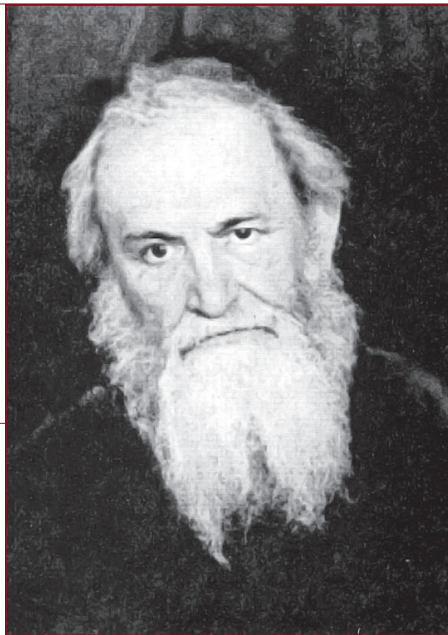




Carrying the Great Torch of Brisk Across the Atlantic: Rav Moshe Soloveitchik זצ"ל

Derashah by Rabbi Dov Loketch via Zoom on Wednesday Night, Teves 23, 5781 (January 6, 2021)



THE STORY OF the renowned Brisker Torah dynasty¹ begins with Rav Yosef

Dov Soloveitchik (1820-1892), famously known by the name of the classic work of *Lomdus* which he authored, *Beis HaLevi*. He was a grandson of Relka Soloveitchik, the daughter of Rav Chaim of Volozhin²,

the most prominent disciple of the Vilna Gaon³ and founder of the legendary Yeshiva of Volozhin in 1802. Already as a young teenager, the *Beis HaLevi* learned in Volozhin,

which was led at that time by the son of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, Rav Yitzchak ("Itzele").⁴ Rav Itzele died in 1849, and was succeeded by his two sons-in-law, the *Netziv*⁵, and Rav Eliezer Fried.⁶ Just five years later, in 1854, Rav Fried

¹ Much of the material presented here is culled from *The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter's Memoir*, by Rav Moshe Soloveitchik's daughter, Mrs. Shulamit Meiselman; biographies of the members of the Soloveitchik family by Shimon Yosef Meller; Moshe Ariel Fuss' article in *Hakirah*, vol. 25; Yaakov Sasson's article in *Hakirah*, vol. 26; as well as articles in other scholarly journals.

² 1749-1821.

³ 1720-1797.

⁴ 1780-1849.

⁵ Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (נפתלי צבי יהודה ברלין), 1816-1893.

⁶ 1809-1853. Rav Fried was also Rav Itzele's nephew (the son of Rav Itzele's sister, Ester).

“... But the *Beis HaLevi* —stood his ground...”

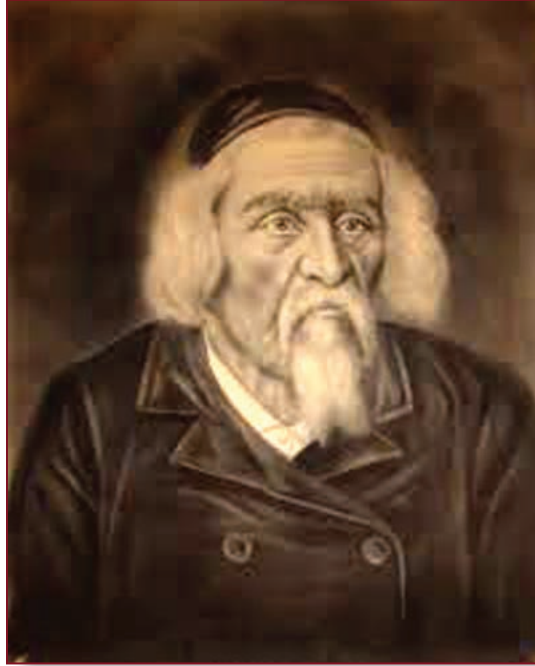
passed away, and the *Beis HaLevi* was appointed co-*Rosh Yeshiva* alongside his illustrious relative, the *Netziv*.

The “co-*Rosh Yeshiva*” arrangement proved unsuccessful, and was short-lived. These two great sages, the *Netziv* and the *Beis HaLevi*, had two very different styles of learning and teaching. The *Beis HaLevi* focused heavily on in-depth analysis, whereas the *Netziv’s* style focused more on breadth, covering a wide range of topics. Their personalities, too, differed from one another, resulting in disagreements in administering the institution. These disagreements created a great deal of tension in the Yeshiva, with the *Talmidim* taking different sides. Ultimately, in 1857, several leading Lithuanian sages were summoned to form a *Beis Din* to resolve the conflict in Volozhin. These included Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor⁷ (who later became the *Rav* of Kovna) and Rav Shlomo *HaKohen* of Vilna.⁸ The *Beis Din* apportioned different roles and responsibilities to the *Netziv* and the *Beis HaLevi*, whereby the *Beis HaLevi* would retain his position of co-*Rosh Yeshiva*, but as an assistant to the *Netziv*.

However, this arrangement, too, did not succeed, and in 1865, the *Beis HaLevi* left Volozhin to pursue a career in the rabbinate.

Standing Up for the Poor

He received the prestigious position of *Rav* of the city of Slutzk, which had a very large and well-established Jewish



community. On the day of his formal installation ceremony, the leaders of the Slutzk community gathered to sign the *Rav’s* contract. The *Beis HaLevi* turned to the chairman of the community and inquired whether all the city’s *Shuls* were represented.

The chairman replied that only the officers of the “important” *Shuls* were invited to the ceremony. The *Beis*

HaLevi then asked which *Shuls* were considered “important” and which weren’t. To the *Beis HaLevi’s* horror, the chairman explained that the “important” *Shuls* were those attended by *Talmidei Chachamim* and wealthy *Balabatim*. *Shuls* attended by simple workmen were never involved in communal affairs, and thus took no part in the process of selecting a *Rav*. As such, they were not invited to the ceremony.

The *Beis HaLevi* couldn’t believe his ears. He stood up and addressed the gathering, announcing that he outright refused to accept the position of *Rav* of Slutzk unless representatives from every one of the city’s *Shuls* came to sign his contract. The communal leaders expressed stern opposition to this demand, noting that such a thing had never been done in the history of the Slutzk Jewish community. But the *Beis HaLevi* stood his ground, telling the leaders they would have to choose another rabbi unless they acceded. Sure enough, representatives from the other *Shuls*—simple craftsmen and shopkeepers—came to sign the contract.

⁷ 1817-1896.

⁸ 1828-1905.

Rav Chaim HaLevi Soloveitchik
'Reb Chaim Brisker'



This dramatic introduction to the Slutsk rabbinate, to a large degree, characterized the *Beis HaLevi's* successful tenure in the city, as he made it his priority to ensure that rich and poor would be treated equally, and that the poor were properly cared for.

After thirteen years in Slutsk, in 1878, he was named *Rav* of the city of Brisk, succeeding the *Maharil Diskin*⁹, who was pursued by the Czarist regime and forced to leave, moving to Yerushalayim. The *Beis HaLevi* led the community of Brisk for fourteen years.

The Emergence of the *Brisker Derech*

The *Beis HaLevi's* son, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, was born in 1853, around the time his father was named co-*Rosh Yeshiva* in Volozhin. He effectively grew up in Volozhin, and began learning there already at a very young age. For a number of years, he taught informal *Chaburos* (groups of students), and his reputation as a brilliant, innovative thinker began to spread. He developed a new, analytic style of approaching Talmudic and halachic concepts, identifying subtle, abstract distinctions that shed light on halachic disputes and could be used to reconcile seemingly conflicting texts. This new approach of conceptual analysis earned widespread acceptance and admiration even beyond the walls of the Yeshiva of Volozhin.

In 1873, at the age of twenty, he married Lipsha, the daughter of Rav Raphael Shapiro¹⁰, son-in-law of the *Netziv*, who served as the *Netziv's* co-*Rosh Yeshiva*. He was now part of the Volozhin royal family both

through his own ancestry, as a great-great-grandson of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, and through his wife's family.

In 1881, Rav Shapiro left Volozhin to become *Rav* of the town of Novo-Alexandrovsk, succeeding his brother, Rav Levi Shapiro, who died that year.¹¹ His position in the Yeshiva of Volozhin was assumed by his son-in-law, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, who was all of twenty-seven years old at the time.¹² There was considerable skepticism within the Yeshiva as to whether such a young scholar would succeed in this role, and whether a daily *Shiur* in Rav Chaim's new analytical style would really take off. A number of prominent *Rabbanim* from the area were brought to the Yeshiva for Rav Chaim's inaugural *Shiur* in order to evaluate his skills. It is told¹³ that during Rav Chaim's inaugural *Shiur* as co-*Rosh Yeshiva*, he suddenly remembered a passage in the *Rambam* that appeared to disprove the thesis he was developing. He announced to the Yeshiva that he was ending the *Shiur*, because he needed more time to rethink the material. With remarkable humility and intellectual honesty, Rav Chaim

⁹ Rav Moshe Yehoshua Yehudah Leib Diskin, 1818-1898.

¹⁰ 1837-1921.

¹¹ Rav Raphael and Rav Levi were sons of Rav Aryeh Leib Shapiro, who was known as "*Rav Leibele Kovner*," the *Rav* of the city of Kovno and a well-known opponent of the *Musar* movement.

¹² It has been suggested that knowing that his shoes would be capably filled by his remarkably gifted son-in-law made Rav Raphael's decision to leave the Yeshiva easier.

¹³ I heard this story from Rav Chaim's grandson, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik.

Esrog Box, given to R. Chaim by the Volozhin administration



abruptly discontinued his inaugural *Shiur* because he realized that his conclusion might be incorrect. The guest *Rabbanim* were awed at this display of integrity, and agreed that Rav Chaim was well-suited for the position.

It is said among Briskers that when Rav Chaim began delivering a *Shiur* in Volozhin, it was as though the Torah was given anew at Mount Sinai. His innovative approach ener-



The Netziv Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin

gized and excited the *Talmidim* of Volozhin, and it has since become a vital source of intellectual rigor throughout the Yeshiva world, raising the standard of in-depth Torah study to this very day.

Rav Chaim delivered *Shiurim* in Volozhin for over a decade, until the Yeshiva closed in the beginning of 1892. The Czarist

regime demanded that the Yeshiva allocate significant periods of time each day for general studies, and while the Yeshiva did run an informal general studies program off-campus, the government now imposed requirements that would make it impossible for the Yeshiva to function. At the same

time, the *Netziv* sought to move to *Eretz Yisrael* and appoint his son, Rav Chaim Berlin¹⁴, as his successor, a decision that met with a great deal of disapproval among the students, many of whom favored Rav Chaim Soloveitchik's style and did not want Rav Chaim Berlin to assume the reins of leadership. These crises proved insurmountable, and the *Netziv* had no choice but to close the Yeshiva.¹⁵

Rav Chaim and his family left Volozhin and went to his father's home in Brisk. He arrived to find that his father, who was seventy-two years old at the time, had fallen gravely ill. Several months later, on *Iyar* 4, the *Beis HaLevi* passed away, and Rav Chaim was named his successor as the *Rav* of Brisk.

A *Shiduch* of Lithuanian Rabbinic Royalty

During Rav Chaim's years in Volozhin, he and his wife, Lipsha, lived in an apartment in the lower level of the Yeshiva building, and they had three sons. The oldest, Yisrael Gershon, was born in 1877, and the second son, Moshe, was born in 1879. Rav Chaim's youngest son, who ultimately succeeded him as *Rav* of Brisk, was Rav Yizchak Zev ("Rav *Velvel*"), who was born in 1886. Rav Chaim also had a daughter, Sarah Rasha, who was born in 1881.

After the family moved to Brisk, Rav Chaim invested a great deal of time into learning with Moshe and Yitzchak Zev, both of whom were child prodigies. They imbibed their father's revolutionary analytic style of learning, and became important conveyors of what quickly became known as the *Brisker Derech*.

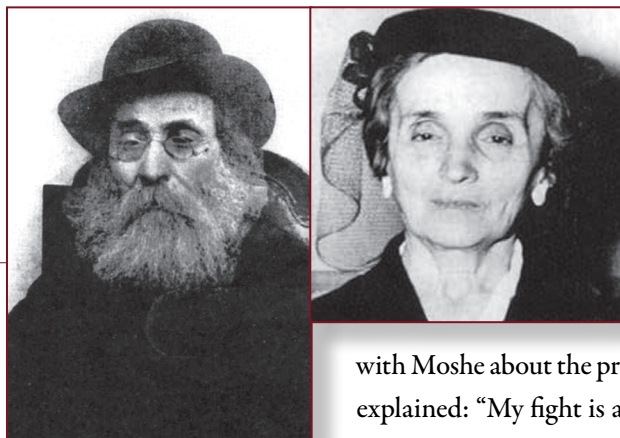
In early 1900, a *Shiduch* was proposed for Rav Chaim's son, Moshe, with Pesha Feinstein, the daughter of Rav Elya

¹⁴ 1832-1912.

¹⁵ The *Netziv* moved to Warsaw and died shortly thereafter. He is buried in the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, and years later, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik was buried alongside him.

Rav Elya Feinstein
"Reb Elya Pruzhaner"
(left)

**Rebbetzin Peshah
Feinstein Soloveitchik**
(right)



Feinstein¹⁶, known as "Reb Elya Pruzhaner," Rav of the prominent community in Pruzhan, a town in Lithuania not far from Brisk. Rav Elya was known as the wealthiest rabbi in the region, as he had a business selling yeast, and even established a monopoly over the market in his region. The match was proposed by Rav Elya's son-in-law, Rav Menachem Krakowsky¹⁷, who had been a close disciple of Rav Chaim in Volozhin, and thus knew both Moshe and Peshah.

This *Shiduch* brought together two well-respected rabbinic families, but two families that were very different from one another, and two outstanding *Rabbanim* who did not see eye to eye. Years earlier, Rav Chaim and Rav Elya found themselves on opposite sides of a heated debate regarding the introduction of general studies in the Yeshiva of Volozhin. At a meeting in 1887, a group of *Rabbanim* led by Rav Elya Pruzhaner and Rav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk¹⁸ supported yielding to the government's demands and introducing a general studies curriculum in the Yeshiva. They felt that this option was preferable to closing down the Yeshiva, and, moreover, that Russian Jewry would benefit greatly from the leadership of Torah scholars who spoke Russian and were familiar with Russian culture.

Rav Chaim adamantly opposed the idea, refusing to countenance the study of general studies in Volozhin. Rav Elya, meanwhile, was quite open to general studies, and his daughter, Peshah, was an educated girl who spoke several languages.

Rav Chaim was, surprisingly, enthusiastic about the match, despite his past disagreements with Rav Elya and his general disapproval of secular education. In his conversations

with Moshe about the proposed *Shiduch*, he explained: "My fight is against the Russian government's plot to proselytize our young men and women. The government isn't concerned about the illiteracy of the peasants; it doesn't force them to attend schools. It is only the Jews. I'm not disturbed by Peshah's knowledge of the Russian language, nor by her love for Russian literature, as long as she is deeply committed to our tradition and observes all our religious precepts. Such a wife will be a blessing for you and your family."

Rav Elya and his wife, meanwhile, were reluctant, fearful that their worldly, intellectual daughter would not fit in with the Soloveitchiks. At Peshah's request, Rav Chaim, his wife and Moshe came to Pruzhan and had dinner at the Feinstein home.

Peshah would later recall how impressed she was by her future husband's physical appearance, brilliance, composure and self-confidence.

Although he knew that everybody at the table carefully watched and listened every time he spoke, she said, he carried himself with poise, showing no signs at all of nervousness or tension.

Rav Elya later invited Moshe back to Pruzhan to test his scholarship. They sat in Rav Elya's study for several hours. They then came out, and Rav Elya called his daughter and announced, "Mazal Tov!" He added, "Rav Chaim said that Moshe knows as much as he does. In my opinion, Moshe is a greater scholar."

The wedding took place in Bereze, a town in between Brisk and Pruzhan, and it was a regal affair. Hundreds of guests

¹⁶ 1842-1928. Rav Elya's sister-in-law (his wife's sister), Faya Gittel Davidovitch, married Rav Dovid Feinstein, and they were the parents of Rav Moshe Feinstein. And thus Peshah Soloveitchik, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik's mother, was Rav Moshe Feinstein's first cousin.

¹⁷ 1870-1929.

¹⁸ 1843-1926.

attended, including leading rabbinic figures and other prominent members of both communities.

A number of unexpected guests also arrived, including one of the most distinguished Torah leaders of Lithuania, Rav Eliezer Gordon¹⁹, founding *Rosh Yeshiva* of Telz. He had been intentionally left off the guest list at the request of Rav Chaim, due to a fierce controversy surrounding the publication of a Yiddish newspaper in Lithuania. Rav Gordon felt very strongly that such a publication had become a necessity, as otherwise the Jews would turn to literature produced by non-Jews or by the *Maskilim*. Rav Chaim, though, vehemently opposed the idea, fearing that such a publication would inevitably contain *Lashon HaRa* and cause widespread *Bitul Torah*. Despite having not received an invitation, Rav Gordon felt dutybound to attend this wedding which celebrated the union between two outstanding rabbinic families. Once he arrived, Rav Elya and Rav Chaim accorded him great respect, and decided to honor him with the highest *Berachah* at the ceremony.

Following the traditional “*Kest*” system, Rav Moshe and Pesha began their marriage living under the support of Pesha’s father. A man of means, Rav Elya supported the couple for ten years, during which time they lived in a section of the Feinstein home which had been set aside for them. Rav Moshe learned diligently and with great intensity. A small group of students began to form around him, thus beginning what would be an illustrious career of *Harbatzas Torah*.

While living in Pruzhan, Rav Moshe and Pesha had their first two sons, Yosef Dov, born in 1903, and Shmuel, born in 1909.²⁰ Normally, it is customary for a couple to name their

first child after a deceased member of the mother’s family. However, Rav Chaim requested that Rav Moshe and Pesha name their firstborn Yosef Dov, after Rav Chaim’s father, the *Beis HaLevi*, as nobody had yet been named for him. The young couple complied, and their oldest became the renowned Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik.

We might apply to Rav Moshe that which the Torah said of Yaakov *Avinu*: “וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיָו” (*Bereishis* 37:3), he felt special love and affection for his son, Yosef. From a very young age, Yosef Dov showed signs of genius and was clearly destined for a future of intellectual greatness. Rav Moshe invested great efforts in teaching and training his young prodigy to become yet another link in the emerging Brisker dynasty.

Rassein and Khaslavitch

After ten years of unbridled devotion to learning, the time came for Rav Moshe to find a rabbinic position.

His father, Rav Chaim, set his sights upon the rabbinic post in the town of Rassein, near Kovna, which had been without a *Rav* for several years, since the passing in 1906 of its previous *Rav*, Rav Alexander Lapidos²¹, who had held the position for some forty years. Many in Rassein felt that Rav Moshe, who was in his early thirties, was simply too young to serve as *Rav* in a major city that had been led by an elderly, renowned *Talmid Chacham*.

Rav Chaim asked his close disciple, Rav Baruch Ber Lebowitz²², then *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivas Knesses Beis Yitzchak* in Slabodka²³, to go door-to-door in Rassein and convince the community members that Rav Moshe had all the necessary

¹⁹ 1841-1910.

²⁰ Their other children were Mrs. Shulamit Meiselman (born in 1912), Mrs. Anne Gerber (born in 1915), and Rav Aharon (born in 1917).

²¹ 1815-1906.

²² 1862-1939.

²³ The Yeshiva of Slabodka split in 1897 due to conflicts over the study of *Musar*, and the branch which opposed incorporating *Musar* into the curriculum was named *Knesses Beis Yitzchak* (after Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, *Rav* of Kovna, which is very close to Slabodka). During World

credentials for this position. Eventually, Rav Chaim and Rav Baruch Ber's influence carried a great deal of weight, and Rav Moshe was offered the job.²⁴

Rav Chaim handed Rav Moshe all his notes from his *Shiurim* so Rav Moshe could transmit his Torah and the new *Brisker Derech* to the students who would come to learn under him. In addition, Rav Chaim convinced the *Alter* of Slabodka²⁵ to send a group of *Talmidim* from his Yeshiva to spend some time in Rassein learning under Rav Moshe's tutelage.

After three years in Rassein, Rav Moshe was called upon to serve as *Rav* in Khaslavitch, succeeding his brother-in-law, Rav Krakowsky, who became a *Dayan* and *Magid* in Vilna.

Interestingly, the Jewish community of Khaslavitch consisted mainly of Lubavitch *Chassidim*. The *Rav* (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik) related that many years earlier, in 1812, when the French army under Napoleon invaded Russia, there was an argument among the rabbis of Russia as to whom the Jews should support. On the one hand, it was thought that Napoleon would bring liberty and freedom, releasing the Jews from the Czar's harsh rule and paving the way for peace and prosperity. On the other hand, many *Rabbanim* feared that Napoleon's victory would open the floodgates of the ideas of the Enlightenment, which would lure Russian Jewry away from their tradition.

The *Ba'al HaTanya*, the first *Rebbe* of *Chabad*²⁶, felt very strongly that the Jews should back the Czarist regime, and even had spies among his *Chassidim* reporting on the

movement of the French army. The French heard about the *Rebbe's* position and his network of spies, and they set out to search for him. The *Ba'al HaTanya* was forced to flee, and at one point he hid in the home of the *Rav* of Khaslavitch, Rav Yisrael of Shklov²⁷, a prominent disciple of the Vilna Gaon, who, quite obviously, staunchly opposed *Chassidus*. The *Chassidim* who accompanied the *Ba'al HaTanya* feared that Rav Yisrael would hand him over to the French agents, but the *Ba'al HaTanya* himself trusted him. Knowing the hostility between the *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim*, the French agents who came to Khaslavitch to look for the *Ba'al HaTanya* did not bother searching the home of the *Rav*, a bona fide *Litvak*, and thus the *Rebbe's* life was saved. In commemoration of this event, it was enacted that the Lubavitch community of Khaslavitch should always be led by a *Litvishe Rav*.

Upon moving to Khaslavitch, Rav Moshe hired a tutor, a Lubavitch *Chasid*, to learn with Yosef Dov. As Rav Yosef Dov later recalled, his tutor, who had been hired to teach him *Gemara* and its commentaries, eventually started learning with him *Tanya* and other *Chassidic* texts. His mother, Peshah, noticed, and was very concerned that this might stunt the young prodigy's development as a Talmud scholar. Rav Chaim got involved, and Rav Moshe dismissed the tutor and took charge of his son's Torah learning.

It is also told that Rav Moshe once found Yosef Dov reciting *Tehilim* with the other community members on *Erev Rosh HaShanah*. He went over to his son, took away the *Tehilim*, and put a *Gemara* in front of him. "For you," he said, "the

War I, the Yeshiva was forced to leave Slabodka, and eventually reconstituted itself under Rav Lebowitz's leadership in Kamenitz.

²⁴ There was one *Rav* in Rassein, Rav Fishel Behr, who remained opposed to Rav Moshe's appointment, and declined to sign the official 'כתב רבנות' which declared Rav Moshe *Rav* of the city. However, later, during a visit by Rav Chaim to Rassein, this *Rav* conversed with Rav Chaim and was so captivated by his brilliance that he added his signature to the document.

²⁵ Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, 1849-1927.

²⁶ Rav Schneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1812.

²⁷ d. 1839.

The young Rav Yizchak Zev Soloveitchik ("Rav Velvel")



way to prepare for *Rosh HaShanah* is by learning *Maseches Rosh HaShanah*.”

In his *Halakhic Man*²⁸, the Rav recalls the following experience from his youth with his father one *Yom Kippur*:

“I remember how once, on the Day of Atonement, I went outside into the synagogue courtyard with my father, just before the Ne’ilah service. It had been a fresh, clear day, one of the fine, delicate days of summer’s end, filled with sunshine and light. Evening was fast approaching, and an exquisite autumn sun was sinking in the west, beyond the trees of the cemetery, into a sea of purple and gold. Reb Moses, a Halakhic man par excellence, turned to me and said, “This sunset differs from ordinary sunsets, for with it forgiveness is bestowed upon us for our sins.” The Day of Atonement and the forgiveness of sins merged and blended here with the splendor and beauty of the world.”

This was the kind of *Chinuch* he received from his father, the understanding that Torah forms the foundation of the world, to the extent that the sunset on *Yom Kippur* fundamentally differs from the sunset of any other day.

Towards the end of World War I in 1917, an unexpected guest arrived at the Soloveitchik home in Khaslavitch, Rav Moshe’s younger brother, Rav Velvel. He explained that he had been drafted into the Russian army, and so he fled from Brisk and sought refuge in his brother’s home. Rav Velvel remained there from some time, and he and Rav Moshe spoke together at length about various *Halachic* topics, including questions that arose as a result of the difficult wartime conditions, such as the inability to access wine or *Matzah*.

Many of the insights shared during these scholarly conversations have been recorded. Rav Velvel also developed during this time a close relationship with his nephew, Rav Yosef Dov, whose knowledge and brilliant mind dazzled him.²⁹

Eventually, the Russian government expelled the Jews from Brisk, and Rav Chaim and his family temporarily lived in Minsk. Rav Velvel left Khaslavitch and went to Minsk to rejoin his family.

Escaping Mother Russia

The Bolshevik Revolution that followed World War I brought an end to the tranquil life that the family had enjoyed in Khaslavitch. The *Yevseksiya*, the Jewish wing of the Communist Party, declared an all-out war against traditional Judaism, and launched a vicious campaign targeting *Shuls*, *Yeshivos*, and all religious activities.

The Great Synagogue of Khaslavitch was taken over and turned into a non-Jewish residence for the elderly. The *Yevseksiya* proceeded to take over seven other *Shuls* in the town, too, leaving only one small *Shul* where the Jews could *Daven*. This persecution, combined with the widespread poverty resulting from years of military conflict, created a dire situation for the Jews in Lithuania. They suffered terribly from hunger and disease. The city of Khaslavitch was overrun by mice, and several deadly epidemics raged. Four of the Soloveitchik children were stricken with the measles.

In addition, Jewish youths were being indoctrinated with Communism and leaving tradition in droves. Worse, they joined forces with the Communists to work towards the obliteration of Judaism. Rav Moshe suffered a personal loss during this time, as well. One day in the summer of 1918,

²⁸ P. 38.

²⁹ The Rav was always very fond of his uncle, Rav Velvel, and I distinctly remember how the Rav would often make an appeal at the end of the summer in Boston on behalf of *Yeshivas Brisk* in Yerushalayim, which Rav Velvel had founded.

a family friend received a Hebrew newspaper printed in Minsk, featuring on the front page a picture of Rav Chaim of Brisk and the headline, “Reb Chayim Brisker, The Greatest Sage Of Our Age, Is Dead.”

After observing *Shivah*, Rav Moshe decided to take the dangerous journey to Warsaw, Poland to verify the reports of his father’s passing, which was said to have taken place in a resort near the Polish city. He found it difficult to accept the news, and needed confirmation. He stopped off in Minsk, where he met a friend who had attended Rav Chaim’s funeral, and even related to Rav Moshe the *Hesped* delivered by his brother, Rav Velvel. Convinced that his father had passed on, Rav Moshe returned home.

Five months later, Rav Moshe’s mother-in-law, *Rebbetzin* Guta Feinstein, died in Pruzhan.

Rav Moshe and Pesha decided to leave the deprivation and turmoil of Lithuania and relocate in the newly-independent country of Poland. Shortly after reaching this decision, a letter arrived from Rav Moshe’s grandfather, Rav Raphael Shapiro, informing him of efforts being made to reopen the Yeshiva of Volozhin. The town of Volozhin had become part of Poland, and so, free of Russian government interference, the Yeshiva could be reopened. Rav Shapiro invited Rav Moshe to come to Volozhin and assume a position in the Yeshiva. The family was elated by the news.

Rav Yosef Dov’s former tutor worked in the passport office, and this enabled the family to procure the necessary documents. En route to Poland, in 1920, the family stayed for a period of time in Minsk. While they were there, they learned that due to Poland’s invasion of Russia, and the civil war in the Ukraine, the Soviet government had closed the borders. They decided to continue their trip, illegally, traveling by wagon at night to secretly cross the border into Poland.

The family safely reached Poland, and went to Pesha’s hometown of Pruzhan. But while their fears of the Soviets were behind them, they faced a new concern, financial uncertainty. They learned that the plans to reopen Volozhin had met with difficulty, and that, in any event, Rav Moshe’s uncle, Rav Yaakov Shapiro, claimed rights to the position of *Rosh Yeshiva* if the plans materialized. Rav Moshe spent some time in Vilna, and then in Brisk, hoping to secure a position in the new Yeshiva, but it never happened.

A job offer finally came, as Rav Moshe was invited to assume the position of *Rav* of Antipole, a town near Pruzhan, and he accepted. However, before moving there, he received a telegram from Yehoshua Farbstein, a leading figure in the Mizrachi Movement in Poland, inviting him to lead the Talmud department of the rabbinical seminary he had founded in Warsaw, named Tachkemoni. Rav Moshe asked the community of Antipole to release him from the contract he had signed, and they agreed. The family excitedly welcomed the opportunity to live in Warsaw, a bustling city that served as the center of Jewish life in Poland.

Controversy in Warsaw

Rav Moshe’s decision to teach in Tachkemoni, an institution identified with Religious Zionism, and which included general studies as part of its curriculum, met with the disapproval of many leading *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshiva*, who distanced themselves from him. On the other hand, a number of leading disciples of Rav Chaim, who knew of Rav Moshe’s greatness and his mastery of the *Brisker Derech*, maintained their relationship with him. In particular, Rav Baruch Ber Lebowitz frequently visited the Soloveitchik home, and even invited Rav Moshe to deliver a *Shiur* in his Yeshiva.

The *Mashgiach* of Rav Baruch Ber’s Yeshiva learned of the plans to bring Rav Moshe as a guest, and urged the students

to boycott the *Shiur* in protest of Rav Moshe, whom they regarded as a Zionist. Angry and disheartened, Rav Baruch Ber summoned the entire Yeshiva to the *Beis Midrash*, and, with tears in his eyes, condemned the disgraceful rumors about Rav Moshe, whom he described as a dear personal friend and a towering sage. He demanded that the entire student body attend the *Shiur*. Rav Moshe indeed came, and Rav Baruch Ber wept the entire time Rav Moshe spoke, lamenting the disrespect that had been shown to his esteemed and beloved colleague.

This marked just one of several controversies in which Rav Moshe found himself embroiled during his years in Poland.

In 1922, the *Agudas Yisrael* held a convention in Warsaw, and one of the important items on the agenda was the establishment of the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* (“Council of Torah Sages”). Rav Moshe denounced the plan, following the stance that his father had taken back when the Agudah was first being formed. Although Rav Chaim had been involved in the earlier stages of the creation of the Agudah, attending both the 1909 conference in Bad Homburg, and the 1912 conference in Katowitz, he then withdrew from official participation in the movement. He had drawn up a list of eighteen provisions which he insisted on incorporating within the organization’s platform as a condition for his involvement.³⁰

One was that the Agudah would not appoint a group to serve as the *Halachic* authority for all *Am Yisrael*. Rav Chaim felt very strongly that *Talmidei Chachamim* should be establishing *Halachic* norms for their cities and communities, rather than be bound by a single rabbinic body that would dictate Torah guidelines for the entire nation. He explained his position by way of an analogy to electricity. If each house in the town has its own, independent kerosene

lamp, then when the lamp goes out, a person can go to his neighbor and light a candle so he can have light. But if the entire town receives its light from a central generator, then when that generator is down, nobody in the town has light. Similarly, Rav Chaim argued, if each community has its own “light,” its own Torah luminary who provides leadership, then even if problems arise in individual communities, the other will *still* have “light.” But if all *Am Yisrael* is dependent on a single rabbinic body for its “light,” then if this body is ever compromised, such as by politics, pressures, or actors with an unholy agenda, then all *Am Yisrael* will be plunged into—“darkness.”

Rav Moshe strongly upheld his father’s stance. He expressed his view in an address he delivered at a convention of Miz-rachi rabbis held in 1923. Rav Moshe stated that the only authoritative Torah body whose decisions were binding upon all other *Rabbanim* is the *Sanhedrin*. In the absence of a *Sanhedrin*, no group can assert itself as the authoritative voice of Torah which must be heeded by all.

The Agudah condemned Rav Moshe’s remarks in an article printed in *Der Yid*, the organization’s official newspaper. The article assailed Rav Moshe for serving in a prominent position in a Zionist institution that taught general studies, and which, according to the article, produced rabbis bereft of Torah scholarship. The writer also accused Rav Moshe of deviating from the path of his father, Rav Chaim, who was among the early founders of the Agudah.

Rav Moshe responded in a public letter, clarifying that although Rav Chaim was involved in the early stages of the organization’s founding, he later withdrew. As for the article’s condemnation of Rav Moshe’s involvement in Tachkemoni, Rav Moshe explained that his role was solely to teach Torah.

³⁰ This list included the demand that the Agudah not publish any newspapers. As mentioned earlier, Rav Chaim sternly opposed the publication of Jewish newspapers.

His article elicited additional written attacks against him, and this controversy evolved into an exchange of public letters between Rav Moshe and Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzynski³¹, one of the important figures in Agudas Yisrael, debating Rav Chaim Soloveitchik's position vis-à-vis the organization.

Just one year later, Rav Moshe got embroiled in yet another controversy, this time, with the *Agudas HaRabbanim* of Poland. The controversy revolved around the rabbinate of the Polish city of Radom, which was home to a large and respected Jewish community. A young rabbi named Rav Yechiel Kestenberg was appointed rabbi by the authorities, and many in the city resented having such a young rabbi who was never elected by the community members. In 1924, the community leaders reached the decision to hold elections for rabbi, much to Rav Kestenberg's consternation. He appealed to his colleagues in the *Agudas HaRabbanim*, who drafted a letter supporting him, warning that anyone contesting his right to the position was included under the curse, "אָרור מְסִיג גְבוּל רְעֵהוּ", "Accursed is he who infringes upon his fellow's territory" (*Devarim* 27:17). This letter was signed by several leading Polish *Rabbanim*, including Rav Meir Dan Plotzky³², author of the *Keli Chemdah*.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik wrote a letter sharply criticizing the *Agudas HaRabbanim* for applying "אָרור מְסִיג גְבוּל רְעֵהוּ" to this matter, contending that this represented a gross misunderstanding of the *Pasuk*. Rav Plotzky responded to

Rav Moshe's arguments, insisting that the "curse" for הסגת גבול was indeed appropriate for this situation. He noted the precedent of Rav Moshe's great-grandfather, the *Netziv*, who took a strong stand when the city of Kharkov brought a rabbi to oversee the *Kasbrus* of a meat factory, in defiance of the current rabbi. The *Netziv* vociferously condemned the new rabbi as a "מְסִיג גְבוּל" ("infringer") whose *Halachic* rulings could not be trusted.³³

Similar to his opposition to the formation of a *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah*, it seems that Rav Moshe's main objection was the authority assumed by the *Agudas HaRabbanim* to dictate policy in individual communities. He saw great danger in a single body reserving for itself the right to meddle in communities' local affairs.³⁴

Yet a third, especially fierce, controversy involved the community of Tomashiv, where a major battle took place between the *Shochtim* and the community leadership. The Polish government had issued an edict requiring all revenue from the sale of kosher meat to be handed to the town councils, which would be responsible for paying the *Shochtim* and setting prices.

The *Shochtim*, however, refused to comply, and retained financial control over the production and sale of kosher meat in the town. The community promptly hired new *Shochtim*.³⁵ The *Agudas HaRabbanim* convened and drafted a letter signed by fifty-six rabbis declaring *all* meat prepared

³¹ 1863-1940.

³² 1866-1928.

³³ Rav Plotzky concluded this letter with a surprisingly harsh condemnation of Rav Moshe: "ז"ל שם יראה מה בין תקפי: "זהמעייין היטב בדברי הגאון הנצי"ב ז"ל שם יראה מה בין תקפי: קמאי לעניי הדעת דעת תורה שבדורותינו".

³⁴ Two years later, elections were indeed held in Radom, and the community elected Rav Yitzchak Steinberg of Yaroslavl, igniting further strife. Rav Steinberg eventually backed down, having come under pressure from the Gerrer *Rebbe*, Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, the *Imrei Emes* (1866-1948). Rav Steinberg later became a *Rav* in Brussels, and later, a prominent *Dayan* in Tel-Aviv.

³⁵ Further complicating matters was the issue of the appointment of the town's rabbi. The original *Shochtim* strongly supported the appointment of Rav Dovid Borenstein (1876-1942), the *Rebbe* of Sochatchov (son of Rav Shmuel Borenstein, the *Shem MiShmuel*), and even funded his campaign with their profits. Others in the town, particularly those aligned with Mizrahi, supported the candidacy of Rav Shmuel Brot (1885-1963), who later became the head of the Mizrahi movement in Poland.

by the new *Shochtim* non-kosher, and strictly forbidden for consumption.

The community of Tomashiv invited Rav Moshe Soloveitchik to arbitrate. After hearing both sides, he penned a letter establishing that the *Agudas HaRabbanim* was not authorized to ban the meat produced by the newly-hired *Shochtim*. Once again, Rav Moshe was assailed for expressing opposition to the central rabbinic body in Poland.

It is told that plans were made to declare a *Cherem* (writ of excommunication) against Rav Moshe for opposing the *Agudas HaRabbanim*, but Rav Baruch Ber intervened on his behalf, declaring, “דעם רבינ'ס קינדער לייגט מען ניט אריין אין חרם,” “The *Rebbe's* children are not put in *Cherem*,” referring, of course, to Rav Baruch Ber's revered *Rebbe*, Rav Chaim Brisker.³⁶

“It is Coming From Volozhin —to New York”

In the late 1920s, Rav Moshe found himself in yet another controversy, one for which he lost his job, leading to his immigration to the United States.

Rav Moshe received word that in one of the history classes at Tachkemoni, students were exposed to heretical ideas, challenging the authenticity of the תורה שבעל פה. He also heard reports of students violating *Shabbos*. Rav Moshe met with Dr. Meir Balaban, the school's administrator who taught the history course in question, and a tense confrontation ensued. The matter was brought to the Board of Directors,

and it was decided that Dr. Balaban's course would begin with the period of *Geonim*, so as to avoid possible heretical perspectives on the *Tanaim* and *Amoraim*. And, the students who violated *Shabbos* were expelled.



Students of Tachkemoni

Tensions between Rav Moshe and Dr. Balaban were reignited shortly thereafter, however, when Rav Moshe was instructed to issue certificates of *Semichah* to the students in the highest class. Rav Moshe refused to confer *Semichah* upon the students without testing them on the *Yoreh Dei'ah* section of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

The administrators of Tachkemoni insisted that the students had completed the curriculum and were already under pressure by the exams administered by the Warsaw Board of Education, and could not be expected to also be tested on *Yoreh Dei'ah*.

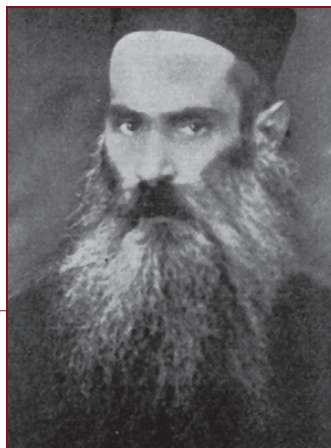
Rav Moshe was so distraught by the direction taken by the school that he fell seriously ill with pneumonia, suffering for several months. As he was recovering, he was informed that the administrators of Tachkemoni had decided to dismiss him if he did not sign the certificates of ordination. True to his principles, Rav Moshe refused.

Around that time, his son, Shmuel, who had taken time off from his university studies to tend to his ailing father, one day came to Rav Moshe jubilant. A letter had arrived from Rav Dr. Dov (Bernard) Revel³⁷ in New York, inviting him to assume the position of *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan*, Yeshiva College. The invitation came

³⁶ Some sources claim that the *Cherem* was planned after the aforementioned controversy surrounding Rav Kestenberg and the community of Radom.

³⁷ 1885-1940.

Rav Shlomo Polatchek
The “Maitcheter Ilui”

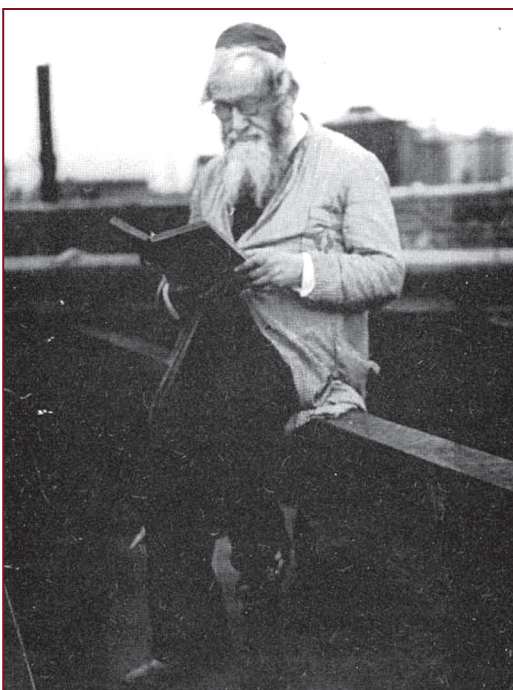


after the sudden, untimely passing of Rav Shlomo Polatchek³⁸, known as the “Maitcheter Ilui,” whom Dr. Revel had brought to serve as *Rosh Yeshiva* in 1922. The *Maitcheter Ilui* had learned under Rav Chaim Soloveitchik in Volozhin, and then for several more years in Brisk, after the closing of the Yeshiva of Volozhin.³⁹ When he passed away, in the summer of 1928, Rav Baruch Ber Lebowitz was in the United States raising money for his Yeshiva in Kaminetz. Dr. Revel asked Rav Baruch Ber to recommend a renowned *Talmid Chacham* to lead the Yeshiva, and Rav Baruch Ber strongly recommended Rav Moshe Soloveitchik.

Rav Moshe enthusiastically accepted the position, and he arrived in New York in 1929. A student at Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan gave the following description of Rav Moshe’s inaugural *Shiur* in the Yeshiva’s packed *Beis Midrash*⁴⁰:

“... a feeling of expectancy and festivity was felt by all. Our Master, Rabbi Moses Soloveitchik, began his lecture. Great was the surprise felt by all those present, since our Master’s lecture didn’t seem like a beginning. It did not appear as if this was the initial time he was speaking in our Yeshiva. It rather seemed like a continuation, as if he had

constantly lectured in the Yeshiva... In truth, it was a continuation. A continuation of a long road that the Torah has traveled from Sura and Pumbeditha in Babylonia through all the countries of our exile until it reached Volozhin. Now, it is coming from Volozhin to New York.”



Studying Torah in America

Rav Moshe spent the last decade of his life fulfilling his dream of teaching Torah and transmitting the *Brisker Derech* which he had received from his father.

He delivered the highest-level *Shiur* at the Yeshiva, dazzling and challenging his students. Many outstanding Torah minds, including Rav Mordechai Gifter⁴¹, Rav Avigdor Miller⁴², and Rav Chaim Zimmerman⁴³, were students of Rav

Moshe at *Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan* and heard his brilliant *Shiurim*. One student, Rabbi Aharon Shurin⁴⁴, in a written eulogy of Rav Moshe, described the special relationship between Rav Moshe and his *Talmidim*⁴⁵:

³⁸ 1877-1928.

³⁹ Rav Elchanan Wasserman (1874-1941) wrote that Rav Chaim marveled at the *Maitcheter Ilui*’s intellect, saying that he had never met such a genius (“אזא משונה ד’יגען עילוי ווי דעם מייטשעטער האב איך אין לעבען ניט געזעהט”).

⁴⁰ Cited in Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rothkoff-Rakeffet’s *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, p. 124.

⁴¹ 1915-2001.

⁴² 1908-2001.

⁴³ 1914-1995.

⁴⁴ 1913-2012.

⁴⁵ Translation cited by Mrs. Meiselman, p. 240.

The young Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik



“Immediately upon opening the door to the Yeshiva, he cast his glowing eyes upon his students and, with a joyful expression, exuding tenderness and delicacy, he looked upon them as a father at his children, and they were drawn to him as if by the force of a magnet hidden in his bosom. Suddenly, they surrounded him from all sides, and he, standing in the middle, speaks on some point and they are all ears. While they discuss and debate, he stands as a conductor among them. They ask and he answers each according to his understanding, according to the character and essence of the questioner. And in this hour, when the precious light flowed from him as a spring—its pure waters streaming out to quench the thirst of the parched—the students would drink eagerly of his deep, clear words and quench their spiritual thirst with the insight of the Torah and wisdom. He would never frighten or menace his students, but, rather, a relationship based on delicacy and friendship existed between them. This relationship bore fruit, as his students loved him with the love of a son to his father.”

Passing the Mantle of Torah

In the early winter of 1940-1941, when Rav Moshe was sixty-one, he suddenly became ill, and he passed away on *Shevat* 3 (January 31).

At the funeral, which was held at *Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan*, numerous *Rabbanim* eulogized the great sage, including his son, Rav Yosef Dov, who had arrived in the

United States at the end of 1932 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Boston. Rav Yosef Dov compared the unexpected death of his father to the sudden departure of Eliyahu *HaNavi*, who was

brought to the heavens in a whirlwind of fire (*Melachim II* 2:11). He then proclaimed:

“Since the age of prophecy is over, and since the prophets handed their mantle to the men of the Great Assembly to continue the teaching of our Torah—our Tree of Life—this mantle has become the possession of the great Torah leaders, and they teach it to their students. My father received the mantle from the great Torah sage, Reb Chaim, who in turn received it from ‘Reb Yoshe Ber’ [the Beis HaLevi], going back to Reb Chaim of Volozhin.”

I accept the mantle of Torah and will continue in the tradition of my family to spread Torah to whoever is eager to learn the ways of our Tree of Life.”

Several months later, Rav Yosef Dov received a telegram from his uncle, Rav Velvel, who had managed to escape Europe and reach Yerushalayim, where he heard of the passing of his beloved older brother. Rav Velvel expressed to his nephew his deepest sympathies, as well as his deep love and respect for him, signing the letter, *“דודו מוקירו ומכבדו ודושו”ט*, *“His uncle, who cherishes him, respects him, always wishes for his wellbeing and welfare with his heart and soul, plated with love and filled with unlimited blessings.”*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ On a trip to Israel in 2019, I and Rav Ariel Lapciug were privileged to see the original, handwritten condolence letter which the Brisker *Rav* sent to Rav Yosef Dov after Rav Moshe’s passing. We visited the home of Rav Nesanel Peretz Myerson, who is married to the only child of Rav Velvel’s son, Rav Refael Soloveitchik, who inherited Rav Velvel’s letters, photographs, and other memorabilia. In the original letter, one can see the way Rav Velvel addressed his nephew, with a series of honorifics extolling his greatness. When Rav Velvel’s letters were published, the names of the recipients were omitted.

Rav Moshe's death occurred less than two months after the passing of Dr. Revel, whose post as President of Yeshiva College had yet to be filled, leaving a large vacuum of leadership in the institution, and thrusting it into a period of turmoil. While many assumed that Rav Moshe's son, Rav Yosef Dov, was the most suitable and qualified candidate to succeed him as *Rosh Yeshiva*, there was considerable opposition to his appointment. Some felt that Rav Soloveitchik—who had arrived in the U.S. less than a decade earlier—was too European-styled to lead the institution. Others felt that his personality was ill-suited for the job. After several difficult months, the Board of Directors, rather disrespectfully, invited Rav Yosef Dov to serve as *Rosh Yeshiva* for one year to prove his “*usefulness*” to the Yeshiva.

Rav Soloveitchik reacted to this embarrassing offer with great humility, responding, “If I could not be useful to the Yeshiva, the cradle of Talmud scholarship in the United States, following my father’s methodology, I would not want to stay there.”

His inaugural *Shiur*, delivered in the spring of 1941, settled any doubts as to his “*usefulness*” to the institution, dazzling his audience with his originality, clarity, and mastery of both the Talmud and the *Brisker Derech*.

Introducing his lecture, the Rav cited the *Gemara’s* discussion in *Shabbos* 30a of Dovid *HaMelech’s* pleas to be forgiven for the sin he had committed with Batsheva. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* assured him that he was forgiven, but Dovid was not content, as he desperately wanted *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to make a public “*אות*”: “*sign*”, or indication, that he was forgiven. The *Gemara* states that this is the meaning

of the *Pasuk* in *Tebilim* (86:17) in which Dovid beseeches, “*עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי אוֹת לְטוֹבָה וְיֵרְאוּ שָׂנְאֵי וַיִּבְשׂוּ*”, “*Make for me a positive sign, so my foes shall see and be ashamed.*” Dovid *HaMelech* suffered a great deal of scorn and hostility on account of the sin he committed, to the point where even the *Sanhedrin* dissociated themselves from him (*Yoma* 22b). And so he petitioned *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to not only grant him forgiveness, but also make it clear to his adversaries that he had been granted forgiveness, so they would recognize that their hostility towards him was unwarranted.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu answered that He would not grant Dovid a public sign of his forgiveness during his lifetime, but such a sign would be provided after his death.⁴⁷

That moment came at the time of the *Chanukas HaBayis*, when Dovid’s son, Shlomo *HaMelech*, assembled the entire nation to witness and celebrate the dedication of the *Beis HaMikdash* in Yerushalayim. During the *Chanukas HaBayis*, the *Gemara* relates, Shlomo wanted to bring the *Aron* into the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, but the gates of the *Mikdash* would not open. “*דבּקוּ שַׁעֲרֵים זֶה בְּזֶה*”, the gates were glued together, unable to part.⁴⁸ Shlomo recited numerous prayers, begging *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to open the gates, but the gates remained shut. Finally, Shlomo exclaimed, “*ה' אֱלֹקִים, אֵל תֵּשֵׁב פְּנֵי מְשִׁיחִי וְזָכְרָה לְחַסְדֵי דָוִד עַבְדְּךָ*”, “*HaShem, G-d! Do not reject Your anointed one! Remember the kindnesses of Your servant, Dovid!*” (*Divrei HaYamim* II 6:42). At that moment, the gates opened.

This was the “*אות*” that Dovid had prayed for. Everyone saw that the gates of the *Beis HaMikdash* opened solely in the merit of Dovid *HaMelech*. It became clear to them that

⁴⁷ The *Gemara* does not explain why Dovid was denied a public “*אות*” of his forgiveness until after his passing. Some commentators explain that his sin involved a “*חילול ה'*”, and the *Gemara* famously teaches (*Yoma* 86a) that a sin which creates a “*חילול ה'*” cannot be completely forgiven until after one’s death.

⁴⁸ Some explain that the gates of the *Beis HaMikdash* would not open, whereas others explain that this refers to the opening of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* inside the *Mikdash*.

he was forgiven, that he was regarded as a *Tzadik*, that his repentance was sincere and accepted by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, that He was "מְשִׁיחֵיךָ", *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* "Anointed one" in whose merit He was bringing His *Shechinah* into the *Beis HaMikdash* and residing among *Am Yisrael*.

The *Gemara* concludes: "באותה שעה נהפכו פני שונאי דוד כשולי" "At that moment, the faces of Dovid's foes darkened like the bottom of a pot, and everyone knew that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* had forgiven him for that iniquitous act."

The Rav announced at that inaugural *Shiur* that just as the *Beis HaMikdash* opened for Shlomo *HaMelech* in the merit of his father, likewise, he was assuming the role of *Rosh Yeshiva* in the merit of his great father, and with a firm commitment to follow and perpetuate his father's legacy. He realized that many people had some concerns about how the Rav would steer the Yeshiva as its leader, and he set out to assure them that he was unwaveringly faithful to the *Mesorah* of his father and grandfather.

"מְזִמּוֹר שִׁיר הַנֶּנֶכֶת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד"

The *Aruch HaShulchan*⁴⁹ (*Orach Chaim* 50:4) references this story of the inauguration of the *Beis HaMikdash* to explain the custom, established by the *Ari Zal*⁵⁰, to introduce the daily *Pesukei DeZimra* service with שִׁיר הַנֶּנֶכֶת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד, the *Mizmor* of *Tehilim* which Dovid *HaMelech* composed especially for the occasion of the *Chanukas Habayis*. What is the reason for this practice? Why do we begin the section of *Pesukei DeZimra* with "מְזִמּוֹר שִׁיר הַנֶּנֶכֶת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד"?

One explanation is offered by Rav Avraham Landau, the *Tzadik* of Tchechnov (Ciechanów)⁵¹, in his *Tzlosa*

DeAvraham commentary to the *Siddur*. He writes that this *Mizmor* is incorporated not as the introduction to *Pesukei DeZimra*, but rather as the conclusion of the *Korbanos* section which precedes it.

In the *Korbanos* section, we recite texts from the *Chumash*, *Mishnah* and *Gemara* describing the *Korbanos* that were offered in the *Beis HaMikdash*, and which we are, sadly, unable to bring. Appropriately, the *Tzadik* of Tchechnov explains, we conclude this section with "מְזִמּוֹר שִׁיר הַנֶּנֶכֶת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד", the *Mizmor* written for the occasion of the dedication of the *Beis HaMikdash*, expressing our hopes that we will soon celebrate the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*, which will afford us the opportunity to once again serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* through the offering of *Korbanos*, as that section concludes, "יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ... שְׂיִבְנֶה בַּיִת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ".

The *Aruch HaShulchan*, however, explains differently, noting that, as the *Gemara* teaches, the occasion of the *Chanukas HaBayis* publicized the righteousness of Dovid *HaMelech*, proving to all that he was forgiven. Appropriately, we introduce our daily recitation of *Pesukei DeZimra*, which consists of Dovid *HaMelech's* stirring praises to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, with the *Mizmor* associated with that event. The *Pesukim* that comprise *Pesukei DeZimra* assume extra special significance in light of the *Chanukas HaBayis*, which demonstrated Dovid's great piety, how beloved He was to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. And so we begin this section with "מְזִמּוֹר שִׁיר הַנֶּנֶכֶת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד", recalling the events of the *Chanukas HaBayis* to underscore the preciousness of the sacred words of Dovid *HaMelech* that we will be reciting.

On this basis, we might explain the content of this *Mizmor*, and its relevance to the event of the *Chanukas HaBayis*.

⁴⁹ Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein of Novardok, 1829-1908.

⁵⁰ Rav Yitzchak Luria, 1534-1572.

⁵¹ 1784-1875.

Many commentators observed that this *Mizmor* makes no mention at all of the *Beis HaMikdash*, and thus seems, at first glance, entirely unrelated to the *Chanukas HaBayis*. Why, then, did Dovid *HaMelech* choose this *Mizmor* to be recited on that occasion? The answer, perhaps, lies in the story of Shlomo *HaMelech* and the gates. The *Chanukas HaBayis* marked a great moment of comfort and triumph for Dovid *HaMelech*, as his adversaries and detractors, who caused him so much grief and anguish, were finally proven wrong and put to shame. And in the very first *Pasuk* of this *Mizmor* of *Tehilim* (after the introduction of שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד "מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר לְדָוִד", (הַגָּבַת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד), Dovid exclaims, אֲרֹמְמֶךָ ה' כִּי דָלִיתָנִי וְלֹא, "I shall exalt You, O G-d, for You have lifted me up, and not let my enemies rejoice!" He later pronounces, ה' הֵעֲלִיתָ מִן שְׂאוֹל נַפְשִׁי, "G-d, You have raised my soul from the underworld." Dovid's reputation was tarnished and sullied until that dramatic moment when the gates opened in his merit. And so this is the שִׁיר הַגָּבַת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד, the *Mizmor* celebrating the *Chanukas HaBayis*, when it became clear to one and all that Dovid *HaMelech* was forgiven and maintained his unique stature as "מְשִׁיחֵיךָ".


Opening the Doors to Our *Tefilos*

Rav Moshe Elyakim of Kozhnitz⁵², in his *Be'er Moshe* (*Parshas Vayishlach*), cites Rav Aharon of Karlin as associating the word "דָּלִיתָנִי" in this *Mizmor* with the word "דָּלֶת" — "door." Rav Aharon of Karlin explained that when Dovid *HaMelech* praises *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* "כִּי דָלִיתָנִי", he is expressing

gratitude: "על שעשיתני דָּלֶת ופתח...לעלות כל התפילות של ישראל", "that You made me a 'door' and passageway . . . for all the prayers of Yisrael to pass through."

Dovid *HaMelech* is our "דָּלֶת", our "passageway" where we go whenever we find ourselves distraught, alone, frightened, or in need. His example of *Teshuvah*, of humble submission to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, of desperate pleading in times of hardship, and exuberant praise in times of celebration, inspires us to this very day. And his beautiful *Tefilos* in *Sefer Tehilim* is the place we turn to each morning as we give praise to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for granting us yet another day of opportunity, and the place we turn to in times of fear and uncertainty. Like Shlomo *HaMelech* at the gates of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we invoke the great merit of Dovid *HaMelech* as we beg *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to open for us the gates of compassion and accept our heartfelt *Tefilos*.⁵³

During this time of crisis, we turn to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and plead that He open the gates of the heavens for our heartfelt *Tefilos* in the *Zechus* of Dovid *HaMelech*, and in the *zechus* of all the great *Tzadikim* and *Talmidei Chachamim* whose Torah we are privileged to learn and from whose piety we draw guidance and inspiration.

MAY HAKADOSH BARUCH HU SOON heal all those who are ill, bring comfort and solace to all those who are grieving, and bless us, our families, our community, *Am Yisrael* and the world with much joy and prosperity, *Amen*.

⁵² d. 1828. He was the son of Rav Yisrael Hopstein, the "Magid of Kozhnitz" (1737-1814).

⁵³ We might also add that the allusion to a "דָּלֶת" in this *Pasuk* hearkens to the "doors" of the *Beis HaMikdash* which opened in Dovid's merit at the time of the *Chanukas Habayis*.

To receive these *Divrei Torah*, or offer comments or corrections, please email: Drashos@aymadedetroit.org

Typesetting and design by Nachman Levine

**Two framed 'Brisker' photographs:
A personal connection.**

These two photographs in my mother's home today, were brought from our home in Boston.

They were given to my father, זכרונו לברכה, by Mrs. Anne Gerber, Rabbi Soloveitchik's sister, and her husband, Edward.

They both said that they wished for the two photographs—that were from the "*Beis HaRav*"—to be in my father's home, because based on the way he was raising his children, they felt the faces of these *Gedolei Olam* should always be seen by them there.

