as they would later become. The first mention of “Chabad” Chassidim as a distinct identity is in a letter written by the Alter Rebbe many years later, from



THE REGION OF ‘WHITE RUSSIA’ (MODERN DAY BELARUS)

Liadi.<sup>3</sup> Chassidus, at this point, was still perceived as a unified movement. Therefore, anyone seeking to become a chossid in the region knew there was only one destination: Liozna. During those decades, thousands, if not tens of thousands, flocked to Liozna and joined the ranks of the Alter Rebbe’s devoted followers.

The opportunity to visit the Alter Rebbe was something that no one wanted to miss. “The Alter Rebbe delivered maamarim in an awe-inspiring manner,” described the Friediker Rebbe. “Everyone present would feel shaken and filled with awe; people became baalei teshuva in a single moment, and felt a new sense of inspiration in their own avodah.”

“His davening was equally awe-inspiring. The Tzemach Tzedek remarked that the Alter Rebbe possessed an insatiable yearning to be completely immersed in *Elokus*. He often said, ‘*Ich vil nit dein Gan Eden*, I do not desire Your Gan Eden, I do not seek Your Olam Haba – I desire You and You alone.’

“His davening in the presence of Chassidim was thunderous. It would often extend an hour or two beyond *chatzos*, and would be even longer on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During davening, he would often bang on the walls until his hands bled, without noticing at all—until they eventually hung soft clothing along the walls.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Response to Growth

Unlike many of the Maggid’s other talmidim, the Alter Rebbe rejected the notion of “*צדיק באמונתו יחי*,” (read as *‘echaye*’), that a tzaddik’s inspiration could suffice in uplifting the *avodah* of a regular Yid. He insisted that every chossid take personal initiative in, and responsibility for, his *avodas Hashem*.

This approach meant that the Alter Rebbe dedicated much time to each new chossid. Every chossid wanted the opportunity to bare his heart to the Rebbe and receive his guidance in *avodas Hashem*. Chassidim also tried asking his advice in material matters, but the Alter Rebbe expressed himself sharply against this trend and tried to curtail it as much as possible. Chassidim would remain in Liozna for weeks, learning Chassidus and preparing themselves for their first *yechidus*.

Soon, the system became unsustainable. The crowds of Chassidim converging on Liozna grew so large that the Alter Rebbe made two foundational changes to the interaction between Rebbe and chossid. The first was *Takkanos Liozna*, the second was the writing of *Sefer HaTanya*.

*Takkanos Liozna* were a series of rules limiting the number of visits a chossid was allowed to make to Liozna. Ordinary Shabbosim were reserved for new Chassidim awaiting

their first *yechidus*, while Shabbos Mevarchim was for veteran Chassidim who had already had at least one *yechidus*. Several occasions each year, such as Shabbos Shuva, Simchas Torah, Shabbos Chanukah, Purim and Shavuos, were 'open to the public' but no *yechidus* was held. The *takkanos* were occasionally tweaked and adjusted.

In the Alter Rebbe's written responses during his interrogations, he writes that Shabbos Mevarchim guests usually numbered some 150-200 Chassidim, occasionally hundreds more. On Shavuos, the Alter Rebbe noted, the numbers sometimes exceeded one thousand.<sup>5</sup> The crowds were so large that there were times when *yechidus* was held only in the format of



## The story of the Alter Rebbe's portrait

The original portrait of the Alter Rebbe was done by one of the Russian Ministers during the Alter Rebbe's imprisonment in Petersburg in 5559. The caption read, "Rabbi Shneur Zalman Boruchovich" and the year and location.

Over 60 years later, the picture was discovered by the Rebbe Maharash in Petersburg and was brought on loan to Lubavitch for two weeks. The Tzemach Tzedek confirmed it to be an accurate depiction of the Alter Rebbe's visage and would emotionally closet himself each day with the picture. It's unclear if it was originally painted in color.

25 years later, it was copied by a Jewish artist (Boris Shatz), who drew this black and white copy (picture no. 1). Working with Reb Shmaryahu Schneersohn, a great grandson of the Alter Rebbe.

It was released in 5649 as a lithograph, with the original Russian caption (picture no. 2) and produced in hundreds of copies.

When the portrait was published, it took the Jewish world by storm and a controversy arose regarding its authenticity. The original picture was not extant, and some even doubted that the Jewish artist had copied it correctly.

Rebbetzin Rivka, wife of the Rebbe Maharash, attested that she merited to see the original portrait often during those two weeks and that this was a perfect copy.

In 5698, rumors rose again that the artist had fabricated the entire story. The Frierdiker Rebbe then published the testimonies of Rebbetzin Rivka and other elder Chassidim in Hatomim.

“*yechidus-klalis*,” thirty or forty Chassidim at a time, while personal *yechidus* was restricted to complicated Halachic matters which necessitated the Alter Rebbe’s close attention. Reb Aharon Strasheler and later the Mittlerer Rebbe were appointed to teach Chassidus to newcomers and serve as a go-between between Chassidim and the Alter Rebbe.

To compensate for the lack of close contact, the Alter Rebbe began to write the Tanya. The opening perakim were

## A SINGLE LONELY WOMAN

Despite the masses of Chassidim converging on Liozna, the Alter Rebbe paid remarkable attention to individuals, as seen in these famous stories:

“One Yom Kippur,” the Rebbe related, “the Alter Rebbe left shul and went to the outskirts of town, where a new mother had just given birth. Her family had gone to shul to daven, and he sensed that she needed assistance. He removed his tallis, went there, and personally did all sorts of actions which are permitted only in cases of *pikuach nefesh*.”

“The Alter Rebbe had a shul full of people; the Gemara indeed says that it is a mitzvah for the greatest person present to break Yom Tov for *pikuach nefesh*—but did he really need to do it?

“We all know the lofty nature of his davening; how much more so when he davened on Yom Kippur itself. Nevertheless, during his davening, on Yom Kippur, in a *makom kadosh, er hot der-filt*—he nonetheless sensed (!) that a new mother on the outskirts of town needs help!”<sup>6</sup>

Another famous story:

“The Mittlerer Rebbe was once deep in learning in his room, when his small baby fell out of the crib 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 calmed the baby back to sleep.

“Afterwards, the Alter Rebbe admonished his son. *B’shaas a yiddish kind veint, darf men derheren*, when a Jewish child cries, you need to hear...”<sup>7</sup>

said as a maamar on Rosh Hashanah תקנ”ג; manuscripts began to circulate in the summer of תקנ”ב, and the sefer was finally published in תקנ”ר, towards the end of the Liozna period.

As the Alter Rebbe explains in the *Hakdama*, the sefer was based on answers given to Chassidim in *yechidus*, “since it is no longer possible to answer each person individually.” Instead of the Alter Rebbe serving as a personal *mashpia* for each chossid, Chassidim were expected to help each other, and leading Chassidim in each city were appointed to teach Tanya and guide the younger Chassidim in *avodas Hashem*.

Over this period—from the early 5540s until the end of the 5550s—the Alter Rebbe became the uncontested leader of all Chassidim in White Russia.

## A Nossi Emerges

From a relatively young age, the Alter Rebbe had a close circle of talmidim, a *chaburah* of *lomdim* attracted by his unparalleled mastery of Torah and his unique approach to *avodas Hashem*. This was true even before he traveled to Mezeritch. In the years after the Maggid’s passing, he also established official *chadorim*, an organized study system where many accomplished *talmidei chachamim* came to learn.<sup>8</sup>

However, these were focused groups of talmidim, not *nesius* in the broad sense of the word. Even after the passing of the Maggid in תקל”ג, the Alter Rebbe accepted the leadership of Reb Mendel Horodoker, traveling to visit him as a chossid to a Rebbe. When Reb Mendel decided four years later to move to Eretz Yisroel, the Alter Rebbe declared his intent to join, and even began the journey south towards Eretz Yisroel.<sup>9</sup>

But then plans began to shift. Upon reaching Mohyliv near



THE HOME AND SHUL OF REB MENDEL HORODOKER IN ERETZ YISROEL

the Turkish border, Reb Mendel Horodoker implored the Alter Rebbe to remain behind and take responsibility for all the Chassidim of White Russia. Initially, the Alter Rebbe resisted this proposal, but after several weeks of reflection, he consented.

The next five years marked a period of transition. Initially, Reb Mendel Horodoker continued to serve as a Rebbe to Chassidim in White Russia, albeit from a distance, guiding them through letters sent from Eretz Yisroel. During this time, the Alter Rebbe remained in Mohyliv for a year and a half, during which, he mentioned to his children, he immersed himself in Torah study, completing Shas for the sixteenth time “while standing, day and night, learning nonstop.”

However, circumstances soon evolved. Many Chassidim in White Russia felt that they needed a Rebbe whom they could visit in person; some began to travel to Ukraine and Poland, where other Talmidei HaMaggid were active. Reb Mendel Horodoker was displeased with this development (perhaps he disapproved of the “poilisher” style), so, in the early 5540s, he began to encourage Chassidim to visit the three local Talmidim

of the Maggid—the Alter Rebbe, Reb Yissachar Ber of Lubavitch, and Reb Yisroel of Polotsk.

During this period, the Alter Rebbe’s name gained increasing recognition as the “Maggid of Liozna.” His *chadorim* had become renowned, and he also played a prominent role in organizing financial support for Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel. Simultaneously, Reb Yisrael of Polotsk passed away, and Reb Yissachar Ber of Lubavitch deferred to the Alter Rebbe’s leadership. It wasn’t long before hundreds, and then thousands, of Chassidim began flocking to Liozna.

The Alter Rebbe continued to regard Reb Mendel Horodoker as his Rebbe, referring to him in letters as “*Rabboseinu sh’b’Eretz Hakodesh*,” but after Reb Mendel’s *histalkus* in תקמ”ח, the transition was complete.

## Being a Chossid

During those years, a significant change was introduced — the establishment of *chassidische minyanim*. This innovation infuriated the *misnagdim* who saw the new shuls as a threat to their authority and influence, and it was often a focal point of the *cherems*, polemics and persecutions.

In Shklov, a certain Reb Aleksander defended the Chassidim in their efforts to daven separately, and was rewarded with a personal letter from the Alter Rebbe. “Although I do not know you, I heard that ... you opposed the people who play games and belittle those who desire to serve Hashem, and who joined forces to enforce a decree of *shemad* against davening, forcing all to daven in their hurried, mechanical manner, devoid of enthusiasm...”

The separate shuls weren’t just in order to daven according to the Alter Rebbe’s *nusach* (which was initially inscribed in the margins of existing siddurim). In the *chassidische minyanim*, davening was recited loudly and slowly, taking at least an hour from *Hodu* until after *Shemoneh Esrei*. There was time for *hisbonenus*, and talking *devarim betalim* was unacceptable. Public shiurim were held between Mincha and Maariv each evening to ensure that time wasn’t wasted.

Chassidim were expected to rigorously adhere to the *takkanos*. The leaders among Chassidim in each community weren’t just *mashpi'im* who taught Tanya but also gatekeepers for Liozna—one could enter *yechidus* only if those appointees determined that one took his *avodas Hashem* seriously and was deserving of the privilege.

Manuscripts of the Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch were also becoming widespread, and Chassidim began adopting many of the Alter Rebbe’s unique *pispei dinim*.



A KSAV YAD DISCOVERED JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, AMONG THOUSANDS OF KESOVIM IN THE LIBRARY OF AGUCH, CONTAINING TWO SIMANIM OF THE ALTER REBBE’S SHULCHAN ARUCH, INCLUDING A NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL HALACHOS AND DIFFERENCES FROM THE WAY THEY WERE PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Tefillin knots were tied in a unique way, tefillin was no longer worn on Chol Hamoed, *mechiras chametz* was rearranged, a new *shechita* knife was introduced, heated *mikvaos* became commonplace, and a general approach of *hiddur mitzvah* developed in all areas of halachah.<sup>10</sup>

Every chossid was also expected to contribute to the Alter Rebbe's fundraising efforts for the Chassidim of Eretz Yisroel. Each individual designated the amount he could contribute, and would hand it over periodically to the local administrator, who held the money until the annual visit of the Alter Rebbe's *Shadar*. Other fundraising activities were organized occasionally, for serious cases of *pidyon shvuyim* or when Chassidim faced persecution from *misnagdim*.

A system of *maamad* also evolved for the support of the *chatzer* of the Alter Rebbe, being that Chassidim in *yechidus* were not expected to make a contribution (as was customary among other Talmidei HaMaggid).

These donations were periodically collected and sent to Liozna. The funds would feed and house poor Chassidim who visited Liozna, and also support the various '*mazkirim*'—the Alter Rebbe's brother Maharil who wrote *hanachos* and inspected all *kesavim* for errors, Reb Aharon Strasheler and the Mittlerer Rebbe who guided new Chassidim. Later, in Liadi, the *mazkirim* also included Reb Chaim Avraham (the Alter Rebbe's second son) who was responsible for questions of *gashmius* that arrived at the Alter Rebbe's door, and the Tzemach Tzedek, who would help prepare halachic *teshuvos*.

This entire system was meticulously structured and overseen by the Alter Rebbe. "The Alter Rebbe was an excellent director and organizer," the Friediker Rebbe once noted. "His broad vision, his decisiveness, and his willpower were extraordinary. From a young age, he never changed his mind—in *ruchnius* or *gashmius* matters."<sup>11</sup>

## From Before, to After, Petersburg

The incredible reach of Chassidus during the two decades in Liozna rankled the *misnagdim*, particularly in the epicenter of Jewish Lithuania, the city of Vilna.

The *hisnagdus* was not new to the Alter Rebbe. During an earlier round of persecution, in the winter of תקל"ב, the Maggid had sent him and Reb Mendel Horodoker to meet with the Vilna Gaon—but to their disappointment, he had refused to receive them. The Alter Rebbe had also traveled to Shklov with Reb Avraham Kalisker to debate the merits of Chassidus, and had participated in other efforts as well. Notably, the Alter Rebbe consistently refrained from retaliatory measures, he did not allow a *cherem* to be issued in response to the *cherem* of the *misnagdim*, and always instructed Chassidim to avoid



THE ALTER REBBE'S TEFFILIN WERE BROUGHT OUT OF RUSSIA IN THE YEAR 5726, DURING THE ASERES YEMEI TESHUVA. THE REBBE INSTRUCTED THAT THE TEFFILIN BE PLACED ON THE BIMA AND ANYONE WHO TOIVELED IN THE MIKVAH COULD TAKE A LOOK.

any sort of provocation.

However, a significant shift occurred after the passing of the Vilna Gaon in תקנ"ח. With the towering figure of the Gaon no longer restraining their actions, the *misnagdim* felt emboldened to escalate their opposition, venturing into previously uncharted territory.

Thus began a three year period of accusations, interrogations, and persecutions.

In early תקנ"ט, the Alter Rebbe was arrested following accusations by an informant who alleged that he led a subversive group involved in embezzlement and inciting rebellion by sending money abroad. Thirty prominent Chassidim were also apprehended. After a few terrifying months, the Alter Rebbe and the Chassidim were finally released; Yud-Tes Kislev marks the historic moment when the Alter Rebbe was freed and the movement of Chassidus was officially legalized.<sup>12</sup>

The *misnagdim* weren't satisfied, and another *malshinus* was submitted just a year later. Thankfully, this one was rejected by the government, and the informers were called in by the Vilna police and informed that "according to the will of his Highness, the rights of the *karlinim*<sup>13</sup> must be maintained."

However, they tried again the next year, and this time they were successful. The Alter Rebbe was once again summoned to Petersburg. In this instance, despite his release on 23 Kislev, the Czar instructed that the Alter Rebbe remain in the city until investigations concluded. These investigations dragged on and on until the Czar was assassinated and his successor, Czar Alexander, issued the final release.

The Alter Rebbe prepared to leave Petersburg at the end of תקס"א. At that point, a decision was reached to relocate from Liozna to Liadi. This decision was influenced by the

fact that the Alter Rebbe's release had been arranged by Count Liubamirsky, who owned the towns of Lubavitch and Liadi. The count recommended that, for added security, the Alter Rebbe should reside in an area under his jurisdiction.

## Liadi—When Chassidim Became Chabad

For the Rabbeim, the term “*noch Peterburg*” was a code-word referring to the vast expansion of Chassidus that took place after the Alter Rebbe's liberation. The approximately eleven years spent in Liadi, from late א”תקס until late ב”תקע, witnessed significant developments and consolidation within Chassidus Chabad.

During this period, the Alter Rebbe's Chassidim gained an identity of their own, becoming known as Chabad Chassidim, with a distinct style and even their own siddur—the Alter Rebbe's Nusach Ari—which was then published and widely disseminated. For the first time in decades, other streams of Chassidus arose within White Russia, under the influence of Reb Avraham Kalisker of Tverya, who opposed the Alter Rebbe's widespread dissemination of Chassidus.

Perhaps the most significant change was with regard to maamarim. Although the foundations of Chabad Chassidus were long established, the Alter Rebbe had not previously delivered long, elaborate maamarim like the ones in Torah Or and Likkutei Torah.

The Frierdiker Rebbe recounted that the first long maamar was recited on Rosh Hashanah 5550, and its content would later become the three opening chapters of Tanya. That was an anomaly, however. In his interrogation, the Alter Rebbe indicated that maamarim were delivered only on Shabbos Mevarchim, and of those, not many have remained. The earliest maamarim that have reached our generation are dated to ג”תקנ, and they are relatively rare.

The shift began during the middle years of his *nesius*, marked by the publication of the Tanya in ר”תקנ and the arrests of ט”תקנ and א”תקס. The Tzemach Tzedek noted that Likkutei Torah was compiled from maamarim spanning the last fifteen years of the Alter Rebbe's *nesius*. The Rebbe Rashab further noted that a change was also evident after Yud Tes Kislev, and that the most significant change was upon the Alter Rebbe's move to Liadi.

In Liadi, the Alter Rebbe delivered long maamarim regularly, every Shabbos and Yom Tov. The vast majority

of his published maamarim date from those years. The transition continued gradually throughout those years. The maamarim of ב”תקס, for example, are far shorter—sometimes just a quarter the size compared to those six years later, in ח”תקס. Unlike the earlier concise teachings, comprehensible primarily to those well-versed in *nigleh* and *nistar*,<sup>14</sup> the Alter Rebbe's Chassidus now became more detailed and accessible to a broader audience.

## A New Neshama

On Chai Elul ה”תק, the Alter Rebbe was born in the outskirts of Liozna to his parents Reb Boruch and Rebetzin Rivkah. They were Chassidim of the Baal Shem Tov, who told them that their son was a “new neshama” (one that has never been in the physical world in the past), and provided detailed instructions with regard to his upbringing and education, including the fact that the Alter Rebbe not be raised with knowledge of the Baal Shem Tov and Chassidus. An exception was made for the Alter Rebbe's *upshernish*, which was celebrated in the Baal Shem Tov's presence, without his identity being revealed.

From a tender age, the Alter Rebbe felt that the gates of Torah were open to him; he shared with the Mittler Rebbe that this was a source of frustration—he was upset that he never needed to *toil* in Torah learning; it came too easily.

At the age of ten, his father brought him to the nearby town of Lubavitch, where he spent two years learning

### SHULCHAN ARUCH

When the Alter Rebbe was in Mezeritch, the Maggid asked him to write a new and updated Shulchan Aruch.

The Alter Rebbe wrote Orach Chaim during his years in Mezeritch, but continued writing throughout his *nesius*. In Liozna, he added various halachos to the Shulchan Aruch, and in the Liadi years, he wrote the *Piskei Hasiddur*, *Seder Birchos Hanehenin*, and also glosses on Hilchos Niddah.



under the tutelage of the Gaon Reb Yosef “Mochiach” and his son-in-law, Reb Yissachar Ber (the Alter Rebbe said that certain key ideas of Chassidus Chabad came to him during those youthful years).

Afterwards, he learned mostly on his own, in the local Beis Midrash in Liozna. At his bar mitzvah, he was inducted into the *chevra kadisha* of Liozna and the *ge'onim* of the region bestowed on him the honorary title “*Rav Tanna Hu Upalig*” (a statement in the Gemara giving Rav the status of a Tanna, though he lived in the first generation of Amoraim).

The young *iluy*'s reputation spread far and wide, leading to his betrothal to the daughter of the affluent Reb Yehudah Leib

Segal of Vitebsk, Rebbetzin Sterna. He received a substantial dowry, but dedicated it all to the establishment of Jewish agricultural settlements in the vicinity.

Around the age of twenty, the Alter Rebbe decided to leave home and travel to one of the great Torah centers, but he couldn't decide where to go—to nearby Vilna, seat of the Gra, or to (the much farther) Mezeritch, home of the Maggid. He consulted with his brother, Reb Yehudah Leib, who said that it was really a choice between learning—which he would receive in Vilna—and davening, which he would learn in Mezeritch. Since he already knew how to learn, he decided on Mezeritch.<sup>15</sup>

## CHASSIDUS CHABAD—FROM MEZERITCH?

When Reb Avraham Kalisker accused the Alter Rebbe of straying from the true path of Chassidus, the Alter Rebbe publicly defended himself, asserting that his Chassidus didn't diverge whatsoever from the teachings he had received from the Maggid and Reb Avraham Hamalach. His claim was fiercely supported by Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev.

When examining the Maggid's teachings, Chassidus Chabad may indeed seem different. While some talmidim record statements of the Maggid about the importance of personal *hisbonenus*, for example, those statements are not found in his *sefarim*. And while the Maggid did base his Torah on the Arizal's Kabbalah (as opposed to the Baal Shem Tov, who rarely referenced it), this element played a secondary role in comparison to the central themes of “*avodah*” and “*mussar*.”

However, we find that the Maggid held personal discussions with select talmidim—namely, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev and the Alter Rebbe—where he taught them concepts that he didn't teach publicly. Reb Levi Yitzchok transcribed his personal conversations, and they were later published in *Kedushas Levi* and *Maggid Devarav L'Yaakov*, where the Maggid extensively expounds upon Kabbalistic concepts not found in his standard writings.

A close inspection of the writings of the Alter Rebbe and his talmidim reveal that he, too, received numerous teachings from the Maggid in a similar manner. His demand for personal *hisbonenus* and the focus on the Arizal's Kabbalah are all clearly attributed

to the Maggid and his son Reb Avraham Hamalach.

“I personally heard from the [Alter] Rebbe,” writes Reb Aizik Homiler, to cite one example, “that the Maggid of Mezeritch told him in the name of the Baal Shem Tov... to delve into the concepts which bring a person to *ahavas Hashem*...”<sup>17</sup>

“It is impossible to properly understand [the concepts of Chassidus],” the Alter Rebbe himself writes elsewhere, “without prefacing from the writings of the Arizal . . . as I received from my Rebbes...”<sup>18</sup>

A long list of uniquely Chabad concepts are linked directly to the Maggid. These include concepts such as the difference between *Atzmus* and *Ein Sof*, the meaning of *ein aroch* and the interpretation of *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto*, to name just a few. Many maamarim published only in recent decades make clear that the Alter Rebbe's Chassidus indeed had a firm foundation in the Torah he received privately from the Maggid.

In a famous letter published in *Hatomim*, the Friediker Rebbe compared the progression from the Maggid to the Alter Rebbe to the growth of flax and its ultimate refinement into fine cloth. Although the first stage is the growth of the rough product, the ultimate goal is the production of a much more developed and refined result.

As Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev attested, “We all ate from the same plate in Mezeritch, but the Litvak [the Alter Rebbe] took the ‘*smetene*’ [the best portion].”<sup>19</sup>

## The First Torah

“The Zaide,” the Alter Rebbe said, referring to the Baal Shem Tov, “loved simple Jews dearly. During my initial days in Mezeritch, the Rebbe, the Maggid conveyed, “The Rebbe—the Baal Shem Tov—would often say: Ahavas Yisroel is *ahavas Hamakom* (love of Hashem). *Banim atem laHashem Elokeichem*, when you love the father, you love the children.”<sup>16</sup>

The Alter Rebbe arrived in Mezeritch in תקכ”ד, remaining there for about a year and a half. During this period he was granted a unique privilege—the Maggid instructed his son, Reb Avraham Hamalach, to teach the Alter Rebbe *nistar*, while the Alter Rebbe would teach Reb Avraham *nigleh*. Seeking to extend the time allotted to *nistar*, the Alter Rebbe would turn the clock’s hand backward unbeknownst to Reb Avraham and gain precious additional minutes.

The Frierdiker Rebbe recounted that when the Alter Rebbe returned from his first visit to Mezeritch, he shared many teachings from the Maggid with the group of students that were already gathered around him. He also changed certain customs: In their private minyan, simpletons hadn’t been permitted to be *chazzan*, but now this practice was discontinued.

Over the next eight years, the Alter Rebbe made occasional visits to Mezeritch, while maintaining his own group of talmidim at home. In the final year of the Maggid’s life, when *hisnagdus* to Chassidus reached a fevered pitch, the Alter Rebbe spent an extended period of time in the Maggid’s presence once again, until the *histalkus* on Yud Tes Kislev תקל”ג.

## Napoleon vs. Alexander

“I hate him thoroughly,” said the Alter Rebbe, “for he is the Satan who opposes good with every kind of evil. He is the ultimate *kelipa* and harsh judgment, the opposite of *chesed* and *tov*, he is only death and evil, and his whole life force is to do evil, like a leech.”

As Napoleon marched through Europe, the Alter Rebbe made it clear that he abhorred Napoleon and saw him as one who is an absolute contradiction to *Elokus*. The Alter Rebbe felt that Napoleon’s success would bring spiritual and material downfall for the Jewish people. He therefore directed Chassidim to support the Czar’s cause—and also predicted that Napoleon would be defeated.



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDET CHABAD

A 275 YEAR OLD LEDGER FOUND IN THE PINKAS OF LIOZNA IN WHICH IT DESCRIBES THE ALTER REBBE BEING INDUCTED INTO THE CHEVRA KADISHA AS WELL AS THE TITLE “RAV TANNA HU” BESTOWED UPON HIM AT HIS BAR MITZVAH.

Not wanting to remain under his rule even for a moment, the Alter Rebbe escaped Liadi just before Napoleon’s forces entered the town. At points during their escape, they were often so close to the battlefield that they were able to count the number of French cannon. For a half a year, from the summer of תקע”ב into the winter of תקע”ג, the Alter Rebbe and his entire household continued moving south, deep into Ukraine.

On Rosh Hashanah morning, the Alter Rebbe called in the Mittlerer Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek. He said, “Today during davening I saw that there has been a change for the better and that we have won the war. Although the enemy will still take Moscow, he will have no respite.”<sup>20</sup>

In the month of Teves, when the entourage camped in the non-Jewish village of Piena, news began to arrive of Napoleon’s defeat. His armies were routed and moving quickly out of the Russian heartland.

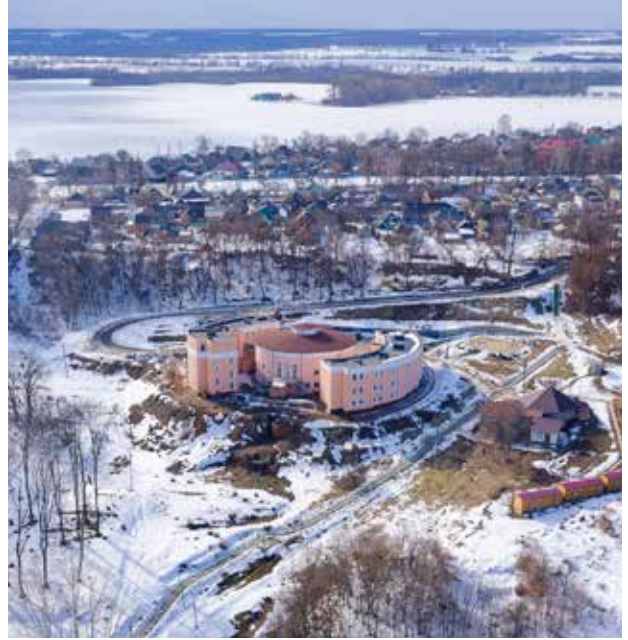
Immediately, the Alter Rebbe began making plans to alleviate the plight of the Yidden in White Russia, who had been devastated by the war. He sent out three groups: The Mittlerer Rebbe led one group to nearby Kremenchug to arrange suitable lodging for the family, Reb Chaim Avraham to Poltava and Cherson (also in Ukraine) to begin fundraising efforts, and Reb Pinchas Reizes to Vitebsk in White Russia to survey the destruction and begin planning the relief efforts.

However, the plans were not meant to be.

That year saw an exceptionally harsh winter, and the



THE ALTER REBBE'S TZIYUN IN HADITCH



THE LARGE COMPOUND BUILT SEVERAL YEARS AGO NEAR THE TZIYUN IN HADITCH.

Alter Rebbe soon fell ill from the strain of the journey. Over five days his condition steadily worsened.

On Motzei Shabbos Parshas Shemos, Chof Daled Teves, the Alter Rebbe “davened Maariv with havdalah in *Chonen Hada'as* with a clear and focused mind and with a wondrous *d'veikus*.”<sup>21</sup> Then, at ten thirty at night, the Alter Rebbe’s *neshamah* was called back to its celestial abode.

No Jewish cemetery existed in the area, so the Alter Rebbe’s holy body was transferred by sled, in a terrible snow-storm, to the town of Haditch where he was laid to rest.

The site immediately became a place of pilgrimage. A short time later, the Mittlerer Rebbe wrote, “we built a wooden roof and prepared many bricks to build an Ohel in his honor, as is

done on the *kevarim* of the Avos and great tzaddikim in Eretz Yisroel... Last Erev Rosh Hashanah, sixty people gathered there from Ramen and Kremenchug, and many candles were lit; a person is constantly at the site, and *panim* are sent from all the regions.”<sup>22</sup>



“For some sixty years,” the Frierdiker Rebbe concludes his *reshimah* about the histalkus, “the Alter Rebbe built and perfected his public activism on four pillars—Ahavas Yisrael, Harbotzas Hatorah, Avodah with Mesirus Nefesh, and Gemilus Chasadim and Tzedakah—and bequeathed to his progeny, the Nesi’ei Chabad, a broad and well-trodden path in *askanus haklal*.” **T**

1. Ashreinu Audio, Purim 5743, Sicha 2 minute 2:54. The Rebbe noted that although he didn’t hear the story from the Frierdiker Rebbe, it seems true since its content is tenable and it was widely retold by Chassidim (albeit in different versions).
2. Approximately modern day Belarus and Lithuania. Other areas where Chassidus was active was *Maleh Rusia* (Ukraine) and Vohlin and Galicia (i.e. Poland).
3. Igros Kodesh pg. 346.
4. Sefer Hatoldos v. 2 pg. 357.
5. Igros Kodesh pg. 291.
6. 19 Kislev 5744, and many other occasions.
7. 10 Kislev 5713, and many other occasions.
8. See Sefer Hatoldos v. 2 pg. 307
9. Sefer Hatoldos v. 2 pg. 343
10. Sefer Hatoldos v. 2 p. 359. Many of these takkanos originated in the time of the Maggid. See “The Maggid of Mezeritch,” *Derher Kislev* 5778.

11. Sefer Hatoldos v. 2 p. 488
12. See “The Arrest and Liberation,” *Derher Kislev* 5780.
13. A nickname for Chassidim which evolved from the Chassidic center of Karlin, home to two students of the Maggid, Reb Aharon and Reb Shlomo.
14. Yud Tes Kislev 5715.
15. This entire section is based on the account of Sefer Hatoldos.
16. Hayom Yom 24 Av.
17. Shnei Hameoros pg. 60.
18. Igeres Hakodesh siman 25.
19. Toras Shalom pg. 47.
20. See “A Battle of Good vs. Evil,” *Derher Teves* 5779.
21. From the Hakdama to Shulchan Aruch.
22. See “Hamasah Ha’acharon.”