Chanoch Regal

Abir Yaacob







The Lives and Times
of the Saintly Grand Rabbis
Of the Abichazira Dynasty

Chanoch Regal



PART 2

The Lives and Times
of the Saintly Grand Rabbis
of the Abichazira Dynasty

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

©
All Rights Reserved:
Yeshivat 'Abir Yaakov – Ohr Meir Simcha'
27 Abir Yaakov
Nahariya, Israel

No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without permission in writing from the publishers.

Those who have in their possession any stories or pictures which do not appear in this book and wish for them to appear in future editions are requested to contact the publisher at the following address:

Yeshivat 'Abir Yaakov – Ohr Meir Simcha'
27 Abir Yaakov
Nahariya, Israel

Compiled, Written, and Edited by: Chanoch Regal
Translated into English by: Nehemiah Klein
English Editor: Caroline Fletcher
Computerized Layout and Typesetting: S. Berger, Ashdod
Cover Design: Rachel Feld, Yerushalayim
Printer: Dudu Printers, Hebron

Published by **Yeshivat 'Abir Yaakov – Ohr Meir Simcha'**
27 Abir Yaakov

Printed in ISRAEL

Table of contents

THE BABA SALI

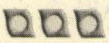
"SEEDS OF GREATNESS" 9
AT EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD – FOR LEADERSHIP 12
"THEY JOURNEYED AND THEY ENCAMPED" 14
"THE LEFT PUSHES AWAY AND THE RIGHT BRINGS CLOSER" 19
"HASHEM HAS BROKEN THE STAFF OF THE WICKED, THE ROD OF RULERS" 21
THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS ACQUIRED IN ... STAGES 25
LEADER IN STORMY WATERS 34
"LET NOT THE RICH MAN GLORIFY HIMSELF WITH HIS WEALTH" 36
"HILULA DETZADIKAYA" 40
MASSECHET TAANIT 43
HOLY WATERS 45
TO INCREASE PURITY IN ISRAEL 50
"DIKNA KADISHA" 55
"TORAH SCHOLARS HAVE NO REST" 59
IN DEFENSE OF PURITY OF EDUCATION 64
"CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THE PATHS OF ITS HOME" 71
LEADER OF THE MASSES, GUIDE TO INDIVIDUALS 76
"THE FORM WHICH THE SAGES ESTABLISHED IN BRACHOT" 86
"MY WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS AND MY THOUGHTS ARE HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS" 98
INVOLVEMENT WITH HIDDEN BUSINESS 93
OVER THE MOON 99
"YOUR HUMILITY MADE ME GREAT" 102
FOR THE SAKE OF THE JEWISH NATION 107
"WHO PURSUES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND KINDNESS" 112
"FOOD THAT HEALS" 116
SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT 119
"FROM THE LOBBY TO THE BANQUET HALL" 125
THE LAST CURTAIN 131

TABLE OF CONTENTS

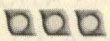


THE RADIANCE OF RABENU MEIR

'MEIR' – AN ILLUMINATION 141
"REJOICE YOUNG MAN IN YOUR CHILDHOOD" 146
"LET YOUR HEART CHEER YOU IN THE DAYS OF YOUR YOUTH" 155
IN THE PATH OF LEADERSHIP 166
FROM OUR FATHER'S LAND TO THE LAND OF OUR FATHERS 184
"ON THE TORAH" 198
ON THE SERVICE 239
"HE WILL BE CALLED HOLY" 258
"HOLINESS BRINGS ONE TO DIVINE INSPIRATION" 267
"ON THE MIRACLES" 286
FORTUNATE IS THE EYE THAT SAW 318
"HOW PIOUS! HOW HUMBLE!" 326
WITH THE GEDOLIM OF ISRAEL 341
HIS CONNECTION WITH THE BABA SALI 351
HIS FINAL DAYS 359



GLOSSARY 381





THE BABA SALI



In an era when the world is enveloped in bewildering darkness; when the generations are deteriorating at a frightening pace; the nation's eyes are weakening and their back breaking under the burden of the two thousand year exile – suddenly a ray of light shines forth.

The radiant image of the Baba Sali hangs on the walls of hundreds of thousands of Jewish homes, an inspiring reminder of the holy sage, whose home was "the peak of the mountain" for tens of thousands. After his passing, his name was whispered with awe by parents and grandparents wishing to teach their children about his incredible spiritual legacy. For many Jewish souls, Rabenu Yisrael Abichazira serves as the final and only link with their glorious heritage.

It seems that in all of Jewish history there have never been so many books and articles documenting the chronicles of one individual's life, his conduct, his saintly demeanor and his sanctifying of Hashem's Name with his miracles, as about the Baba Sali.

If we were to use this forum of teaching future generations about the noble Abichazira family to reproduce all the information available about the Baba Sali, it would be superfluous because there are enough books about him available to satisfy any need.

On the other hand it would detract from the total picture if we did not dedicate a few lines to document the incredible life of the holy *tzaddik* whose grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira said: "My esteemed grandfather was a heavenly angel who was planted in this world."

We must remember that it was the Baba Sali who brought fame world-wide to the name Abichazira, hallowing the memory that was carried on the lips of thousands of Jews of every stripe. This book is, in part, a vehicle for carrying out his fervent wish – that of publicizing

the biography of their holy ancestors, chief among them the Abir Yaakov.

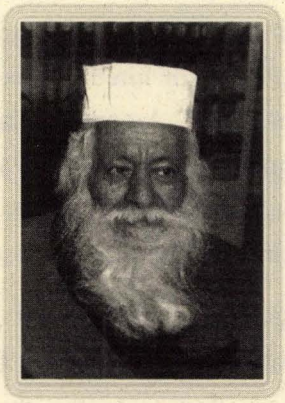
It is with trepidation then that we approach this task of sketching a comprehensive picture of the holy sage, R' Yisrael Abichazira – the Baba Sali. The bulk of our efforts will be to trace the path of history so that the reader will be able to view in chronological order the generations comprising the hundreds of years of heroic leadership of this illustrious family.



"SEEDS OF GREATNESS"

At the height of the expansion of the Jewish community of Morocco, when the holy memory of the Abir Yaakov still echoed in the alleyways of the *Malach* and his Torah was learned in the *batei midrash*, and while his holy sons were serving as community leaders, the Creator brought into the world a *tzaddik* who shone like the midday sun. He was born on *Rosh Hashana* 5650 [1889] to Rabenu Masud and his wife Isha, nee Ben Chamu. The Baba Sali used to say about his mother: "She was not affected by the decree against Chava," (see Sotah 12a) and he always accorded very special honor to her memory[1].

The holy *kabbalist* HaRav Mordechai Sharabi revealed to the Baba Sali in private conversation, that he had had a dream in which he



The holy Kabbalist – Rav Mordechai Sharabi

---

1. See the section "*Ateret Roshenu*" where Rabenu David expressed himself in the following words: 'Had my mother been alive, I would carry her on my shoulders and dance with her with great joy'. Similarly, each year the Baba Sali would hold a memorial dinner on the day of her passing on 6 Kislev, where he would praise her highly and speak words of Torah in her honor. In one of his last years, after those present concluded the customary singing of "*Eishet Chayil*", the Baba Sali began to explain the deep hidden *Kabbalistic* meanings behind "*Eshet Chayil*" as it appears in Sefer Mishle. While elaborating on his novel insights, he would proclaim from time to time: "May this elevate the soul of my dear mother".

asked the Abir Yaakov from where his grandson's soul was carved. The answer he received was, "The soul of my grandson was carved from the soul of King Chizkiyahu, and when anyone receives his blessing, it is as if he was blessed by King Chizkiyahu himself.

On the eighth day, the newborn was brought into the covenant of Avraham Avinu with his father acting as *mohel* and his uncle Rabenu Yitzchak (the son born to the Abir Yaakov in his old age), serving as *sandak*. He was given the name Yisrael, because his father feared calling him by his grandfather's name Yaakov. He chose the name Yisrael, based on the verse: "No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome" (Bereishit 32:29). This was a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the entire assembly of Israel would be able to testify many years later.

While still a young child, he began to pursue his Talmudic studies diligently, learning at a rapid pace and acquiring knowledge in all areas of the Torah. The first tutor hired by his father was R' Yitzchak Fadida, "Baba Chaki ben Nana". Among his later teachers were many other leading Torah scholars whom Rabenu Masud hired to oversee his precious son. Among these were guests visiting Tafilalet who extended their stay specifically for this purpose.[2]

In addition to guiding him on the path of Torah study, his father instructed him in the holy manner in which he should lead his life. From the age of six, in an effort to protect the purity of his eyes, his

---

2. To form an impression of the Torah accomplishments of the young Baba Sali, consider this story told us by his grandson, Moreinu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira. When he was about five years old, R' David was once a Shabbat guest at the home of his grandfather, the Baba Sali. Late that night, the electricity went out and the Shabbat candles were all that glowed in the darkness. Because the young child had not yet completed the eight chapters of Mishnayot in Massechet Shabbat that he learned as part of "*Tikunei Shabbat*", he took his book of *mishnayot* and was about to read by the light of the candles. His grandfather, the Baba Sali reprimanded him, saying that it was forbidden to read by the light of a candle (see Shabbat 11a). When the boy apologized for not having yet completed the *mishnayot*, the Baba Sali responded, "A boy of your age should already have mastered the *mishnayot* of *Massechet Shabbat* by heart."

face was covered with a cloak whenever he went into the street. This custom remained with him his entire life.

When he was only nine years old, his father included him in a formal dinner in the salon of his home, to which the members of Tafilalet's *Chevra Kadisha* were invited, all G-d fearing individuals, whom Rabenu Masud tried to persuade to accept his son into their society. Signs of greatness and holiness were already apparent in him in those early years. The story is told that when his father heard that his son had rebuked a wealthy man very harshly for having forgotten the gift he had asked him to purchase in Algiers, his father silenced him saying: "Beware of ever punishing a Jew, and let no harshness come forth from your mouth, for 'One whom you bless is blessed and one whom you curse is accursed.'" (Bamidbar 22:6).

As a young child, the Baba Sali was kidnapped by some Tafilalet Arabs who demanded a high ransom for his relase. One of the Arab dignitaries under whose authority the Abichazira family lived, warned Rabenu Masud not to pay the ransom but rather to allow his people to fight the kidnappers and gain release of his son. R' Masud, however refused to accept their advice and even endangered himself by entering into a dispute with the Arab dignitary. These were his reasons:

This kidnapping was not only for the sake of ransom, but the Satan and his forces were trying to extinguish the great light destined to emanate from the boy. The Arab clan might succeed in releasing him by force, but it was still possible that the messengers of Satan would kill him, which would be a tremendous loss to the entire Jewish nation. Rabenu Masud paid the full ransom demanded and the boy was returned in good health.

For the sake of Klal Yisrael, Rabenu Masud was willing to violate the standard procedure of dealing with kidnappings even though it meant parting with an exorbitant sum of money.

AT EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD – FOR LEADERSHIP

The Baba Sali spent the next few years under the wing of his elder brother, Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, as they learned together in the *beit midrash* of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov. Both were devoted students of their uncle R' Yitzchak, who worked along with their father in running the community.

When he reached the age of *Bar Mitzvah*, his father married him off to his niece.[3] Unfortunately she fell ill shortly after their marriage and died two years later. A few months later the Baba Sali married Pricha of the Amsalem family. However for twelve years the couple had no children.

During that time, his brothers and uncle saw him as a vessel fit to receive Hashem's blessing. They guided him into the secret chambers of *kabbalah*, giving him a thorough grounding in its wisdom. After he demonstrated exceptional knowledge and understanding in all the writings of the Arizal, they began teaching him the special *kavanot* found in the Arizal's *siddur*, following in the footsteps of the Abir Yaakov.[4] During that same period, the Baba Sali composed a *siddur* in the manner of the Arizal in order to have the appropriate intention for each prayer. This was in addition to the *siddur* mentioned earlier, which he had received from his father while still a child. Later, during the years 5682-5683 [1922-23] while he was in *Eretz Yisrael*, he visited the *Kabbalist* Yeshiva "*Beit E-l*", spending many days with the

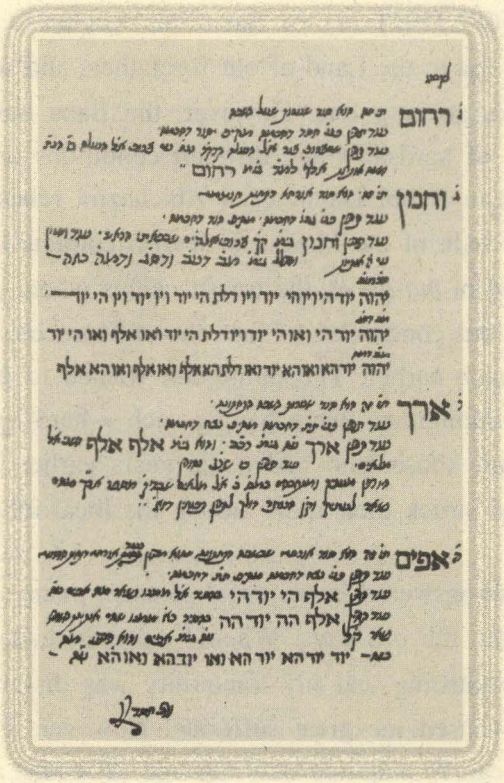
---

3. See Yevamot 62b "One who marries his sister's daughter … concerning him Scripture states: 'Then you will call and Hashem will respond; you will cry out and He will say 'Here I am." (Isaiah 58:9)

4. As we mentioned, in the chapter "In the Inner Chambers of the King" in the section on the Abir Yaakov, Rabenu Yaakov had his own *kavanot* – special intentions one should have in his prayers, differing from the standard manner of the Rasha"sh

great *Kabbalist* R' Eliyahu Legami and gaining expertise in the method of the Rasha"sh, which was more accepted among the *Kabbalists* of Jerusalem.

He viewed R' Moshe Turgeman, the *Baba Si ben Yoseph*, who at the time headed the Yeshiva in Tafilalet, as his principal teacher. It is interesting to note that already at the age of sixteen, he was appointed to head the *Metivta* of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov. His teacher supported the appointment and encouraged him to be firm in guiding the students' approach to learning. Not long afterwards, in 5669, [1908-9] a year after the passing of Rabenu Masud and at the beginning of the period of seclusion of Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, the Baba Sali was appointed administrative head of the Yeshiva.



The Baba Sali's list of *kavanot* for the *Yom Kippur* prayers.

"THEY JOURNEYED AND THEY ENCAMPED"

The tranquil life in Risani was cut off at the height of its glory when the forces of Moulay Muhammad occupied the region. In the winter of 5680 [1920], immediately after the cruel murder of the leader of the community, Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, the Baba Sali moved the entire family to Erfoud, where he was appointed head of the Rabbinical court in place of his brother and ancestors. Erfoud is about sixteen kilometers from Risani. From there they continued their wanderings until they reached the city of Budniv, approximately one hundred and twenty kilometers from Tafilalet. It was to Budniv that the central spiritual life of the Moroccan Jewish community was transplanted.

In the year 5682 [1921-22] the Baba Sali decided to fulfill his life's yearning to ascend to the Land of our forefathers and settle there. The journey was not an easy one. However, the Baba Sali would never retreat because of hardships and difficult conditions on the way. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that decades later, when the bulk of the Moroccan Jewish community made *aliyah* and were placed in *ma-abrot*, the transit camps where people suffered greatly in atrocious conditions, he met one of Morocco's Jews who had made *aliyah* much earlier. The immigrant wished to understand why the new *olim*, immigrants, were having such a hard time making the adjustment, while those who had come years earlier had acclimated quickly and had struck their roots among the local inhabitants.

The Baba Sali answered in his usual pleasant manner "Look! These days are not like the old days. When I came here decades ago, the journey was exhausting and my tranquility was disturbed by certain ordeals which caused me great suffering. However, I knew that the Land of Israel can be acquired only through suffering, as taught by R' Shimon bar Yochai (see Brachot 5a), therefore I rejoiced in the suffering.

Today when the *olim* come in planes that can cover the entire distance in a matter of hours, how will those immigrants acquire The Land without suffering for it?" We can learn from this that the ordeals that the Baba Sali underwent during his journey were equal to the long period of hardships that the new immigrants felt until they managed to acclimate themselves in The Land.[5]

After staying in *Eretz Yisrael* for about a year from 5682-5683 [1921-22], he returned to Morocco at the behest of his *Rebbi* R' Moshe Turgeman, who insisted that he return to lead the flock. He received a blessing for his journey from the venerable sage R' Shlomo Eliezer Alfandri of Jerusalem, who even encouraged him to leave The Land whose inhabitants had thrown off the yoke of *mitzvot* and accepted upon themselves the customs of the other nations.

While he lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, arrangements were made to publish the books of Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu.*[6] The Baba Sali's introduction to the book *Petach HaOhel* gives us some impression of his yearning to be in the Land of our forefathers.

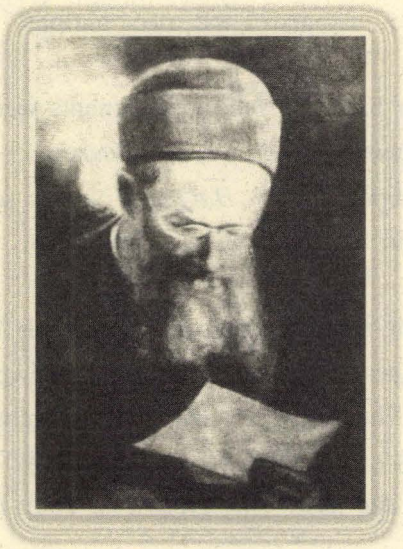
While he lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Baba Sali learned Torah and studied with the sages who lived there. His ostensible purpose was to ask them to view the books of his brother Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu,* but they also had the opportunity to observe their distinguished guest and assess his greatness. They honored him as he

---

5. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related that people would come to complain about the difficulty of adapting to life in Israel, saying that they were considering returning to Morocco. The Baba Sali would answer them angrily: "If someone does not love the Land of Israel, it does not love him, and if someone has a complaint against it, The Land will have a complaint against him".

6. When the Baba Sali returned to Morocco he brought with him "*Sechel Tov*" the only book which had already been printed. The rest he left for the publisher, until the year 5685 [1924] when his younger brother the Baba Chaki returned to complete the publishing.

deserved. Among the Sages living in *Eretz Yisrael* with whom the Baba Sali developed a close relationship, we should make special mention of the great sage R' Shimon Ashriki zt"l, the head of the Rabbinical courts in Yerushalayim; the Holy *Kabbalist* R' Eliyahu Legimi, one of the heads of the *Kabbalist* Yeshiva Beit E-l; the well-known sage and pillar of chesed, R' Yaakov ben Atar[7]; the great sage R' Eliyahu Iluz, head of the Rabbinical court in Tiberias and many more.[8] Nothing can compare, however, to the relationship he had with the elderly sage, R' Shlomo Alfandri. As the Baba Sali expressed it, "the great sage Rav Alfandri would not come close to everyone, and not everyone was permitted to come close to him, but he used to let me in and bring me close and he would show great love for me."



HaGaon Rav Yaakov ben Atar zt"l

---

7. Rabenu Yaakov ben Atar remembered the Baba Sali as an infant from when he stayed with Rabenu Masud on a visit to Tafilalet in the year 5651 [1890]. Rabenu Yaakov composed a song in honor of the Abir Yaakov – *"E-eroch Mahalal Nivi"* which became a sort of family anthem and was sung at every Abichazira family *simcha* and memorial dinner.

8. As we mentioned, the Baba Sali originally settled in Jerusalem but because of a particular incident he secretly moved to Tiberias (see section Abir Yaakov).

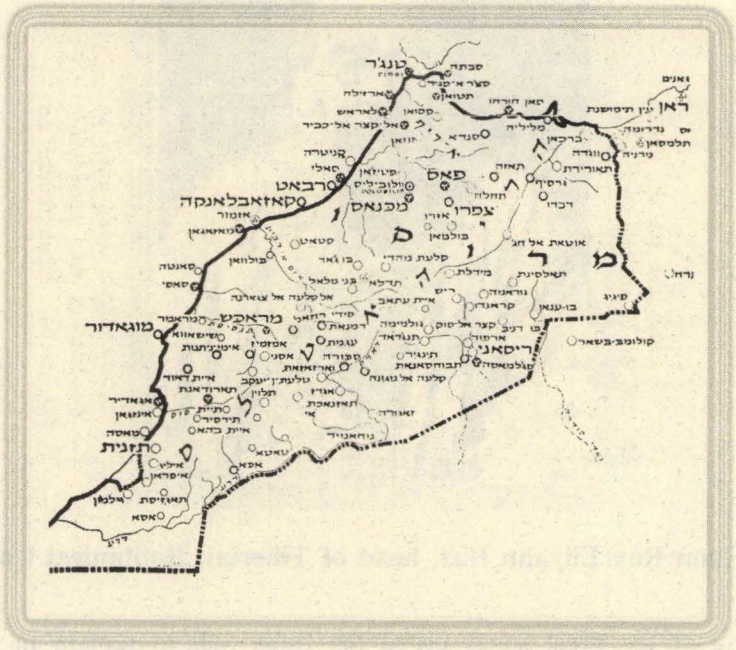


HaGaon Rav Eliyahu Iluz, head of Tiberian Rabbinical Court

Some of the great sages urged the Baba Sali to remain in Eretz Yisrael as he desired, and not to return to lead his flock in Tafilalet. One of the most persuasive was R' Eliyahu Iluz who said: "Baba Sali, you have given us life by coming to Tiberias; do not return to the Diaspora. Let us live by your shadow and in your shelter and not die!"

He took advantage of this, his first visit to *Eretz Yisrael*, to visit the graves of his holy forefathers. Twice, on his way to *Eretz Yisrael* and on his return from there, he visited the grave of his holy grandfather in Dimanhor. He even made a special trip to Syria in order to visit the grave of the patriarch of the family, Rabenu Shmuel Abichazira who is buried in Gubar near Damascus, not far from the grave of the prize student of the Arizal, R' Chaim Vital.

After his stay in the Holy Land ended abruptly, the Baba Sali took up the staff of leadership in Morocco once again.


טנג'ר
תטואן
ראס תרפשנת
תלמסאן
תאזה
פאס
מכנאס
צפרו
מרכאש
מוגאדור
מראכש
ריסאני
קולומב-בשאר
רתזנית

"THE LEFT PUSHES AWAY AND THE RIGHT BRINGS CLOSER" (Sanhedrin 107b)

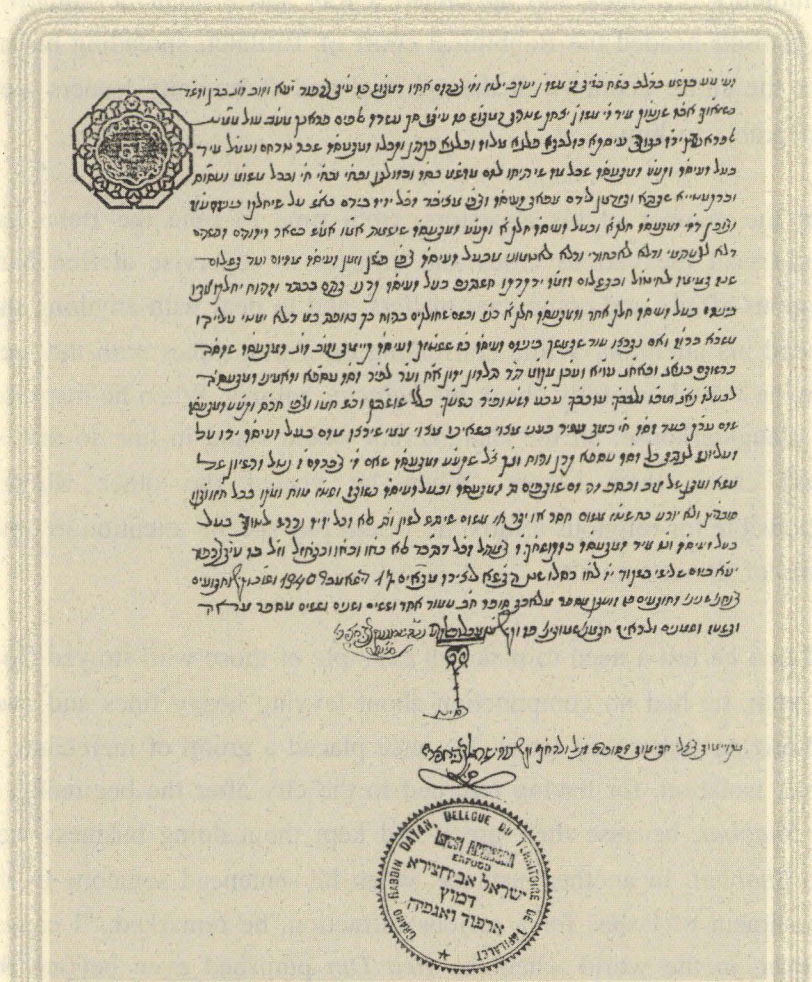
One familiar with the map of the Tafilalet region in Morocco knows that it contains tens of cities and villages. In each community the Baba Sali appointed a Rav and a *halachic* authority. He himself headed the Rabbinical court of Tafilalet, spreading his net over the entire country; all the spiritual and community leaders were answerable to him.

In the manner of his ancestors, from time to time the Baba Sali would visit the various cities and villages to supervise at first hand religious affairs and communal matters, and to deal with anything that needed his attention. While conversing on Torah topics with the local Rav, he would carefully check his *halachic* rulings. When he inspected the slaughterhouse, all the slaughterers would stand in line so that he could check their knives. When he visited the other workers responsible for religious affairs, he would pay special attention to other needs of the community.

When he felt a need to make an example of those who strayed from the path, he had no compunction about levying heavy fines and even authorizing lashes and arrest. He once placed a group of merchants in *niduy,* isolation, for having returned to the city after the beginning of the *Shabbat*, because their greed had kept them doing business well into *Shabbat*. In another instance, when he sentenced someone to the punishment of lashes for a serious infraction, he remarked, "I caused a storm in the world when the *Beit Din* punished even beyond the requirements of the law."

Although he stood firm in order to prevent breaches in the Jewish nation, his leadership was characterized by such modesty and humility that everyone felt comfortable turning to his leader at any time to seek counsel in any area. Many took advantage of the easy access he

allowed and knocked on his door seeking guidance, to be blessed and to see salvation.



The Baba Sali confirms a ruling of the Erfoud Rabbinical Court

"HASHEM HAS BROKEN THE STAFF OF THE WICKED, THE ROD OF RULERS" (Yeshayahu 14:5)

As local Rabbi, the Baba Sali enjoyed special status with the government, which gave him the authority to fine violators and to incarcerate them as he saw fit. In addition to these legal powers, he gained great respect from the entire hierarchy of the Moroccan government, when word spread of his miraculous actions and his uncanny ability to solve problems using means beyond the grasp of ordinary people.

The ruler of the city of Budniv was an evil man who was not above committing malicious acts against his own subjects. In addition to his innate wickedness he was also an anti-Semite, so the Jews of Budniv often bore the brunt of his wicked schemes. One of the wealthy people of the village, hoping to influence the ruler to act more favorably towards the Jewish people, made a party in his honor. All of the dignitaries of the community, headed by the Baba Sali, were invited to this gathering.

When the ruler arrived at the gathering, all rose in his honor and cleared a path to the head table. Along the way many bowed down in his honor and kissed his hand. When the Baba Sali arrived at the party, he was also invited to grace the head table. As he passed the ruler, he did not greet him, but took his staff and beat the ground in front of him, matching his action with a salvo of harsh words decrying his evil deeds. Those present trembled, knowing that the cruel ruler would not let such an affront to his dignity pass in silence. The host hurried to hide in an outhouse, lest he be accused of planning this embarrassing occurrence. Yet, to the surprise of all those present, the ruler put his head down in submission and begged the Baba Sali's forgiveness.

A few days later the ruler's son took ill. The local doctors were unable to diagnose the cause of his illness and summoned the country's

medical experts to the village, but they too failed to find the cause of the illness or to suggest any remedy. In distress, the ruler turned to the Baba Sali and asked him to bless his son whose condition was deteriorating. The Baba Sali acceded to his request. He arrived at the villa and was immediately ushered into the sick room. Standing next to the sick boy, the Baba Sali took from his pocket a watch which he had received as an inheritance from his brother, Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, and placed it under the patient's head. He promised the ruler that the next day his son would feel better and that he would recover completely.

The following day, the village of Budniv was in an uproar as the ruler's carriage made its way to the Baba Sali's home. In it were seated the ruler and his son, who had risen from his sickbed as if nothing had happened. From that time on the ruler became an ardent admirer of the Baba Sali, deferring to him in everything. His son too, who knew that his life had been given to him as a gift through the Baba Sali's blessing, always sought to be close to the Baba Sali, and was ready to assist him in any way he could. With the passage of time the son became Morocco's Minister of the Interior. It was he who annulled the law requiring the teaching of foreign languages and higher secular learning in the Jewish schools.

One of the officers of the French government in Morocco, who was above being accountable for his actions, lived for a time opposite the Baba Sali's home in Budniv. At the beginning of the month of Elul, when the Jewish people of the city would meet in the Baba Sali's *beit midrash* to recite *Selichot*, the officer threatened that if they continued to disturb his night's sleep, he would not hesitate to kill all those gathered there. When the Baba Sali approached the ruler of the city and told him about the officer's threats, he responded that he could do nothing, since the officer was of equal rank with him.

The Baba Sali said to his brother, the Baba Chaki, "The threats of the officer are nothing to worry about. If there is no judgment below,

then there is judgment above. He will die suddenly". The Baba Sali then informed his household that he had to travel to the city of Ohran in Algeria and asked that they inform him by telegraph if news came of the death of the officer.

That very evening, when the officer's wife entered his study to bring him a cup of tea, she was shocked to discover him lying sprawled on the couch with his head lolling on his chest. The wife, realizing that this was a result of her husband's threat to harm the Jews and their saintly leader, immediately ran to the Baba Sali's house. The Baba Sali was not home. She called a doctor who determined that the officer had died.

Another French officer, who was appointed military governor of one of the villages in Tafilalet, was also known as a fierce hater of the Jewish people, who did not hesitate to spill innocent blood. This was during World War II, when France was dominated by the pro-Nazi Vichy government, and the military governor did as he pleased. One day he put all of the community leaders in jail on a trumped-up libel charge. When word reached the Baba Sali, he went straight to the village and arranged a meeting with the military governor for the same afternoon.

The conversation began with a heated argument when the governor pointed out that the Baba Sali was half an hour late. The Baba Sali responded that he had been obliged to daven *Mincha* before the meeting began. The governor, a devout Catholic, began to shout and curse the Jews. The Baba Sali responded to each of his claims. When he claimed that the Christians had to avenge the blood of their prophet, may his name be obliterated, the Baba Sali responded that the person the Jews had put to death was a Jew who denied G-d and that non-Jews have no right to get involved in internal Jewish matters. The Christian governor was not only unconvinced, but became even more incensed, exclaiming, "I have to avenge his blood from the Jews under my command!"

The Baba Sali stood up and slapped the governor across the face once and then twice: "Now I understand that it is not righteousness and honesty which govern you," he shouted at the governor. "It is hatred and base fanaticism which boil within you. In their name you are willing to punish people who are totally innocent."

The governor, very insulted by the Baba Sali's words and by the slap across his face in front of his family, took his pistol out of its holster and aimed it at the Baba Sali, who continued with his piercing words of rebuke. After a few seconds, the governor suddenly threw the pistol from his hand and begged the Baba Sali to forgive him. "If you are willing to sacrifice yourself for the sake of others, even though you know that I have the power to harm you and even to take your life, then I must honor you and respect your integrity.

The Baba Sali who had not been frightened in the least by the officer's threat, did not hurry to accept his capitulation. He made his forgiveness conditional on the release of the prisoners and on receiving a clear commitment not to do further harm to the Jewish people of the village.

Word of these stories and others quickly spread throughout the kingdom, publicizing the name of the Baba Sali in the palaces of the various rulers, who were in fear of him from then on. They knew what awaited them if they tried to trouble the Jewish community or their religion. In the Baba Sali we see a fulfillment of the verse: "Kings will be your nurturers and their princesses your wet nurses. With faces to the ground they will prostrate themselves to you; they will lick the dust of your feet ... then all flesh will know that I am Hashem, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." (Yeshayahu 49:23,26).

THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS ACQUIRED IN ... STAGES

Ten years passed and the Baba Sali's yearning for Eretz Yisrael only grew stronger with time. His previous excursion had been for the express purpose of bringing the works of Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu* to publication. This time, however, the Baba Sali was determined to settle permanently in the Land of our forefathers. Any attempt at persuading him otherwise met with no success and finally in the year 5693 [1932-33], he ascended to the Land of Israel accompanied by his young assistant Moshe Sheetrit z"l.

The head of the Rabbinical court of the *Eida Chareidit*, HaGaon HaRav Pinchas Epstein[9], testified that all the sages of Jerusalem went out to welcome him as he alighted from the train that had brought him from the port of Jaffa. He had sailed to Jaffa directly from Alexandria, Egypt where he had stopped to prostrate himself by the grave of his saintly grandfather the Abir Yaakov.

He took up residence in Yerushalayim, in the home of a member of the Rabbinical Court of the Western community, HaGaon R' Yoseph Shlush zt"l who was highly regarded by the Baba Sali for his Torah wisdom and his pleasant ways. The Baba Sali had originally attempted to settle in one of the towns in the Galil but the publicity aroused by

---

9. When the Baba Sali sent his son-in-law to bake matzot for him in the holy city of Jerusalem, he gave him specific instructions. He added that he should visit the head of the Rabbinical Court of the Eida Chareidit, HaRav Pinchas Epstein and ask him to give his own *hechsher* for the *matzot*. When the head of the Rabbinical Court heard who the *matzot* were meant for, he acquiesced, saying: "Do as he instructed; I am announcing in advance that the *matzot* about to be baked are of the highest standard of *kashrut*." Those present were astonished that he gave a *hechsher* so quickly, in total contrast with his usual manner. He added, "Do you not know of whom we are speaking? From the days of my youth I still remember the visit of R' Abichazira who was then very young, when all of the sages of Jerusalem went out to give him a glorious welcome ... a man as great as this has no need for my *hechsher*."

a miracle which he performed had made it impossible for him to remain there. He had opened the Ar"I's synagogue which had previously been sealed, since everyone who entered its portals was suddenly taken from this world. As his greatness became known in the region, Rabenu Yisrael elected to return to a life of relative anonymity in Jerusalem. This is what happened.

In those days Rabenu Yisrael would often travel to prostrate himself by the graves of the *tzaddikim* buried in the Land of Israel. When he resided in Tiberias he took advantage of the opportunity to visit the graves of the *tannaim*, *Amoraim*, *Geonim*, and *Kabbalists* buried in the Galil. One day while on a visit to Tzefat, Rabenu Yisrael asked his assistant to show him the road to the Ar"I's grave. The assistant explained to him that the synagogue had been sealed shut after a few people who entered its Sanctuary had died suddenly.

The Baba Sali refused to concede defeat and sent his assistant to the home of the city elder who held the keys and asked him to open the gates. The elder was concerned for the safety of the Baba Sali and refused to give him the key, claiming, "Handing over the key to one who will die from it, is literally like taking his life." After much pleading by the assistant, the elder gave in, handed him the key and even accompanied him to the synagogue. As soon as they arrived at the synagogue, before they went inside, the elder tied a long string to the key, in case anything untoward should happen.

The Baba Sali entered the courtyard of the synagogue and instructed his assistant to hold on to his robe. "You have no cause for worry," he stated calmly. The two of them walked on the right side of the courtyard until they reached the door of the synagogue. Even though it was twilight, the moment the Baba Sali opened the door, the place lit up with precious holy lights. The Baba Sali turned to the *aron hakodesh*, took out one of the *sifrei Torah* and read from it. Afterwards, he instructed his assistant to let go of his robe, promising



categorically that no harm would ever again befall anyone who entered the gates of the synagogue. The Baba Sali and his assistant then prayed *Mincha* and took their leave.

That same elder who had waited anxiously outside the synagogue did not believe his eyes, when he saw the Baba Sali leaving the synagogue completely unharmed. The Baba Sali, who did not seem at all surprised by the miracle which he had just brought about, asked the *gabbai* to publicize to all the residents of the city that there was no further reason to fear entering the synagogue of the Arizal.

One evening when they had just concluded the *Maariv* prayer at the home of HaGaon HaRav Yoseph Shlush, the Baba Sali stood up and began to recite the entire *Shir HaShirim*, explaining deep Kabalistic concepts in this work known as "*holy of holies*"[10]. As he was speaking, the entranced listeners tried to memorize these wondrous hidden matters in order to be able to write them down for posterity. However, when the Baba Sali finished, he said, "I do not wish these things to be written down ... and this is your sign, when you arrive in your homes you will forget all that you have heard here, with the exception of the interpretation of one verse." Much to everyone's amazement, all those present were indeed unable to remember anything that had been said[11]. As opposed to the glory

---

10. The *mishna* states: "The entire world is not as worthwhile as the day when *Shir HaShirim* was given to the Jewish people, for all of Scripture is holy, and *Shir HaShirim* is holy of holies" (Yadayim 3:5).

11. Even when he headed the holy Yeshiva of Tafilalet, he instructed the students that anything he said should not be publicized for he felt that he might be overcome with pride. When he once gave a lengthy *shiur* filled with incredible *chiddushim*, one of his close students decided to go against his wish and record the entire shiur in writing. He was amazed to see that when he took the pen in hand he had forgotten all of his new insights. He racked his brains in an attempt to recall the contents but he produced nothing. The student returned to the holy Yeshiva and tried to clarify the subject matter by discussing the *shiur* with his fellow disciples. Again he returned to his room in order to record all that he had just summarized and organized. Again he

of his leadership in Tafilalet, that was his way in those days, to conceal his greatness from all.

The Torah giants and sages of Jerusalem discovered him and admired his greatness, as well as the humility that was part of it. In his simple manner he did not glorify himself with a rabbinic position; he preferred to learn regularly in the Porat Yoseph Yeshiva, and not to reveal his greatness. However, it was enough to observe him while he learned, to witness how he and the Torah were one, in order to understand what depths were hidden in this young sage. From the small hours, after the *vatikin* prayers were over, until the late hours of the night, he was to be found in his corner studying the Torah.

During that entire period, the Baba Sali learned with the great sage, R' Ezra Ataya zt"l, who served as the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Porat Yoseph. HaGaon R' Ataya would tell his many students about the Baba Sali, "Now he is *Rosh Yeshiva* and not I." The Baba Sali for his part, felt great distress at the honor that he was given in the Yeshiva, and more than once he complained to R' Ezra Ataya, "The world is mistaken about me." When HaGaon R' Ataya would respond, "Humility is great," the Baba Sali answered in typically pithy fashion, "Humility after ability!" meaning that only a person who is filled with spiritual content, or one who has some ability, can be considered humble when he does not show off his greatness. However, in one who has neither Torah nor *mitzvot*, nor piety, nor fear of heaven, simplicity is merely his essence and not based on humility.

The Sages of Jerusalem, who had known him from his youth, when it had not yet occurred to him to conceal himself, were the ones who appreciated his greatness and were amazed at his diligence.

---

did not succeed in remembering the insights that had been revealed in the lecture. Later, when the Baba Sali met him, he said to him: "If you wish to remember my shiur, do not attempt to record it in writing ... I promise you that the moment you attempt to write it, you will forget everything".



One evening, when the many sages who had been visiting him in the home of HaGaon R' Yoseph, left for their homes, the Baba Sali noticed a young scholar waiting for him by the door, holding several bound books under his arm. When the Baba Sali asked what he wanted, the scholar said that he was from Jerusalem, from the ranks of those who learned Torah in great poverty, a scion of a very illustrious family. Because he was in dire financial straits he was forced to sell the few things of value that he possessed. He owned a small *Shas*, the Lemburg edition, an inheritance from his holy ancestors. He was unwilling to sell it to a Jew who did not appreciate its true worth or to a book dealer who would not take its value into account and would have no qualms about allowing it to pass into strange hands. Now that he had become aware of who the Baba Sali was, having followed him around for a while, he thought perhaps he might wish to purchase this *Shas* from him, because it would befit him to study from the holy *Shas* that the Torah giants of Jerusalem had used.

The Baba Sali took one of the volumes and opened it. On the title page he saw the signature of R' Shimon Nota Biderman, son of HaRav HaKadosh R' Dovidel, son of the Jerusalemite *Rebbe* R' Elazar Menachem Mendel, the grandson of R' David of Lelov. It appeared that this young scholar was none other than the Lelover *Rebbe*! The Baba Sali, paid a very high price for the *Shas*, far more than its market value. He was deeply impressed by the refined manner of this young *Rebbe*, who even in times of distress, went to great lengths to avoid treating the property of his holy ancestors with disrespect.

Thirty-six years passed and the Baba Sali now lived in Yavne. One day, a close disciple of R' Moshe Mordechai of Lelov told his *Rebbi* that he had visited the Baba Sali, who had given him a blessing which had immediately borne fruit. Greatly excited, the disciple told the Lelover *Rebbe* about the power of the Baba Sali's blessings that he had witnessed with his own eyes.

When the *Rebbe* heard the name "Rav Abichazira" he was filled with great emotion, saying " In my youth I too had the privilege of meeting a great *tzaddik* by the name of Rav Abichazira, but it must be a different person, for he already appeared quite old and in all probability he is no longer in this world." The *Rebbe* then related the story of the *Shas* that was purchased from him when he was poor and suffering.

Now that he had a sign, the disciple hurried to Yavne, where he told the Baba Sali all about the Lelover *Rebbe* in Jerusalem, and omitting what he had heard from the *Rebbi* about him. The Baba Sali heard but did not react until the disciple was about to take his leave, when the Baba Sali opened a drawer and took out one volume of the Lemberg *Shas*. He opened the first page and showed the *chassid* the signature of the holy R' Dovidel Biderman, ancestor of the Lelover *Rebbe*, adding with a broad smile, "This *Shas* was sold to me by R' Moshele ... he had a red beard," In other words, "I already know the purpose of your coming to me today."

When the Lelover *Rebbe* heard that the Baba Sali was the same man whom he had met decades earlier, his demeanor became serious and he said "If it is truly him then we must prepare ourselves in order to greet a *tzaddik*."

About two years after the first visit of the Lelover *Rebbi* to the Baba Sali, one of his *Chassidim*, a G-d fearing Jerusalemite, told the *Rebbe* that he had just visited the Baba Sali and he merited receiving his blessing. When the Baba Sali's name was mentioned to the *Rebbe*, he said:

"When I knew him he was still young. The year Rav Abichazira visited *Eretz Yisrael*, I followed his conduct closely. Even though he concealed his actions, I was able to uncover things in the merit of my holy fathers. He worked on himself and his service of Hashem was awesome. He undertook fasts and other forms of afflictions, immersing himself often in cold *mikvaot* and fasting from one *Shabbat* to the next. He would often remain awake entire nights studying *Chassidic* and other works. This is a true servant of G-d!"

A few years later during the *Rebbi*'s Tu B'Shevat *tisch* in 5735 [1975], he turned to his son, who would eventually take his place as Admor of the Lelov dynasty in Jerusalem, and asked him whether he had visited Rav Abichazira in Netivot, adding:

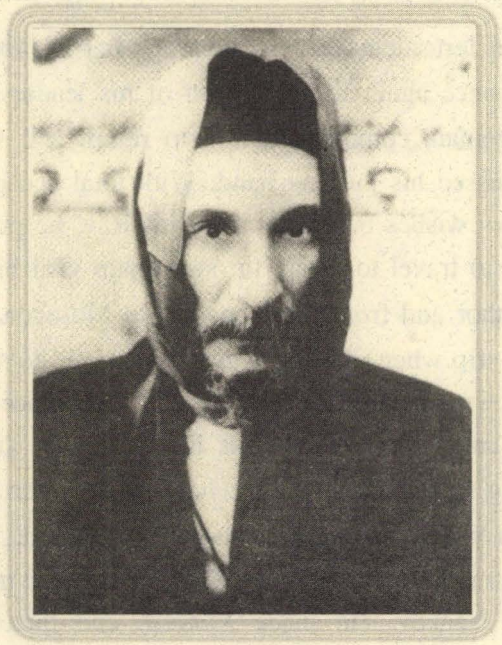
"**I** met him when he was in Jerusalem in the year 5693 [1932-33]. He was staying at the home of Rav Shlush near Rehov HaYehudim ... his service of Hashem was tremendous. Today we do not realize this because he is already an old man. We cannot know how hard he worked in his youth, because of his great humility. Had he not worked so hard at serving Hashem in his youth, he would not have achieved such humility."

These holy conversations are worthy of being recorded in writing to teach us about the Baba Sali's lofty level, as perceived by the Sages of Jerusalem. He achieved this level by means of toil beyond words, by overpowering both nature and his natural character traits, negating all pleasures and by channeling all his resources towards heavenly pursuits.

His sojourn in Jerusalem did not last long after all, for the people of Morocco were once again in great need of his leadership. His *Rebbi* R' Moshe Turgeman, commanded him to return and serve his flock which sorely missed his guiding hand. With total acceptance, entirely negating his own wishes before those of his Rav, he promptly packed his possessions to travel to Egypt to once again visit his grandfather's grave in Dimanhor and from there onward to Morocco. It was during a storm on that trip when massive waves threatened to sink the ship in mid-ocean that a great and famous miracle took place and the Baba Sali incredibly calmed the sea. It was *Erev Shabbat*, just as the Baba Sali was waiting to welcome the *Shabbat* Queen, when he was told of the great storm which threatened everyone on board. The Baba Sali serenely picked up from the table the *Kiddush* cup that he had inherited from the Abir Yaakov. He made *Kiddush* and then instructed his assistant to pour the remaining wine into the stormy sea. The moment the lad did so, the storm ceased and the wild waves became calm.



The Baba Sali with HaRav Moshe Mordechai, the Lelover *Rebbe*



The Baba Sali during his second sojourn in *Eretz Yisrael*



The Baba Sali in his youth

LEADER IN STORMY WATERS

On the Baba Sali's return to Tafilalet, the entire community gave him a royal welcome and consolidated around him in his renewed leadership. During his time in *Eretz Yisrael*, his influence had been less obvious, though he had continued to supervise all communal matters, guiding the assembly, its leaders, and its benefactors from afar. Before leaving Morocco, he had appointed his eldest son R' Meir as *Rosh Yeshiva*; on his return he allowed him to retain his position, ensuring that he also received Rabbinical ordination that year.

The ensuing years saw many great upheavals in local affairs well as in the rest of the world. The Nazi régime which rose to power in Germany, had ambitions to reign from Tifsa to Azza (see Sanhedrin 20b), and initiated hostilities which developed into a world war of massive proportions. North Africa, which had been mostly under French rule had already been captured by the Vichy régime, which was devoted to the Nazis. All that remained for the Germans to do was to establish direct control in the area. The Baba Sali, in an effort to hasten salvation for his flock, took counsel with his step-brother R' Masud Sheetrit, the Baba Sidi. Together they decided that a *minyan* of *talmidei chachamim* would undergo a *taanit dibbur* every day and would recite the entire *Sefer Tehillim* daily until Hashem saw the suffering of His oppressed people. Indeed, only a short time later, the allies arrived and pushed the Germans, may their name be obliterated, out of Morocco.



Rav Masud Sheetrit, the Baba Sidi

Throughout the Second World War, which was characterized by upheavals in nearly every country in the world, the Baba Sali stood by the members of his community, to comfort them and encourage them to be strong and not despair in the face of trouble. He urged them to anticipate better days, which would surely come. In the years after the war, refugees from all over the world gathered in Eretz Yisrael and established their own government, Morocco became a hotbed of "*aliyah* activists," who went from city to village to settlement to encourage people to make *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Baba Sali's community was not easily persuaded; they decided to consult their Rav and wait to hear his verdict. Many of them received his blessing to go and settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, while others heeded his advice to remain for the time being in Morocco.

This is what the Baba Sali was to them during those turbulent times – a captain who guides his ship in stormy waters, keeping the passengers safe, while the waves are breaking on the sides of the vessel.

"LET NOT THE RICH MAN GLORIFY HIMSELF WITH HIS WEALTH" (Yirmiyahu 9:22)

For the next seventeen years while the people of Tafilalet benefited from the presence of the Baba Sali among them, they thought that he had abandoned his plan to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. In fact, he yearned to return to the Land and live permanently within its borders, but he kept his feelings to himself, knowing how much the community relied on him. His son R' Meir, no longer served beside his father for in the year 5705 [1944-45] he was appointed head of the Rabbinical court in the large city of Midelt. The entire burden now fell on the shoulders of the Baba Sali, who was then at the height of his glory, reigning literally as a king.

The Talmud Yerushalmi asks, "Why is he referred to as Nahum *Ish Kodesh HaKodoshim*? Because he never looked at the shape of a coin." (*Megilla perek* 3, *halacha* 2). Similarly, The Baba Sali did not relate to money as other people did.

It is interesting to note that although his home was spacious and affluent, none of the novel and attractive technological wonders which were becoming available crossed his holy threshold. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira shlit"a, related that when the Baba Sali returned to Morocco in the year 5714 [1953-54] after another stay in *Eretz Yisrael*, technological advances had made changes in the neighborhoods outside the Jewish *Malach* – there was running water and electricity for home lighting. Even refrigerators were seen here and there. When the ruler of the city of Erfoud heard that the Baba Sali had returned to his province, he offered to build him an impressive house filled with modern appliances. The Baba Sali refused, explaining that he did not wish to change by one iota the way that his ancestors had lived.

In the final years of his residence in Tafilalet, the first generator was set up in Tafilalet. At the beginning it worked only until midnight. At

this late stage, when electricity had become widespread, the Baba Sali permitted it to be installed in his household for the sake of the other members of the family. Curiously, a little miracle used to happen every time the students gathered to learn with the Baba Sali at night. The worker whose job it was to switch off the generator at midnight would doze off and wake up only when they had finished learning. One *Shabbat* a feast was held in honor of two Sifrei Torah donated to the synagogue. The Baba Sali joined in the rejoicing. About half an hour before midnight, just before he left to go home, he told the donor that as long as they continued to rejoice in honor of the Torah, there would be light. And in fact it was only at five o' clock in the morning, when the last of the people had left for a short rest, that the generator operator woke up and disconnected the electricity in the whole city.

While it is accepted that technology solves problems and helps people with their difficulties, in the home of the Baba Sali these problems never arose. On the hottest days, when the heat of the sun forced people into their houses, there was not a single bead of sweat to be found on the residents of the Baba Sali's home, where the air remained as fresh as on an autumn day. When they slaughtered a sheep for the household and for their many guests, they did not have to place it in the icebox or in a cool room, but rather they hung it up on the rafters of the ceiling of the house. The meat stayed fresh, as if it were one of the ten miracles that took place in the Beit HaMikdash, where "the sacrificial meat never rotted." (Avot 5:5).

It has been told by the family and by regular visitors to the Baba Sali's home in Risani, that the same house which had served the Abir Yaakov continued to serve the entire family, in spite of its great age and crumbling walls. Large holes had developed in some of the walls, allowing dangerous snakes to come inside. Miraculously the snakes never bit anyone. Poisonous scorpions too were sometimes seen

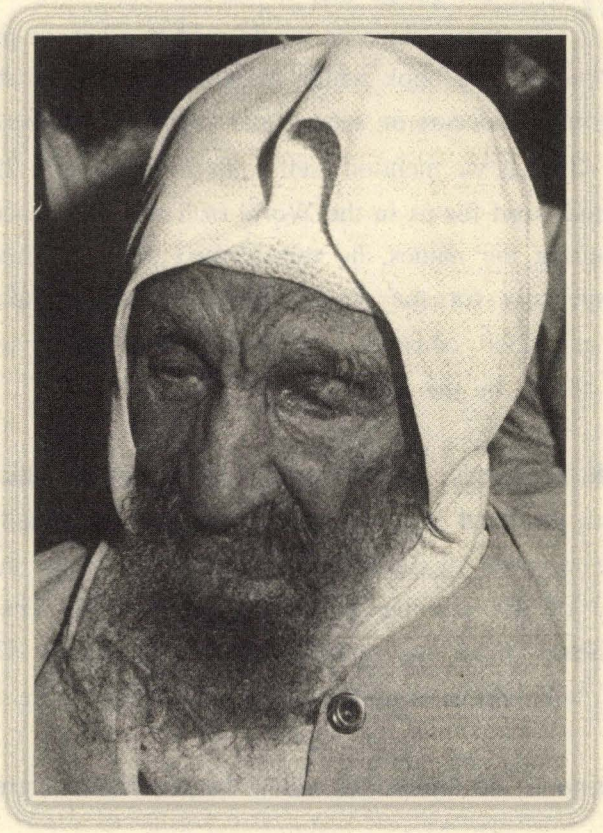
scurrying about the floor of the house, yet none of the people who walked barefoot in the house was ever stung.[12]

Although abundance was apparent in every corner of the house and in the royal generosity of his conduct, hidden amidst the wealth were the penances and fasts that the Baba Sali inflicted upon himself. We know about the permanent fasts, on Mondays and Thursdays when he would only eat at night, as well as every day during the weeks of *Shovavim*. Added to these were the days between Tu B'Av and *Yom Kippur* in the years when he did not observe *taanit hafsaka* during the month of Elul, when he would fast every day besides *Shabbatot* and festivals. And who can even count all the *taaniyot dibur* that he undertook?

While people like us are used to filling ourselves with food and drink during the *seudah hamafseket* which precedes a fast and some people even wake before dawn to eat before a fast the Baba Sali was accustomed to long fasts and did not need to eat extra after a fast nor to eat more beforehand. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira once said that for the *melave malka* which was his last meal before his *taanit hafsaka* he ate only leftover *Shabbat challa* dipped in tea, which was more than enough for him.



12. This is the place to bring the testimony of R' Avraham Sabag, the Baba Sali's assistant in Tafilalet from the year 5714 [1953-54] until he made *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael. He would accompany the Baba Sali to the *mikveh* across a thorn-field full of dangerous snakes which did not hide in their holes but slithered around silently on their bellies. He often pointed out to the Baba Sali the great danger of walking in that area. The Baba Sali would dismiss these concerns, saying, "These are messengers of Hashem," until R' Avraham himself became accustomed to their presence and was no longer afraid.



"HILULA DETZADIKAYA"

Most of the meals that he ate between fasts were *seudot mitzvah*, since he would read to all those present from *Hilula deTzadikaya,* a book which mentions the names of *tzaddikim* whose *Yom hillula* occurs on a particular day[13]. The Baba Sali always concluded, "Just as we mention their souls in this world, they too will put in a good word for us in the World of Truth." He once explained that by reciting the names, he transformed the meal into a *seudat mitzvah* especially for the simple folk who would take part, for otherwise any food consumed beyond the minimum required for survival is shared by the *sitra achara.*

Although the practice of reciting the names was introduced in order to transform the meal into a *seudat mitzvah*, he eventually began to hold these *mitzvah* feasts every night, each night marking the anniversary of the passing of a different *tzaddik.* The following incident, heard from his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, will help us to understand just how lofty these meals were.

One afternoon, the Baba Sali asked the Rabbanit to prepare a big

---

13. The Baba Sali would visit the graves of the *tzaddikim* in Eretz Yisrael. From time to time he would visit the graves of the holy *tannaim*, R' Shimon bar Yochai and R' Meir Baal HaNess, though he would avoid visiting these graves on the anniversary of their deaths, because of the improper atmosphere and the intermingling of men and women which took place there on those days. On the other hand, he would go to Jerusalem to visit the graves of R' Sholom Sharabi (the Rasha"sh) and R' Chaim ben Atar (the Ohr HaChaim) on the anniversary of their passing. He once went to the grave of Shmuel HaNavi in Northern Jerusalem on the anniversary of his passing on the 28th of Iyar.

One of Rabenu Meir's followers recorded his remarks on 15 Iyar 5742 [1982] to a group who asked him about making the trip to Meron on the anniversary of the passing of R' Shimon bar Yochai. "I am not saying anything one way or the other ... in the *responsa* of the Chatam Sofer (Yoreh Deah 233) he is very doubtful about the source for this custom ... regarding R' Shimon bar Yochai, it is after all said, "Scholars who are studying Torah have to interrupt their studies for the recitation of the *Shma* but they do not interrupt their studies for prayer. R' Yochanan said,

feast, for that evening was the anniversary of the passing of R' Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, author of "*Pri Haaretz*". However by afternoon the Baba Sali felt very weak and was obliged to take to his bed, where he rested for several hours. That evening no one was permitted to enter his room, and the tens of guests who knocked on the door of the house were sent away empty-handed. The Rabbanit, seeing his condition, had put all the food that she had prepared into the freezer.

At two o' clock in the morning, the Baba Sali arose from his bed, opened the door, summoned the Rabbanit and asked her to set the table for the *yahrzeit* meal. The Rabbanit was very surprised: "For whom shall we organize a meal at this late hour of the night?" The Baba Sali simply repeated his request to set the table.

When she had finished, he asked her to open the door to see if anyone was outside. She was very surprised to discover a group of *Chassidim* standing outside the gate of the house. They told her that they were on their way back home from a town in the South and as they passed near Netivot, they decided to go to the Baba Sali's home, if only to see it and to kiss the *mezuzah* at the door. They were quite surprised to be invited into the house, and astonished when they were called into the Baba Sali's room and he urged them to wash their hands to join him for the *seudat mitzvah* on the occasion of the anniversary of the passing of the holy Rav from Vitebsk.

After they had sat down to eat, the Baba Sali related the following: "Today I was too weak to have the *seudat mitzvah* in honor of his *yom hillula*, as I had wished to do initially. However, a short while ago, the author of *Pri Haaretz* appeared to me asking me why I did

---

'They taught this ruling only in regard to people such as R' Shimon bar Yochai and his colleagues, whose only occupation is their study of Torah'" (Shabbat 11a). We, however, must strengthen our Torah learning on this day."

not make a *seudat mitzvah* for him as I did for all the other *tzaddikim*. I apologized and replied that I was feeling very weak and did not have the strength even to get off the bed. The *tzaddik* took me by the hand and helped me off the bed in order that I be able to hold the meal in his honor. You have the merit of joining me in this meal."



MASSECHET TAANIT

The abundance enjoyed at those meals conducted by the Baba Sali could not be described even by those who participated in them. There were never more than ten to twelve people at the meal, at times he invited only two or three of those close to him. Not one of those present would ever have dared to come without an invitation. The Baba Sali himself ate very little of what was served, yet those who scrutinized photographs of these meals would notice that the Baba Sali's plate was full, while the guests' plates were empty ... for this was his holy demeanor towards the plenty which surrounded him throughout his life - to cover up, to hide, to conceal his self-denial.

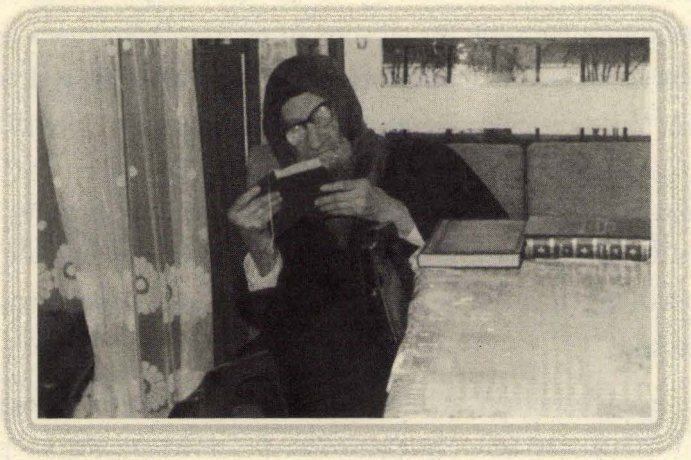
It never entered the minds of the many guests who were a constant presence in the house that while the *tzaddik* was insisting that they eat, he himself had not eaten or drunk for several days. The profusion of food on his table did not affect him in any way and certainly did not interfere in the least with his tremendous devotion to the One Who Gives Life.

Even on days when he did not prepare these *seudot mitzvah*, and his meals were brought to him by his assistant or household members, he would refuse the plate for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes he would claim that he wished to rest before eating, then after his rest he would say, "The food is cold. Besides, I am not hungry." Sometimes he would say that he would eat later and in the meantime they should bring him a radish or a cucumber. Later, when they brought him his food, he would stare at it in amazement, asking, "Why are you serving me such filling food ... it is not healthy to eat these things before going to bed!"

Meat, even if served at the table, did not enter his mouth. This included *Shabbatot* and *Chagim* when his food would be prepared separately. Few noticed that he never tasted the meat, because he concealed how little food he ate. Only the family members who were entrusted to prepare his meals were aware of this practice.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a tells us that each time he washed his hands before eating, a *halachic* question arose regarding his obligation to recite *Birkat HaMazon*, for he certainly did not eat enough to satisfy himself. Furthermore, the fact that he was not accustomed to eating meant that he would have to eat his *Shabbat* morning meal very early in order to have an appetite to eat the requisite *kezayit* for *seudah shlishit* before it became dark.

This reminds us of the holy *Rebbe* of Rizhin's well-known interpretation of the saying of *Chazal*: "The entire world is sustained 'בשביל' (lit. for the sake of) Chanina, My son" (Brachot 17b). The word בשביל also means "in the path of". The *Rebbe* interpreted this saying as follows: "The path of the *tzaddik* – that of generosity and abundance, sustains the entire world. However, 'Chanina, my son, is satisfied with just a *kav* of carobs from one *Erev Shabbat* to the next *Erev Shabbat*'" (ibid.).





HOLY WATERS

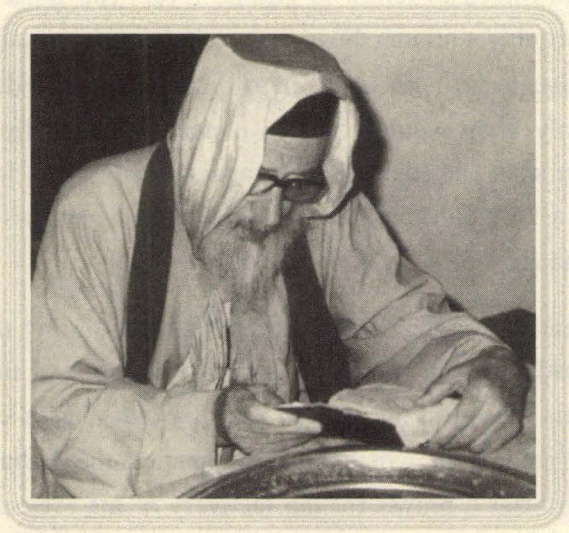
The holy acts, the constraints and the precautions with which he guarded himself from the lures of this world were so extreme in their stringency, that it is difficult to understand how he was able to maintain this level throughout all of life's circumstances, including his many journeys where sometimes neither the time nor the place was conducive to abstinence.

The *mikveh* which the Baba Sali had used in Tafilalet was nothing more than a deep pit which had been dug in the courtyard of his house, involving a descent of ninety-one steep steps. The waters of the *mikveh* came from a cold spring which at times literally froze. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, recalls the days of his youth in Morocco when the assistant would help his holy grandfather down to the *mikveh* in the darkness of the night with an oil lantern in his hand. The moment he started climbing down the steps to the *mikveh*, the lamp would be extinguished by the dampness prevalent in those depths and they relit it time after time. In addition, when the assistant was only halfway down the steps, he would sometimes begin to shiver from the extreme cold emanating from the depths of the earth and would be forced to return to ground level. The Baba Sali did not flinch and would continue down into the *mikveh*, counting together with the assistant the number of steps with profound hidden *kavanot*. When his holy body would come in contact with the freezing water, he would immerse and then immerse again. Many years later when he was already a very old man, the Baba Sali said of himself: "Never did the cold conquer me!"

His assistant R' Avraham Amuyal testified that during the winter he sometimes had to break the ice in order to immerse in the river. The greatest of his disciples, the *tzaddik* and *Kabbalist*, R' Yichye Shneur, related one incident in which he accompanied the Baba Sali to the synagogue to offer a prayer for the recovery of his esteemed father R' Masud, who was on his sickbed. On the way they wished to immerse

in the *mikveh*. The building housing the *mikveh* was exposed and the extreme cold had penetrated inside, freezing the water solid. The Baba Sali was not intimidated, but broke the blocks of ice, injuring himself in the process, and then went down to immerse. When he came out he persuaded his disciple to immerse as well. The Baba Sali was not yet nineteen years old.

Early one morning when the Baba Sali wished to immerse in the waters of the river, he was unable to find the keys to let himself out of the house. It seeems that the Rabbanit, out of concern for his health, had hidden the key. The previous day there had been heavy skirmishes between the French army and the local rebels and the waters of the river were full of glass shards and other sharp objects making immersing there a great danger. The Baba Sali, who had never missed his morning immersion, insisted on going out anyway, emphasizing that in his eyes, not immersing is a definite loss, while being harmed by a piece of glass is only within the realm of possibility. The outcome was that the Rabbanit was unable to withstand his persistence and in the end she handed him the key. The Baba Sali went down to the river and did in fact sustain an injury. But how great was his joy on that day!



The saintly Kabbalist Rav Yichye Shneur zt"l

His faithful friend, HaRav HaGaon R' Masud Malul Shlit"a related to us what he saw in Erfoud. A man once came before davening to tell the Baba Sali about a member of the community who had had the audacity to mock the Baba Sali and to speak negatively about him. The man thought that the Baba Sali would be angry at his fellow-townsman's foolish words, but the Baba Sali was more upset at the other man's tale-bearing: "A man can voice any opinion to me and I will have no complaint," the Baba Sali said to him, "but you who have come to speak *loshon hara*, you are the insolent one." After the man had gone on his way, the Baba Sali wished to immerse again prior to praying, for one does not come to pray while in a state of anger, and this was therefore a new prayer requiring [re-immersion and] a new purification.

After the passing of the Baba Sali, one of his close acquaintances in Morocco related that one year, heavy snow fell in Tafilalet. The Yeshiva students went out into the yard to play in the snow, piling it up in mounds. When the Baba Sali saw those heaps of snow, he requested that the students build them higher and higher. The students did as the Baba Sali asked, without knowing the reason. When they returned to their learning, the Baba Sali summoned a friend to go out with him into the Yeshiva courtyard. He locked and bolted the gate of the yard, removed his clothes and lay down on the rough snow, asking him to cover his entire body so that only his face remained uncovered. After a few moments, he arose and dressed, and when he returned home he asked his acquaintance not to tell anyone what he had seen.

His conduct at the time of immersion was exemplary in its modesty. When he had removed his outer robes and all that remained was the inner garment which enveloped his entire body, he would go down to immerse. As he entered the water, he would remove the robe, leaving the *kippah* on his head until his whole body was covered in water. Following the immersion he hurriedly replaced the *kippah* on his head, and put on his robe while emerging from the *mikveh*.

While living in France in 5714 [1953-54], he spent several months in Yeshivat Ohr Yoseph which was in an outlying village, about fifty kilometers from Paris. Each morning, the Baba Sali would catch a ride in the Yeshiva's old car which struggled along the road to Paris in order to supply the Yeshiva boys with kosher food. He would then use the *mikveh* there. In spite of the fact that he was over sixty years old, and spent the majority of his days fasting, the Baba Sali did not miss the journey to Paris even once, allowing nothing to prevent his morning immersion.

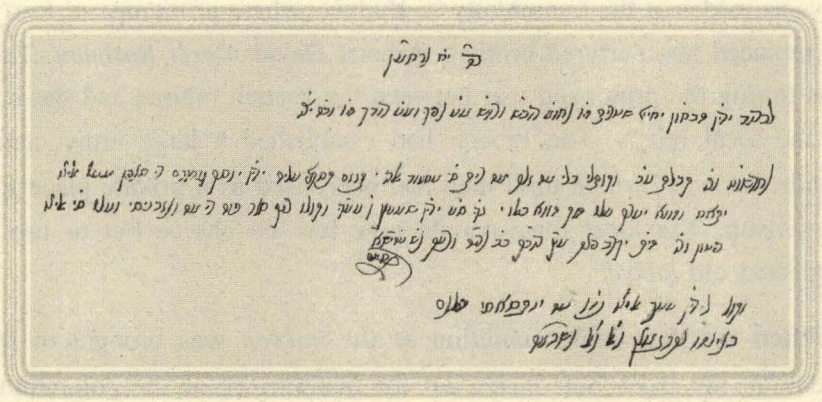
Until his last days, when he was already over ninety, he would not relinquish his immersions and even added to them, for they had great *kabbalistic* spiritual intentions. Not only would he never pray without immersing beforehand, but when people came to beseech him to help a Jew in trouble, he would immediately go down to the *mikveh* in order to arouse heaven's mercy. Nothing deterred him; not the icy water nor his difficulty with the steps; not the weakness of his body nor the fact that he was fasting.

His grandson, R' David Chai Abichazira relates an incident in which he was approached to help a woman in labor who was having great difficulty. As soon as he had heard the details, the Baba Sali summoned his staff to prepare the *mikveh*, for he realized that he needed to make great efforts to draw out *chesed* from the wellsprings of salvation for her. When the Rabbanit tried to prevent him, reminding him that he had not felt well all day, he retorted, "Are you interfering in my serving Hashem? A Jewish woman is in critical danger and you start making calculations?" The Baba Sali stayed in the *mikveh* longer than usual. Even when they begged him to emerge, he would not listen. Then they told him "This woman is not from our camp and her family is unknown to us," yet he remained insistent: "A Jew is in pain. Should I not do my utmost to bring about salvation?"

Scarcely an hour had passed when sounds of "*Mazal Tov*" were heard from the phone. The excited father wished to inform the Baba

Sali of the birth of his son. Only then did the Baba Sali emerge from the *mikveh* in order to return to his holy work with renewed vigor and energy. On his return home, he told his assistant something which typified his way of life: "Even had it taken two or three hours, I would not have come out of the *mikveh* ... I would have sacrificed my life in order to save her from danger."

We can see from here that these were not just immersions for the sake of purification, but they were the ultimate connection to the waters of life, utilizing hidden secrets in the meaning of *tevilla*.



A handwritten letter of the Baba Sali



TO INCREASE PURITY IN ISRAEL

Many true stories are told about the Baba Sali's insistence that all of the local *mikvaot* be set up with strict adherence to the *halacha*. Any problem rendering a *mikveh* unusable would have serious consequences, since the distances between the settlements were too vast to allow travel to the next town to immerse. As the leader of the community, the Baba Sali did his utmost to ensure the proper running of the *mikvaot*. The following three stories are about the Baba Sali and his dedication to the efficient and proper functioning of the community's *mikvaot*. Each presents a different facet of this, while they all share his goal of increasing the level of purity in the Jewish community.

The best-known story took place in public view during his early days as leader of the community in Budniv, where at the age of thirty, he replaced his martyred brother, Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*. This was during the prolonged war between the French régime and the last of the local rebels. The French had established a large army camp beside the river, which until then had been used as a private place for immersion. The local townspeople now had no choice but to use a neglected old *mikveh*.

When the deplorable condition of the *mikveh* was brought to his attention, the Baba Sali instructed the benefactors of the community to build a beautiful new *mikveh* which would adhere to the strictest requirements of the *halacha*. Hearing that this would take two years the Baba Sali decided to build a *mikveh* in the interim in the courtyard of his home and to fill it with rainwater. For two months the builders worked hard, digging a channel from the road at the end of which they built a small drainpipe through which the rainwater was meant to spill into the *mikveh*. The building was completed during the month of Tammuz, so they expected to wait until the rainy season before the public could use the *mikveh*. This at least was what the workers thought.

When the job was finished, the Baba Sali went out to examine the results, accompanied by his close disciple, the righteous *Kabbalist* R' Yichye Shneur, and his assistant R' Avraham Amuyal. It was they who reported all the details of this incident.

After he had inspected the *mikveh* and found it to be both beautiful and in conformity with *halacha*, the Baba Sali lifted his eyes up towards the heavens and declared, "Master of the Universe! You have commanded us to act in a matter of purity and sanctity and this is the way we wish to live. We have fulfilled our obligations; now You do Your part for the sake of Your Holy Name." Those present did not even have time to return to their homes before the bright skies suddenly darkened with clouds and heavy rain began to fall. The water-cistern was soon filled to overflowing.

The people were filled with joy foremost among them the Baba Sali. However, within a few hours their happiness was marred when it was realized that the steel drainpipe at the edge of the channel disqualified the *mikveh* according to the view of the *Beit Yehudah*, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Ayash zt"l. The Baba Sali's face clouded as he publicly expressed his dismay to the *Rabbanim* and disciples around him. The Sages and young scholars began an animated *halachic* analysis, seeking to appease the Baba Sali on the grounds that the *Beit Yehuda* is a minority opinion, which goes against the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* and the majority of *halachic* authorities. The Baba Sali took no notice and instructed that the *mikveh* be emptied.

One of those present was his cousin and close friend, R' Yichye Adahan. He too tried to dissuade the Baba Sali from emptying the *mikveh* which had been filled in so miraculous a fashion. When he saw that the Baba Sali was adamant, he jumped up and declared in a loud voice, "Our revered Rav, I will take full responsibility for the *kashrut* of this *mikveh* ... it is not every day that a miracle occurs; how much more unlikely are we to be the recipients of two miracles in one day".

The Baba Sali, whose intention was to allow Jews to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mikveh* in the best way possible, did not heed him either, but ordered that the *mikveh* be emptied immediately and that the steel drainpipe be replaced with a wooden one. Once the task was done, the Baba Sali examined the *mikveh* once more. Having seen that it was constructed in the best possible manner, he declared, "Our master, the *Beit Yehuda*! We did as per your instructions and we disqualified the other *mikveh* in accordance with your view. It is now your task to see to it that the *mikveh* is filled ... Stand up and pray before the Throne of Glory that the miracle be repeated and that rain fall for the sake of the purity of the people of Israel."

Indeed, just a short while later, Heaven acceded to the Baba Sali's request and the miracle happened again. All those assembled saw and were astounded by the holiness and power of their leader who had worked so hard to spread purity among the nation.

The following incident was recorded by his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira. When the Baba Sali arrived in the city, the people requested that he remain as their guest. In the course of their discussion about the religious situation in the town, the local leaders told him that there was no *mikveh*, leaving the residents no choice but to travel to the next town in order to immerse. The Baba Sali informed them that he could not remain overnight in a city without a *mikveh*; he had no choice but to part from them that very night.

The heads of the community apologized, explaining that the mayor of the city did not permit them to construct a *mikveh*. The Baba Sali told the community leaders to summon the mayor immediately, but the very thought filled them with fear. They explained that the mayor was a very difficult individual, who would regard such an invitation as an offense against his great stature. The Baba Sali, however, insisted that the mayor come to his lodging.

When the mayor heard that the Baba Sali himself was in their city and that he had sent for him, he immediately dropped what he was

doing and hurried to present himself before the Rav. The Baba Sali got down to business without any ceremony. He explained to the mayor that he was unable to remain in his city overnight, despite the invitation of the community and despite his agreeing in principle to visit their city, because there was no *mikveh*. The mayor, who had already heard of the Baba Sali and his resolve, immediately removed his objection and gave his approval for the construction of the *mikveh*. He hastily brought non-Jewish workers to build the *mikveh* while the Baba Sali stood watch over the laborers to ensure that all was kosher. Water was drawn from the rivers adjacent to the city. That very night, the *mikveh* was completed under the strictest *halachic* guidelines.

In another incident related by his grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, the Baba Sali again went to great lengths to have a *mikveh* constructed for the townspeople. In each incident the Baba Sali was forced to reveal his power in one form or another.

During his stay in one of the cities under his leadership, he went with his assistant to immerse in the *mikveh*. On emerging they discovered a man outside waiting for the Baba Sali to leave the *mikveh* so that he could immerse. Moments later the man burst forth from the *mikveh* in a state of great agitation, barely able to speak. He slammed the door of the *mikveh* shut and locked it with shaking hands. He ran after the Baba Sali and when he caught up with him he told him that when he emerged from the *mikveh* he spotted a fearsome viper in the room!

The Baba Sali asked him for the key so that he could see the snake. At first the man refused, fearing that perhaps the Baba Sali would be badly hurt by the snake. The Baba Sali was insistent and he finally gave him the key to the *mikveh*. The Baba Sali arrived at the *mikveh* building, unlocked the door and instructed his assistant to close the door after him, as he wished to enter the building alone. The assistant too attempted to dissuade the Baba Sali from placing himself in danger, but the Baba Sali would not listen. A few moments

later the Baba Sali knocked on the door, calling him to open it. When he opened it, he saw the Baba Sali standing by the entrance with a great smile on his face. On top of the walking stick that he always carried with him, hung the lifeless snake.

The Baba Sali refused to divulge what had taken place inside the *mikveh*. However, in order to curb the rumors being spread by the man who had discovered the snake, the Baba Sali handed his stick to his assistant instructing him to carry it all over the city so that all the Jewish people would see the dead snake. He also asked him to promise all the citizens in his name that they had nothing to fear from any snakes in the *mikveh.*

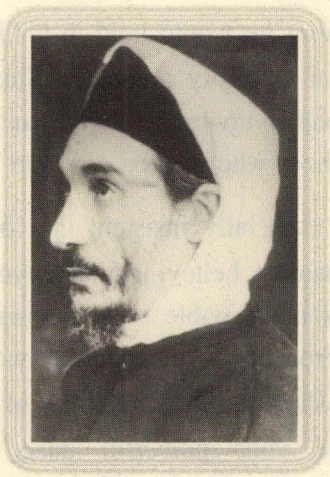
Thus another town was added to the already long list of cities in which the construction and proper upkeep of *mikvaot* was to the credit of the Baba Sali whose total dedication strengthened the foundations of purity.



"DIKNA KADISHA"

The Baba Sali placed great emphasis on growing a beard. He would always treat bearded people with honor and respect, while clean-shaven men were subjected to very convincing arguments in favor of growing a beard. Speaking of his own experience, the Baba Sali said, "Until the age of forty my beard did not grow[14] and I feared that I would never be able to grow a beard. One night I stayed awake, weeping the entire night until daybreak ... I prayed before Hashem asking Him how I would be able to fulfill the *mitzvot* associated with a beard if I never grew a beard. Hashem came to my aid; that very week my prayer was accepted and two hairs grew." When the Baba Sali related that story, he would take hold of his beard and kiss it with great love, saying, "I am happy that I never brought any blemish to my beard."

In later years, he preserved any hairs which fell from his beard, keeping them in the pocket of his robe. As he was about to depart from this world, he gave his robe to one of the great *Kabbalists* whom



14. He gave as the reason for this phenomenon: "Most sons resemble the brothers of the mother." (Baba Batra 110a) His uncle from his mother's side, R' David Ben Hamu did not have a beard.

he loved dearly, describing him as "A righteous one, the foundation of the world and keeper of the covenant." (Mishle 10:25) He told him that the robe was worthy of being worn to receive the *Moshiach.*

At various opportunities, the Baba Sali would praise the well-known picture of R' Yoseph Chaim of Baghdad known as the "Ben Ish Chai" whose beard was extremely long, calling it a "perfect beard".[15]

In his later years the Baba Sali would read every week from the *halachot* of that week's *parsha* in the Ben Ish Chai. On one of those occasions he noticed the image of R' Yoseph Chaim that was printed on the cover of the book. The Baba Sali spent much time contemplating the picture. Afterwards he kissed the picture with great fervor saying, "His holy image is carved out under the Throne of Glory!" The Baba Sali was also reported as stating, "Any person who merited seeing the face of the Ben Ish Chai must be accorded great honor, even if he is a simple person and even if he merited seeing him only once, for it is impossible not to be affected by that inspiring face." So too, more than once, he praised the beautiful countenance of his son R' Meir when he said "R' Meir merited."

In the great celebrations he would hold in his home on *Lag B'Omer* marking the *yahrzeit* of the holy *tanna*, R' Shimon bar Yochai, the Baba Sali would personally invite the participants, ensuring that there were no men among them who shaved any part of their beards.

The Baba Sali was especially insistent that *bnei Torah* and *kollel* members grow their beards, believing that anyone who trimmed his beard in any way was not capable of achieving lofty heights in his service of Hashem. From time to time he would support this by quoting R' Eliezer Alfandri's interpretation of a verse from Shir HaShirim: "Show Me your prayerful gaze, let Me hear your supplicating voice." (Shir HaShirim 2:14) "First show me your appearance

---

15. Compare the writings of Ar"I ("Etz Chaim, Shaar Arich Anpin Chapter 9) regarding the Thirteen *Tikunei Dikna.*

(i.e. your beard – whether it has been preserved and allowed to grow) – and [only] then will I listen to your words of Torah."

The Baba Sali once ordered a new pair of *Tefillin*. The *sofer* delayed handing them over because the man who crafted the *batim* had not yet completed his work. He stressed that the *batim* maker was not only a well-known meticulous professional but he was also exceedingly G-d-fearing. The Baba Sali inquired whether the *batim* maker allowed his beard to grow. Upon hearing that he trimmed it, he became incensed, shouting, "How can you say that he is G-d-fearing? It is impossible for a person who shaves to be a true *Yarei Shamayim*!"

In his later years, when his house in *Eretz Yisrael* was filled with visitors, it is known that he would encourage them all to let their beards grow. In his years in Tafilalet he had been extremely strict about this requirement. The story is told of one of the townspeople who sailed to distant lands and became very prosperous. On his return to Tafilalet he was very finely dressed and freshly-shaven. At first the Baba Sali gently requested that he return to the proper path and re-grow his beard. The man refused to comply. When he would not relent, the Baba Sali declared a *cherem* (excommunication) on him. When the man saw that he was being ostracized, he approached the Baba Sali to ask him to lift the *cherem*, the Baba Sali answered him, "Know that a man who shaves is as if he passes a burning iron over his cheeks! If your desire overcomes you and entices you to start shaving again, take a hot iron and press it to the two sides of your face. Rather be burned in this world and be saved in the World of Truth!"

In his twilight years, he often spoke of the importance of growing a beard. He once said, "Anyone who preserves his beard, I promise and guarantee that in the World of Truth, half of his sins will be forgiven." When he heard of a *baal tshuva* whose wife objected to his growing a beard despite his assurances, he would add, "A woman who does not prevent her husband from doing so – half of her sins are forgiven too."

When a *Kollel* fellow who had recently begun to grow his beard at his urging, came to call on him, the Baba Sali greeted him with a warm "*Sholom Aleichem*" explaining, "You have become a new person; you are now on a much higher level. It is therefore fitting that I greet you as if this is the first time I have seen you!"



"TORAH SCHOLARS HAVE NO REST"

(Brachot 64a)

The seventeen years during which the Baba Sali resided in Tafilalet were very good ones for the residents, yet in all that time his yearning to settle in the Land of Israel never lessened. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a related that in his youth he would go out every *Erev Shabbat* with the Baba Sali to visit the graves of the righteous in the small cemetery of Tafilalet. At times they would come across graves of emissaries from *Eretz Yisrael* who had died in the course of their journey and had been buried in Morocco. When the Baba Sali saw their gravestones he would sigh and say, "When will I be able to set foot in the holy soil of *Eretz Yisrael*?"

When the great *aliyah* from Morocco began and the ranks of the community began to thin, the Baba Sali saw this as his opportunity to fulfill the secret promise he had made to himself many years earlier, to immigrate to *Eretz Yisrael* and to remain there permanently. To the people of Tafilalet who begged him not to forsake them, he responded that he was leaving them a very worthy replacement, his son R' Meir, whom he had appointed to serve as Rav of Erfoud. This time he was sure that no one would insist that he return to Tafilalet. At the end of 5710 [1950], the Baba Sali took his family and made his way to the land of the forefathers, breaking his journey in Marseilles in France.



The Baba Sali in France in 5711 en route to *Eretz Yisrael*

Arriving in *Eretz Yisrael* on *Erev Rosh Hashana*, he traveled to the home of his brother, the Baba Chaki, who had already immigrated and was serving as Rav of the cities of Lod and Ramle. It was at his brother's home that he spent the High Holy Days and the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkot* in an elevated spiritual atmosphere. After the *Yom Tovim*, the Baba Sali established his residence on Rechov Shimon in Bakaa,Yerushalayim, a quiet neighborhood far from all the hustle and bustle of the city[16]. The Baba Sali chose this location thinking that now he would be able to serve his Creator free from interruption.

The Baba Sali set aside a room where he could seclude himself with the great library which he had brought with him from Morocco. In this room he would gather a *minyan* for davening, and he would sequester himself for most of the day, learning both the hidden and revealed parts of the Torah. There too he would record the many *chiddushim* which he learned by the *pardes* method in all areas of the Torah[17].

Before long, however, the Baba Sali began to reconsider the idea of living in *Eretz Yisrael*, as he observed the shrugging off of the yoke of Torah that characterized much of the State of Israel and its government. Worse yet, it trickled down into the educational system with results visible on every corner. The great sage R' Shlomo Eliezer Alfandri had already advised the Baba Sali to leave *Eretz Yisrael* in 5683 [1922-23]. His words took on extra meaning when he realized that the deterioration had not only not stopped but had intensified. His household heard him complaining, "When I was in *Eretz Yisrael* in those years, it was a land filled with sages and scholars, holy

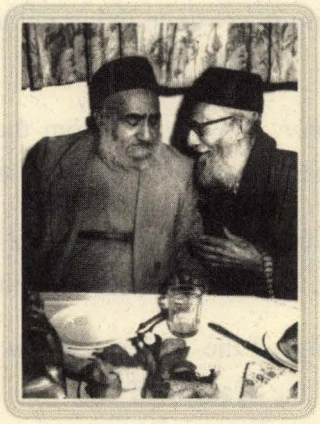
---

16. On arrival in Eretz Yisrael the Baba Chaki, had also been invited by the sages of Jerusalem to dwell among them; and they even prepared a very spacious house for him in this neighborhood. The "Rishon LeZion", HaGaon R' Ben Zion Chai Uziel zt"l, however, asked him to take upon himself to build and establish communities in the cities of Lod and Ramle.

17. Unfortunately, as is well-known these Torah insights disappeared during the period of his absence from the Land of Israel between the years 5714-5724 [1953-64].

and pure. In every corner I could feel holiness and purity. Today however ..." He decided to return to Morocco.

The Baba Sali spent many long hours consulting the sages of Jerusalem and the great Kabbalists about returning to Morocco. Among them were his old friend the great Gaon R' Ezra Ataya zt"l, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Porat Yoseph, the great Gaon R' Yaakov Mutzafi zt"l the head of the Rabbinical court of the *Eida Chareidit*, the great Gaon R' Yitzchak Alfia zt"l, author of "*Kuntres HaYechieli*", which the Baba Sali valued greatly, and the great Gaon R' Yehoshua Sharbani zt"l who served as the Rav of Bakaa, where the Baba Sali resided. In spite of the fact that they agreed with the Baba Sali's view of the lowly spiritual state that prevailed in the Holy Land, many of the sages beseeched him not to leave the Land but to wait for the Divine wrath to pass and for Hashem to bring the final redemption to His people.



HaGaon HaRav Yehoshua Sharabani shares a word with HaGaon HaRav Yaakov Mutzafi

After hearing the views of the Sephardic sages of Jerusalem, the Baba Sali went to Tel Aviv in order to meet the elder of the Chassidic *Rebbes*, the holy R' Aharon of Belz. Without announcing his plan to visit, the Baba Sali arrived at the house of the Belzer *Rebbe* and joined those waiting on line, while the *Rebbe* was resting

in his room with the door closed. As soon as his aides saw who was waiting to see the *Rebbe*, they informed the *Rebbe* that the Baba Sali had arrived. The *Rebbe* instructed them to let him enter immediately. The Baba Sali's assistant, who was present during the meeting pointed out afterwards that he was amazed that in spite of the fact that they spoke *loshon hakodesh* with completely different accents and pronunciation, they had no need for an interpreter and handled their conversation with ease.

Their conversation began with a discussion of the Belzer path of *Chassidut*, and as we heard from his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, the Baba Sali was familiar with the entire Belzer philosophy, to the great amazement of the *Rebbe*, who had never met the Baba Sali until that moment. During the course of the conversation, when the Baba Sali brought up the subject of living in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Rebbe* convinced him that he should remain in *Eretz Yisrael* despite its sorry state[18]. The Baba Sali heard similar things from the *Chazon Ish*, who encouraged him to continue living within the borders of *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Lubavitcher *Rebbe* as well, to whom the Baba Sali wrote for advice, replied with clear reasons why he must remain in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Subsequent events were destined to take place which would cause the Baba Sali to leave *Eretz Yisrael* in spite of the opinion of the great sages.

Following the passing of the *Rishon LeZion*, HaGaon HaRav Ben Zion Chai Uziel zt"l, the leaders of the state asked the Baba Sali

---

18. However, when the Baba Sali sent his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira to serve as the Rav of Naharia, which in those days was spiritually desolate, he connected the future lot of the city with its past, for this city had the privilege of being the first place that R' Aharon of Belz stepped foot in, when he arrived in the Holy Land at the height of the terrible Holocaust. This is what he said to him: "Did they not say that 'a *tzaddik*'s departing from a place leaves an impression.' (see Rashi on Bereishit 28:10) This means that the impression of the *tzaddik* is recognizable in the city even following his departure. If the Belzer Rebbe resided in this city, the Baba Sali ruled, the city is destined to become a bastion of Judaism and fear of Hashem".

whether he would agree to become the leader of Sephardic Jewry in *Eretz Yisrael*. He was vehemently opposed to this, using the expression of R' Yitzchak ben Eliashiv "The power to decree was once with me, but it has departed" (Taanit 23b), but emissaries of *Rabbanim* and communal leaders continued to visit his home, trying to persuade him otherwise.

When he saw that he would not be left alone to learn in peace, he left *Eretz Yisrael* in the month of Tammuz 5714 [July 1954] – until such time as they would choose another Rav to serve as *Rishon LeZion*. Without notifying anyone of where he was going, the Baba Sali left Jerusalem for France. From there he continued to Algeria and then he went to live in the village of Bni-Yunif, near his father-in-law, Rav Eliyahu Amsalem zt"l.

Ten years were to pass before the Baba Sali returned to *Eretz Yisrael*.



The Rishon LeZion HaGaon Rav Ben Zion Chai Uziel

IN DEFENSE OF PURITY OF EDUCATION

The Baba Sali devoted much effort to dealing with the urgent educational problems of the time. Even before the *haskala* had dug its poisonous claws into Morocco, the Baba Sali had to deal with parents who took their children out of school at the age of eleven to help support the family. The Baba Sali would look for children of such parents, pay them the full amount that their child would be able to earn and take the child to his Yeshiva in Tafilalet. Tens of young men such as these who were educated in Yeshivat Abir Yaakov would be sent afterwards by the Baba Sali to the Yeshivot of Marakash or Machnes. They were destined to achieve distinguished positions as Rabbis and Dayanim in the Sephardi communities.

Much later came the "time for battle" when representatives of the progressive movements wished to gain a foothold in Morocco as well. After they had taken control of a sizable portion of the Eastern European countries, the representatives of these latter-day *maskilim* then attempted to open secular schools in the North African countries.

If at first the campaigners for "free" education imagined that they would find themselves face to face with a bunch of naïve Jews, they were surprised to discover that at the head of this naïve group was an unflinching warrior who refused to give up. He was undaunted even when they solicited the government to issue a decree requiring all Jews to study secular subjects and foreign languages. With brilliant tactics, the Baba Sali led the ship of education to safe waters, defeating all attempts by "L'Alliance" to take over the Jewish educational system.

When the Baba Sali's influence on the daily lives of the Moroccan Jewish community became apparent, their sincerity was revealed in all its glory. The Baba Sali had returned to Budniv after a lengthy absence which the activists of the "L'Alliance" had used to their advantage to open a secular school in which parents had already placed their children. However they withdrew them immediately at

the urging of their leader. For them, his resolute words were enough: "Anyone who does not take his child out of school immediately is guaranteed that the child will die during the course of the year".

At the same time, the *Chabad* movement headed by R' Yoseph Yitzchak Schneerson had staked a claim in the Western countries. The *Rebbe* consulted the Baba Sali about ways and places where he could work. The Baba Sali pointed out the weak spots where the *Rebbi*'s emissaries could do good. And within a short time, schools and Yeshivot began to open throughout Morocco and Tunisia. In the city of Erfoud itself, residence of the Abichazira family, a Talmud Torah was established with close to one thousand children, supervised by the Baba Sali and his son Rabenu Meir.

When he lived in Jerusalem, the Baba Sali had noticed the deteriorating standards of education that were especially prevalent among immigrants from North Africa. The "*aliyah* (ascent) activists" who had brought them to *Eretz Yisrael* were in fact activists of "*yeridah*" (decline) who did everything in their power to have them stray from their sincere devotion to the heritage of their ancestors. The agents of the "Jewish Agency" became "agents" of the *yetzer hara*, by taking advantage of the trusting new immigrants to steal the next generation from them. Progressive schools were opened in the new neighborhoods so that whoever wished to give his children a Torah education was forced to send them far away to the Orthodox neighborhoods.

The Baba Sali conferred with the head of the Rabbinical court of the Sephardic *Eida Chareidit*, HaGaon HaRav Yaakov Mutzafi zt"l to seek his advice on how to safeguard the heritage of pure education. They decided to open special academies in which the children of the new immigrants would be educated as their ancestors had been educated in their countries of origin. Before long the first branch of Yeshivat Kiryat Sefer opened in the Bakaa neighborhood on 13

Shimon St., right next to the home of the Baba Sali, so that he was able to supervise the running of the institution and to keep a close eye on the teachers. He encouraged the teachers to ensure that the children reviewed all that they had learned. He was particularly interested that they know the cantillation notes of the Torah and the correct pronunciation of the words. Out of concern for their future and with the understanding that not all of them would be *Beit Midrash* habitués in the long term, the Baba Sali instructed that the children be educated in reciting *Chok LeYisrael*[19] which would stand them in good stead for the future.

As was his custom on his travels in North Africa, here too the Baba Sali would arrive from time to time to test the children on the material they had learned. The Baba Sali's tests were very different from other tests. When he entered a classroom, he would ask the children to recite for him portions of the silent prayers, such as *Modim D'Rabanan* or *Nefilat Apayim*, emphasizing the importance of educating the children to pray correctly, even from a young age. To one sage who expressed wonder at the emphasis he placed on this area, the Baba Sali explained that there is nothing that a person can get as accustomed to as the text of the prayers and the pronunciation of the words. One who is educated in his youth to pronounce the words correctly without skipping or slurring any of them, will not make mistakes in prayer in his old age either. However, if one makes a habit of saying the words of the prayers incorrectly, our Sages say "Once a mistake has entered, it has entered for ever." (Pesachim 112a)

When the teachers complained to him that their meager salary was not sufficient to sustain themselves and their households, the Baba Sali encouraged them not to give up their holy mission, but to continue their work despite the difficult conditions, for their stature is great

---

19. A collection of Oral as well as Written Torah broken up into a daily schedulre. It contains part of the *parsha* of the week as well as *Neviim, Mishna, Gemara, Halacha, Zohar, and Mussar.*

as it says; "Those who teach righteousness to the multitudes will shine like the stars." (Daniel 12:3, see *Baba Batra* 8b). He explained to them that while they felt that they were wasting their time, teaching children the letters of the alphabet and the vowels, they were in fact educating pure souls who were free from sin. They, the *melamdim*, were responsible for the next generation and it was up to them to give them their first taste of Torah.[20]

When he lived in Yavne, the Baba Sali noticed that the children of the city would wander the streets with nothing to do, "killing" time and generating an atmosphere of frivolity and sin. He summoned his son-in-law, the righteous R' Avraham Abichazira, who served as the local Rav, asking him in pain, "Where are the sages of Yavne?" quoting R' Yochanan ben Zakkai's words to Vespasian Caesar of Rome, "Give me Yavne and its Sages." (Gittin 56b). R' Avraham apologized, explaining that plans for dealing with this had not come to fruition for lack of funds and other reasons. The Baba Sali immediately gave him a generous sum of money encouraging him to begin the work immediately. He recommended making use of the site which according to tradition was the burial place of R' Gamliel the *Nasi*. That same week during the afternoon hours the children of Yavne began to acquire Torah.

Immediately after moving to the city of Netivot, the Baba Sali inquired about the state of education in the area. He wanted to know what choices existed for parents who wished to educate their children in the traditions of their ancestors. Precisely at that time the heads of the State Religious educational system were about to open a school and were trying to persuade many of the local Jews to send their children there. When the Baba Sali heard that they planned to

---

20. Compare this to the words of R' Yoseph Chaim of Baghdad in his book "*Ben Yehoyada*" who explained the analogy of *Chazal* that compared those who teach young children to stars that are seen from afar as very small in comparison to the sun, when in truth they are bigger than it.

have boys and girls learning together, he publicized a *halachic* ruling that he signed together with all the local *Rabbanim*, so that the residents should be aware of the severity of the issue and would prevent their children from setting foot through the gates of that place.

Even when he reached an advanced old age, the subject of education was in the forefront of his mind. He reserved a special place in his heart for those who were involved in this holy endeavor and he showed a constant interest in the educational situation of G-d fearing individuals in the community.

The following fascinating story, told for the first time on these pages, was heard first-hand from one of the main protagonists of the story, HaRav Yisrael Gellis of *Peilim,* who spent much time during those years journeying to different settlements in order to register Jewish children in Torah schools and to bring the people closer to a Jewish lifestyle. This incident took place in the mid 1970's. A fierce battle arose when a state school was opened in the village of Safsufa near Miron and many parents were tempted to send their children there. When the people of *Peilim* saw how the school was taking over the education of the children of Safsufa, they came to the Baba Sali in Netivot, requesting that he travel to Safsufa to speak to the parents who were almost all from the Tafilalet area. The Baba Sali, who knew each of them by name, was thought of as the only one who would be able to influence them.

The Baba Sali heard this special request to travel the length of the country from Netivot in the south to Safsufa in the Galil and he had a very difficult time refusing them. He told them that he was planning to travel to Akko to participate in the *Brit Milah* of one of his relatives and he would be willing to continue to Safsufa in order to speak to the hearts of the local residents.

The people of *Peilim* rejoiced when they heard that the Baba Sali had agreed to come to Safsufa and began to lay the groundwork for

the visit. In order to honor the occasion and to give it a unique character, they decided together with the religious leaders of the Moshav, that that day there would be a ceremony marking the dedication of a new Torah scroll to the local synagogue. When they went to bring the Baba Sali from Akko, it was in the same car that was transporting the *Sefer Torah* from Jerusalem. It was not a comfortable and luxurious vehicle, but rather a jeep belonging to *Peilim.*

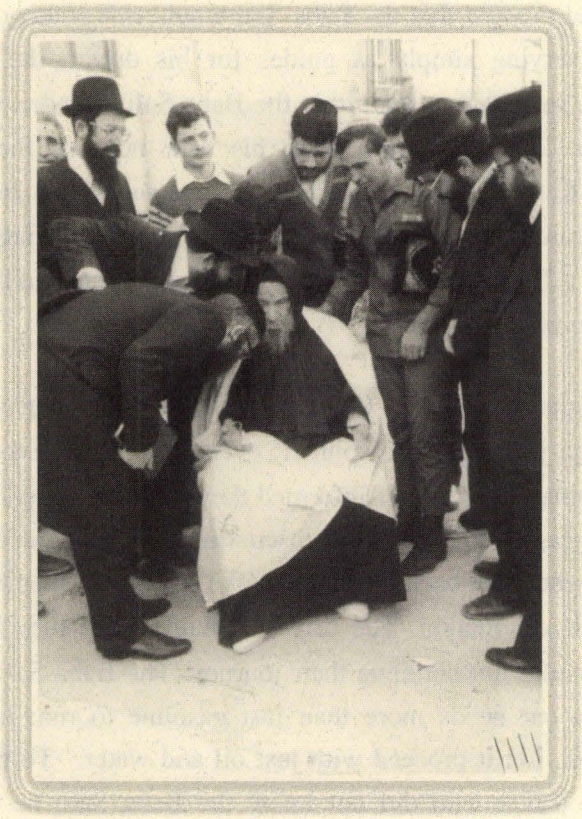
If they had thought that the Baba Sali would ride in his own vehicle, with them serving simply as guides for his driver, the workers of *Peilim* were surprised to learn that the Baba Sali intended to join them in the jeep. The Baba Sali took his seat next to the driver, R' Mordechai Karelitz (who in time became the mayor of Bnei Brak). Behind him was seated the famous *Maggid* of Jerusalem, HaRav Sholom Schwadron zt"l and beside him was HaRav Yisrael Gellis who held the *Sefer Torah* in his arms.

As they approached the "Chanania Junction" and began the ascent to Miron, the jeep began to splutter; eventually it came to a complete halt. The embarrassed driver informed the other passengers that the car was out of gasoline. They were discussing how to proceed when the Baba Sali who had been dozing, awoke asking if they had already reached their destination. The driver explained that they had run out of gas and could not continue their journey. The Baba Sali smiled and said, "Nu, a car needs more than just gasoline to run; it also needs water and oil. Let it proceed with just oil and water." To the surprised look of the driver who did not know the Baba Sali, he repeated, "I told you to drive on!"

As two witnesses who are alive today testified, the jeep continued on its way until the gasoline station in the Sassa junction next to Miron. This meant that they managed twenty-five minutes of the arduous climb in an old jeep without any gasoline! The gas station

attendant could not believe his eyes when he saw the jeep, belching smoke, enter the gas station

When he recognized who was sitting next to the driver, all his questions vanished.



"CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THE PATHS OF ITS HOME" (Iyov 38:20)

Perhaps the Baba Sali would have returned to *Eretz Yisrael* sooner had he not elected to spend his seventy-third year in Tafilalet, where he had lived for many years. He divulged the reason for this unusual move only to his old friend HaGaon Rav Ezra Ataya zt"l upon his return to *Eretz Yisrael*. He told him, "My father and grandfather both passed away at the age of seventy-three. I feared that perhaps it was decreed that I too leave this world at that age. If so it was my wish to be buried in the section of the cemetery where my father lies in Risani in Tafilalet."

Only at the end of 5724 [1964] did he return to *Eretz Yisrael*. He once told his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira that prior to his return, while he was living in France, he had given away all his assets to charity and had nothing left to finance his trip to *Eretz Yisrael*. That night, his father R' Masud zt"l appeared to him in a dream, holding a gold watch in his hand. He said, "My son, do not worry; the Creator will fill all your needs and you will not lack for anything." The following day a man arrived at the inn where the Baba Sali was staying. He was very despondent because his daughter had disappeared and there had been no word of where she was or of her fate. The Baba Sali calmed the man, saying, "Today your daughter will return home." Indeed, a few hours later the girl returned to her father's home, following a quarrel with a friend. Her father, a man of great means, hurried to the Baba Sali's lodging to inform him that his blessing had indeed borne fruit. As a gesture of gratitude, he left the Baba Sali a handsome sum of money, sufficient to sustain his family during the initial period of their return to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Following a short stint in the Bakaa neighborhood of Jerusalem, he established his residence in the town of Yavne, near the home of his son-in-law the *tzaddik* R' Avraham Abichazira zt"l (the son of his brother

the Baba Chaki) who served as Rav of the town. However, Yavne soon lost the opportunity to be home to the honor and glory of the generation, as a result of the following incident.

A local Torah scholar, who was head of one of the *Kollelim* in Yavne visited the Baba Sali in his home. The conversation turned from words of Torah to a discussion about study methods. The sage claimed that the difference between the Vilna Gaon's method of learning and the holy *Baal Shem Tov*'s was that the Vilna Gaon was able to get to the very root of a topic and also had comprehensive knowledge of the entire Torah, while the *Baal Shem Tov* was not like that.

When the Baba Sali heard these words his face took on an angry expression. He rebuked the scholar; "Who are you to involve yourself in such a subject? I know who the *Baal Shem Tov* was! Leave immediately; I do not wish to see you here any longer."

After the scholar had left, the Baba Sali turned to his grandson (the son-in-law of his son Rabenu Meir), who had accompanied the scholar, saying, "How could you bring someone to me who speaks that way about the holy *Baal Shem Tov*? ... You will see, if his *Kollel* does not close tomorrow, then I am not the Baba Sali." To his family, who were trembling at the sight of the Baba Sali's anger over the honor of the holy *Baal Shem Tov*, he said very firmly, "It is forbidden to live in a place where they speak this way of the holy of holies, the *Baal Shem Tov*."

That very day, the Baba Sali gathered his belongings and left Yavne, never to return.

It would be superfluous to add that the following day brought news of the closing of the *Kollel* which was headed by the *talmid chacham* whose Torah on the outside did not reflect what he was on the inside. The Ministry of Religion suddenly announced that the *Kollel* did not meet its criteria and would no longer receive government funding.

When the Lubavitcher *Rebbe* heard this story, he responded in amazement, "Is that what happened? You have such stories to tell and you keep them to yourself?"

For a time the Baba Sali resided in Ashkelon, while many people tried to persuade him to settle permanently in their city. Mayors of other cities as well as District Rabbis offered to meet any conditions he set. In the year 5730 [1969-70], he acceded to the requests of the many North African immigrants and established his residence in their community in the city of Netivot, where he lived until his final day. His home there became a magnet for tens of thousands of Jews.

Many who had been drawn to the light emanating from Netivot found themselves cleaving to the Baba Sali with the pure belief that "All that comes forth from his mouth ... shall be done" (Bamidbar 30:3). During those years, truly miraculous stories became part of the daily routine in the vicinity of the Baba Sali. Each of the thousands of episodes enhanced the admiration of those present, including the Baba Sali's own family members.

To those who benefited from his holy aura and the powers through which it became manifest it became clear that he was no ordinary person in the physical and material sense, but was detached from this world entirely. Books of *kabbalah* were a constant presence on his desk and he studied them at length. One of his close confidants, HaRav Sholom Dov Stern from London tells us that when the Baba Sali related that the Abir Yaakov used to complete the entire *Zohar* every month, he added, "We have not yet reached the level of completing the *Zohar* monthly". A moment later he confided in a whisper, "But we complete it weekly."

Ordinary people saw him as a miracle worker who could remove worry from people's hearts, smoothing all the obstacles in life's path, while the truly pious recognized him as a person of immense stature, whose every word of whose conversation reflected the esoteric. Such

people would gather the precious pearls of wisdom that they saw and heard in that house. Offhand remarks that he uttered nonchalantly, almost as if he were speaking to himself, painted a picture so glorious that it was difficult to believe that one was actually witness to it.

Many can recall the times when he would comment to those close to him, "Today such and such a person will arrive." Within a few hours, that person would knock on the door, which did not surprise anyone who had spent even a short time there. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira describes incidents in which people whom the Baba Sali had never met would arrive at his home; before they could introduce themselves, he would already inquire about their welfare, mentioning their family background and town of origin. He did not do this in order to show off his abilities, but, as his grandson pointed out, "My grandfather did it in order to instill belief in the hearts of the people."

He could foresee the future; sometimes a whispered prediction would escape him and only decades later would his ability be verified. A Yeshiva student who wished to be blessed that he should find a suitable wife once arrived in his home and found him in a joyful mood, pouring out blessings in abundance. When the young man mentioned his name and his mother's name, the Baba Sali blessed him that soon he would merit building a home with the woman destined for him from the time of creation. He then mentioned offhandedly: "But your daughter will marry a Tunisian." Now this young man was a member of one of the more prominent Ashkenazic families of Jerusalem.

A short while later the first half of the blessing was fulfilled, when the young man became engaged to the daughter of a family as prominent as his own. As the years went by, he forgot the second half of the Baba Sali's words. When his daughter reached marriageable age she had an excellent reputation. A friend of the father suggested a young G-d-fearing *talmid chacham* whom he knew very well and

greatly respected. Only after the wedding did the father discover that his son-in-law's parents were of Tunisian descent. The son-in-law and his father had each studied in Ashkenazic Yeshivot and their manner was totally Ashkenazic. But as predicted, the man's daughter ended up marrying a Tunisian. The father then remembered the words of the Baba Sali, who could see the future spread out before him like an open book.



LEADER OF THE MASSES, GUIDE TO INDIVIDUALS

The Baba Sali refused the position of Chief Rabbi and *Rishon LeZion*. He was adamant about rejecting the mantle of leadership even at a heavy personal cost. For ten years he had been absent from *Eretz Yisrael*, the land he loved with all his heart, because of pressure from the state to accept an appointment as Sephardic Chief Rabbi. In practice, the Baba Sali understood the desire of the ministers and their associates who in those days controlled the Chief Rabbinate. From the moment of his arrival in the Holy Land, these people did their utmost to assist him, on the condition that he supported them, thus exploiting him for political purposes. The Baba Sali, however, saw with his own eyes the great breakdown that the state had inflicted on Jews who had arrived from North Africa with a tremendous inclination towards sanctity. He refused to be associated with the state government, even in such an honorable and influential position as that of Chief Rabbi.

When the Baba Sali returned to *Eretz Yisrael* in 5724 [1963], he looked around him in pain and saw what had happened to the residents of the state in the fifteen years since its inception. A spirit of secularism pervaded the land. The *chareidi* community was forced to wage battles over almost everything. The privileges of the Torah world in *Eretz Yisrael* were not to be taken for granted. All this was a big blow to the Baba Sali. The thing that he had so feared during his stay in *Eretz Yisrael* in the years 5711-5714 [1951-54] came true, when the haters of religion attempted to destroy any remaining vestiges of Judaism.

In the face of these severe breaches, the Baba Sali resolutely girded himself for battle against the destructive aims of the government. Although he did not have access to the tools he had had in Tafilalet, such as imposing a *cherem* on those who breached the fence, or

arresting those who violated the laws of the Torah, the Baba Sali used combat strategies that were reserved for the battle of the few against the government forces.

Many years later, towards the end of his life, a delegation of *Rabbanim* consulted the Baba Sali about the struggle being waged in those days against *Shabbat* desecration on the Ramot Road. From HaRav Yisrael Gellis, who was one of the delegation, we heard the Baba Sali's words to them: "We must not forsake the ways of our forefathers. We must continue to protest breaches of the *Shabbat*! Only the children must be watched to ensure that they do not bring about a desecration of the Name of Hashem". When someone mentioned the idea of building a bypass road, the Baba Sali responded, "Why do you and I need to get involved with alternative routes allowing them to travel on *Shabbat*? Our job is simply to fulfill our obligation to protest against those who desecrate the *Shabbat*, not to find them solutions".

He would intersperse words of guidance even in general conversation and he saved many from sin with the beauty of his words. At times a simple hint was enough for the person to understand his intention, while there were times when he had to be more specific in his rebuke. The following frightening story was recorded from the words of a reliable witness, his close friend R' Menashe Stern from London, who saw with his own eyes how the Baba Sali was able to save a youth from sinking into the depths.

One day when R' Menashe was visiting the Baba Sali in Netivot, a father and son, who bore no resemblance to each other, entered the house. The father kept Torah and *mitzvot* and his face had the imprint of pure and sincere fear of Hashem. The son, on the other hand, was more than casually dressed; his appearance spoke of shirking the yoke of Torah and shirking the law. The father complained about the son who had left the path and was, sad to say, even desecrating the *Shabbat* publicly. His brazenness was clear to all; even in the holy

home of the Baba Sali, he did not bother to cover his head. The Baba Sali looked at the young man and asked him, "Why are you not religious? Why do you not repent?" A few minutes later the young man left the house, mounted his motorcycle and was on his way.

Within moments, the terrible noise of a crash was heard. A passing car had hit the young man causing him to fly off the motorcycle. Frightened by the sound, people ran into the street to see what happened and to help the victim. The Baba Sali alone maintained his composure, and after a pause, told his assistant to go out to the street and bring the injured young man to him. The young man was carried into the room, apparently unconscious. He was placed on the couch as the Baba Sali had instructed. The Baba Sali looked into his face, then lifted his stick and tapped the young man who had opened his eyes. "Was that enough?" the Baba Sali asked. The young man nodded affirmatively. The Baba Sali then ordered him to stand up and handed him a *kippah* to cover his head.

Many people who had a bad character trait or who had strayed from Torah were brought before the Baba Sali, who cared for them as a merciful father cares for his son, and guided them on the proper path. A small child was once brought to the Baba Sali by his father, who claimed that the child was constantly taking things which did not belong to him. The Baba Sali sat the child on his knees and began to cry. "A small child, stealing? How can it be?" He gently explained to him the severity of the sin of stealing then gave him sweets and encouraged him to improve his ways. A few months later the father came to thank the Baba Sali for having saved his son from that terrible trait.

Another incident involved a young scholar who was dining at the Baba Sali's home with other guests. The young man surreptitiously slipped some of the food into his bag. Perhaps he thought that the sanctity of the *shirayim* (leftovers from the table of a holy individual) was

present even in food that had been taken from the *tzaddik*'s table without permission. In any case, the Baba Sali realized what the young man was doing and reserved his reaction for the end of the meal. Then in his inimitable manner, he hinted to the young man that he was not pleased, saying, "It is written in our holy Torah, 'You shall eat, be satisfied, and bless Hashem.' (Devarim 8:10). Why did the Torah have to write 'You shall eat'? Is it not obvious that if a person is satisfied, then he must have eaten? The Torah is alluding to something by using the word ואכלת -'you shall eat'. The letters of the word are a mnemonic for the verse: "ואל כליך לא תתן" meaning "you may not put it into your vessel" (Devarim 23:35) – it is sufficient for a man to satisfy himself; there is no need for him to take food away with him.



HaRav HaChaver Rav Menashe Stern at a *seudat mitzvah* in the Baba Sali's house

As we see here, the Baba Sali knew how to speak to each person according to his needs, while preserving the honor of the innocent and protecting the fool from falling. A person who had transgressed accidentally or due to circumstances beyond his control merited understanding and treatment commensurate with his situation and the

level he was on – and the Baba Sali knew precisely who had acted in a truly accidental manner and who was covering up deliberate acts with excuses. The following story we heard from the person involved in the incident, HaRav Yisrael Gellis.

One *Erev Shabbat* HaRav Gellis made his way with some members of the *Peilim* organization to the settlement of Mitzpe Rimon. They had planned to spend *Shabbat* there as part of their *kiruv* campaign in the south. On their way they passed Netivot and decided to visit the Baba Sali in order to receive his *Good Shabbat* blessing. When the Baba Sali heard that they were planning to spend *Shabbat* in Mitzpe Rimon, he told them, "You should be aware that the residents of that *moshav* are very simple people. Some are completely ignorant and have strayed out of lack of knowledge. We must treat them with respect; do not shout at them or say disparaging things to them. Even those who appear learned, such as the *gabbai*, are total ignoramuses. This *gabbai* does not know his left from his right. He needs to perform this task for *shalom bayit*, to keep the peace in his home, but the fact is he has no idea how to do the job." That was the end of the conversation. None of those present including his family, understood what he was referring to; they had never heard him speak in that way before.

The *Peilim* group arrived in Mitzpe Rimon, where they were guests of the Rav of the *moshav*. They made their preparations for *Shabbat* and completely forgot about the conversation. As *Shabbat* came in, they went with their host to the synagogue, where they prayed together with all members of the moshav. When the prayers were over, and the last of the congregants had wished the Rav "*Shabbat Shalom*" and gone home, the Rav and his guests made their way to the front of the synagogue. As they left, they noticed the *gabbai*, who had been waiting for the last of the congregants to leave, turning switch after switch until all the lights in the synagogue were out. They could not believe what they were seeing and, having forgotten the Baba Sali's warning, they were about to protest, when the Rav abruptly silenced

them. "This *gabbai*," he explained, "is a total ignoramus. He came from Morocco twenty years ago and does not know his left from his right. Had he not needed this appointment to create an atmosphere of *shalom bayit* in his home, he would not have been given the position. He simply does not know that it is forbidden to extinguish the lights on *Shabbat*. When I was appointed Rav of this *moshav* and became aware of his simplicity, I realized that this was a matter of life and death. If the man would learn that his actions violate the *Shabbat*, his heart would not be able to withstand the pain and he would die." Then the guests remembered what the Baba Sali had told them while they were en route to Mitzpe Rimon. They were amazed at his ability to see such great distances.

After *Shabbat*, one of the guests traveled to Netivot to tell the Baba Sali what had taken place in Mitzpe Rimon. The Baba Sali suggested that the man purchase a "Shabbat clock" as a present for the *gabbai*. He could then explain it with the following rationalization: "I see that you work very hard on behalf of the synagogue and you are not such a young man. In the synagogues in Jerusalem they use a new invention so that the *gabbai* will not have to work so hard. To avoid the tiring work of going from switch to switch, you simply decide at what time you wish the lights to go out; you can then set the clock to turn off all the lights simultaneously." The *gabbai* was elated at this Jerusalem "invention" and went straight to the Rav of the *moshav* to tell him that the guests had brought with them some of the wisdom of Jerusalem.

This was the Baba Sali's way, to right the wrongs of others in his pleasant manner, while at the same time being uncompromising with brazen people who intentionally violated the ways of the Torah.

"THIS IS MY G-D AND I SHALL BEAUTIFY HIM" (Shmot 15:2)

The Baba Sali was renowned for his steadfastness in service of Hashem, where he and Hashem were "One". He could never be dissuaded from his immense efforts towards beautifying his *mitzvah* performance; his soul yearned to cleave to Hashem, Giver of Life and all his actions were directed towards that goal. For over ninety years, from his early youth until the end of his life, he utilized his strength to its fullest to glorify the Torah and to elevate Hashem's Name in the world.

The number of hours he slept had already diminished beyond human comprehension and still continued to dwindle. A half hour from time to time, and that was all! When a relative stayed with him and they discussed retiring for the night, the Baba Sali would ask the other person to wake him after half an hour. The moment the other person covered himself with a blanket, he would fall into a very deep sleep. The Baba Sali on the other hand, always kept his feet exposed while sleeping in order not to sleep too deeply, and would arise like a lion after half an hour. When he turned to wake his *chavruta*, the other could not believe that the Baba Sali had just completed his entire night's sleep.

From when he was able to fend for himself, he never missed arising at midnight and reciting the *Tikkun Chatzot* in private. He did not allow anyone else to enter the room during that time. On one occasion the Rabbanit came in, not realizing that it was midnight. She found the Baba Sali sitting on the floor with his face almost touching the tiles. Next to him was a big puddle of water. The Rabbanit assumed that he had spilled some water and she wanted to clean it up. The Baba Sali was unaware of her presence in the room until she asked what had spilled on the floor. He lifted his head from the floor and said to her, "This is the reason I always asked that nobody enter the room at this hour. Since you have already seen what you have seen,

I will ask you not to reveal it to anyone in the world. The water here is my tears, which I am unable to stop as long as the Divine Presence is in exile."

There are many who arise at midnight to recite *Tikkun Chatzot*, but most people return to their beds to make up for their lack of sleep. For the Baba Sali, however, waking up for midnight prayers was also waking up for morning prayers – it was already the beginning of a new day. A close confidant who stayed with him in France related that after he had completed *Tikkun Chatzot* he would sit on the cold ground and study the holy Torah until the morning.

The Baba Sali never rested a book on the table when he was learning. He always held the book in front of his eyes. In his view, it diminishes the honor of the Torah if we do not put that extra effort into our learning by holding the book in our hands the entire time. One of his oldest friends, HaRav Avraham Biton, related that once when he arrived at the Baba Sali's home, he found him poring over a *Gemara* which was clearly too heavy for him. When he saw how difficult it was for him, he suggested using a *shtender* as is customary in the holy Yeshivot. The Baba Sali smiled and responded: "*Shtender*? I have a *shtender* ... here is my *shtender*!" He raised his two hands.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira once related, "I never saw my father or my grandfather place the *Gemara* upon the table; they always held it in their hands. When they noticed us resting our *Gemaras* upon the table, they would immediately point out to us that we must not degrade the Torah".

Day and night he devoted himself to studying Torah, with long hours dedicated to the study of the holy *Zohar*, and much time in isolation cleaving to His Creator. His faithful assistant from Tafilalet, R' Avraham Sabag related that when the Baba Sali was immersed in his learning, nothing could disturb him. It was possible to walk around, shout or move heavy furniture right next to him, yet he would not even lift his eyes.

For the Baba Sali, prayer truly became a "service of the heart", for he would begin his preparations for prayer from the moment he concluded the previous *Tefilla*, as his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a told us: "From the moment he concluded *Shacharit*, which he had prayed *kevatikin* (at sunrise), he would begin preparing for *Mincha*.

Perhaps this would be a good point to relate an insight of the Baba Sali regarding *Tefillat vatikin*. From the verse, "יראוך עם שמש ולפני ירח דור דורים" - "They will fear You as long as the sun and moon endure." (Tehillim 72:5) *Chazal* derive that this refers to those who pray *vatikin*, completing the *Shma* with the sunrise (see Brachot 9b). The Baba Sali pointed out that the verse makes use of the term יראוך – "they shall fear You," when it would have been more appropriate to say יתפללו – "they shall pray to You." The Baba Sali explained in his usual pleasant way that the way to serve Hashem with fear is to be meticulous about keeping to the proper times for prayer, thereby rising to greater heights in cleaving to the Creator. One who serves Hashem out of love, which is a higher level than fear, clearly does not cleave to the Creator any less than this, for his entire life is spent crowning the Creator above him.

He would insist on fulfilling any *mitzvah* that came his way in the best possible manner, satisfying all opinions. His stringency was particularly apparent when it came to the *kashrut* of *matzot* on *Pesach*. He himself would go out to harvest the wheat and draw the "מים שלנו", supervising and participating in the baking and all that the work entails. In general, the Baba Sali would perform anything related to the festivals in a very meticulous manner despite the tremendous effort that this required on his part.

During the *Sefirat HaOmer* he would eagerly anticipate the moment when the time came to fulfill this *mitzvah* each evening. Long before *Maariv*, he would ask from time to time: "When can we pray and count the *Sefirat Haomer* already?" When the time arrived, his actual



counting would take a very long time. Even after the rest of the congregation had already finished the psalms following the counting, he was still beginning his count, emphasizing every word and letter, and counting each day on his fingers. Quite often, even after he had concluded his prayer, he could be heard throughout the day whispering to himself the days of *Sefirat HaOmer*. Very late one night, the Baba Sali summoned his assistant to his room to confirm that he had indeed recited the proper *bracha* and counted the correct number that evening. When he felt that people thought his suspicions superfluous, he would explain, "Do you really think that Hashem needs our counting? Hashem wished to give us merit and he therefore gave us extra *mitzvot*. It is therefore incumbent upon us to be very meticulous in the gifts of the Creator, and the more meticulous we are, the more merits we will amass."

From his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, we heard of the many great stringencies which he practiced in the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. Every few months he would purchase a new pair of *tefillin* for himself. Once this was because he heard of a new type of glue that was being used; another time he had heard of a scribe who was extremely G-d-fearing and he placed an order from him for *parshiot* to be written with the utmost sanctity and purity. At a later date, word spread of a special hide that could be used for parchment, so the Baba Sali hurried to purchase a new pair of *tefillin* to be written on this parchment. This did not prevent him from purchasing another pair of *tefillin* when he heard of special long-lasting ink that had been developed by G-d-fearing individuals, although he hardly needed long-lasting *tefillin*, since he would very shortly purchase another pair for himself. He was aware of the existence of every possible stringency, and he wished to fulfill each one as an expression of his great love for the *mitzvah* and his desire to fulfill it down to the last detail.

"THE FORM WHICH THE SAGES ESTABLISHED IN BRACHOT" (Brachot 40b)

In North Africa the Baba Sali had earned a reputation as a miracle worker and a bringer of salvation. Even the non-Jews feared him when they saw his power occasionally revealed. Widespread public acclaim came only during the last twenty years of his life, after he had settled in *Eretz Yisrael*. In addition to the hundreds who came to gaze at his countenance and to drink in his palpable greatness, there were tens of thousands who flocked to him to lay their troubles before him, seeking deliverance in his blessings.

Indeed the Baba Sali became known as an expert in *'Massechet Brachot* '(lit. the Tractate of Blessings) as his words were fulfilled in the heavens. It is no wonder that many chroniclers of the holy life of the Baba Sali concentrated mainly on his miracles, relating countless stories of distress and troubles that were cured instantly. Doctors in hospitals throughout *Eretz Yisrael* were aware that the knowledge they had amassed during years of study lost all meaning once the patient consulted the Baba Sali. Many patients whom the doctors thought incurable returned to walk among the living. "Lost cases", in an act of desperation grasped on to the Baba Sali's *bracha* and were answered. The burdens of life's trials and tribulations were removed from the bent shoulders of those who sought the Baba Sali's blessings.

When he wished to remove a negative judgment against someone who merited his blessings, an open miracle would take place instantaneously. There are thousands upon thousands of authenticated first-person accounts recorded of how the salvation that he promised was immediately fulfilled in heaven.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related an incident regarding the son of *a gadol hador* (one of the giants of the generation), who was himself a *talmid chacham* of renown. From

infancy the boy had suffered from very severe asthma. His breathing deteriorated until he was hospitalized at the age of sixteen in very serious condition. The doctors were at a loss to ease his suffering. His father would meet the Baba Sali from time to time to discuss Torah thoughts, or to seek his advice on public matters, and was aware of his great ability to bring about salvation. When the boy's illness defeated the doctors, the father brought him to the home of the Baba Sali, who put his hand on the lad's face and wished him a *refuah shlema*. To this day, that scholar no longer experiences shortness of breath or any difficulty in breathing. This was not an isolated incident.

In another case related by Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, he brought to his grandfather a man from Nahariya, who had been a patient in the psychiatric ward in Beer Yaakov for two years. He did not even know his family and friends. R' David told his grandfather that this was one of his oldest friends, yet he did not recognize him. The Baba Sali placed his hand on the sick man's head and he became totally coherent, as if that very moment his eyes opened. R' David ended the story: "On the way to Nahariya we stopped at Beer Yaakov just to collect his clothing and personal belongings."

What many of his supplicants did not know, and what was not apparent in all the incredible stories of the Baba Sali's miracles, is exactly how he brought about salvation. He would conceal from the eyes of onlookers the manner in which he dedicated himself to help the broken-hearted and to extricate them from the terrible decrees hanging over their heads. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, testifies that on a day when he learned that a Jew was suffering, he would refuse to eat. The entire day he would not remove his *tefillin* and would not sit down. His family would try to persuade him to taste something, or at least to sit and not stand all day, fasting. He answered them with a face filled with sadness: "How can I sit in my seat and satiate myself with food when another Jew is suffering so badly?"

On the other hand, when he himself was not feeling well, when weakness would overtake him from the long fasting and the intensity of his self-denial, when he had difficulty opening his eyes and had to spend most of his time lying down, he would bolster his flagging strength to sit up on the couch to receive people. When they were brought into the room and saw his joyful expression, they could never have imagined that it was only on the surface, and that wearing it caused the Baba Sali to suffer sevenfold. He never received anyone with a sad face, but greeted everyone warmly.

When he prayed on someone's behalf, it was not enough simply to mention his name; he would sacrifice himself to bring about the salvation he needed. More than once was he heard crying in his prayers beseeching Hashem to bring suffering upon him as a means of atoning for the sins of the petitioner, whom he had never met before. A frequent visitor testified that he heard the Baba Sali whispering, "Master of the Universe, I am ready to enter the furnace and to give my life as long as it serves as an atonement for this person".

His assistant once came into the room after a Jew had left to find the Baba Sali holding his face in his hands, his eyes streaming with tears. When he realized that the assistant was there, he said, "At times I am so troubled by people's anguish that I pray that both of my hands should be cut off to serve as an atonement, so that the person will be redeemed from his suffering."

Is it any wonder that there are so many people who feel that they owe him everything they have?

"MY WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS AND MY THOUGHTS ARE HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS" (Yeshayahu 55:9)

The Baba Sali's uniqueness was not limited to those times that he revealed his strength by performing open miracles, for his entire demeanor was beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. Even men of stature were amazed by the simplicity with which he spoke about the secrets of creation and the hidden ways in which Hashem guides His world. Even if we believe that the paths of heaven are as familiar to *tzaddikim* as the entryways to their own homes, the matter-of-fact manner in which the Baba Sali spoke about heavenly concepts was astounding.

Stories heard from reliable witnesses abound: there was the time he painted an imaginary line with his stick around a fire that had taken hold of his furniture and the blaze died down precisely at the line that he had made; when he insisted that a driver keep going even though the gas gauge showed the tank to be empty; when he stopped in the middle of a busy street to pray, and the traffic came to a halt on its own a few hundred meters from where he stood, in order not to disturb his concentration; when an Arab bus driver refused to stop the vehicle to allow the passengers to pray *Mincha* and only moments later one of the tires blew out and the bus could not move, leaving sufficient time for both *Mincha* and *Maariv*. Another time he instructed his driver to fill up the car's radiator from a nearby spring, yet when the man came back again to search for the spring, he was unable to find it, despite the fact that he had marked the place with a pile of stones. Once when a guest disturbed him by taking pictures with a flash, he later discovered that all of the pictures taken with that flash were ruined while other pictures on the roll of film remained intact. Countless other stories provide us with a glimpse of the Baba Sali's daily routine, reminding us that his thoughts were way above those of an ordinary person.

Just being in his company, and seeing how his household was run, brought many of those close to him to feel that every step he took in this world defied the laws of nature.

One of his loyal assistants, hoping for a firsthand account of the incident that had become known as "the miracle of the *machya*", took advantage of an opportunity to ask the Baba Sali precisely what had taken place. The Baba Sali at first evaded the question, stating, "What happened, happened." The assistant deduced from this response that the story was indeed authentic, and he persisted until the Baba Sali agreed to tell it to him. This is what he told.

"The incident took place on *a Motzaei Shabbat* in our home in Morocco. We sat down to *Melave Malka* with close to four hundred guests around our table. The household had not prepared enough for so many guests. All the stores, including those owned by non-Jews, were already closed, and the only drink in the house was half a bottle of *machya*. I took the half-empty bottle, wrapped it in my cloak and asked that it be served to all those present so that they could make a blessing and also be blessed with *Lechayim* – to life. The bottle became blessed and its contents were able to satisfy all the guests."

We heard similar stories from people who attended various *mitzvah* functions in his house - how the Baba Sali would cover a bottle of *machya* or whiskey and pour many drinks from it while the bottle remained full to capacity.

The following story heard from his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a helps us weave together a double message regarding his conduct in general as well as the miraculous manner in which he lived and was Divinely assisted.

During the entire time he resided in Tafilalet, he made sure to pray with nine other handpicked *tzaddikim* who would attend his *minyan* three times daily. Even when he traveled, he would take them with

him and pay them for their services. This was very important to him and he was willing to do anything in order to keep the *minyan* intact. When one of the *minyan* members was delayed on the road, the others would wait for him to join them.

During one of his travels, as they made their way to the village of Tirgleil, the burial site of R' Machluf ben Yoseph Abichazira, grandson of the patriarch of the dynasty R' Shmuel, one of the *tzaddikim* from the *minyan* fell ill and was confined to bed. In spite of his usual insistence, the Baba Sali decided to continue on his way, for there was little time left to prostrate himself by the holy grave in Tirgileil. The *minyan* members were wondering how the Baba Sali would be able to pray with a minyan. The Baba Sali seemed unconcerned and continued on his way to the holy grave.

As they arrived in Tirgileil they met a distinguished-looking Jew with a long beard, who seemed to be waiting to pray with them. The Baba Sali rejoiced as they rose to pray. If at first they had judged the stranger by his appearance alone, after observing his prayer they concluded that he indeed was worthy of being counted in the Baba Sali's *minyan.*

When the prayer was over, before they even had a chance to bid him farewell, the man disappeared from before their eyes ...

During another of his long journeys, en route from France to Morocco by car, the Baba Sali was praying *Maariv*. On reaching the *Shmone Esrei* prayer, he motioned to the driver to make an immediate stop, for he did not wish to have any delay between "גאל ישראל" and *Shmone Esrei* (see Brachot 4b). The driver was reluctant to stop, for they were on a very winding, dangerous road, but the Baba Sali insisted and the driver halted immediately. The Baba Sali alighted from the car, approached a nearby tree, and became engrossed in prayer.

A moment later a policeman on a motorcycle ground to a halt, asking the driver why he had stopped at such a dangerous spot. The driver explained apologetically that his passenger, an elderly Rabbi, had to get out to pray precisely at that place. In his heart, he was hoping to draw out the conversation with the officer to allow sufficient time for the Baba Sali to conclude his prayer.

To the driver's amazement, not only did the police officer not ask for any further explanation, but he even redirected the traffic with his flashlight until the Baba Sali had finished his prayers and returned to the car. The driver wished to thank the police officer for his generous assistance, but the Baba Sali stopped him in his tracks saying: "You have nothing to search for; that man was not a policeman at all."



INVOLVEMENT WITH HIDDEN BUSINESS

The Baba Sali's home was open to all and everyone who entered was greeted warmly. Simple people and the extremely pious would sit together, waiting to behold his holy visage and to experience spiritual elevation. The Baba Sali for his part had the ability to speak to each person on his own level, just as a mother gets down on the floor to play with her young child. Anyone attempting to catch a glimpse "behind the curtain" to observe his actions would not even begin to comprehend, for whatever the Baba Sali chose not to reveal could never be revealed or understood. Those close to him repeated over and over the advice recorded in the book *Ben Sira*: (see Chagiga 13a) "Into that which is removed from you, do not inquire and into that which is shrouded from you, do not probe. That which you have been authorized to study, contemplate; you have no business dealing with things that are hidden."

On rare occasions they had an inkling of what went on behind the curtain. To see and hear, but not to understand. A few testimonies can serve us as examples ...

One day the Baba Sali went on a mysterious journey to the Arab-controlled city of Gaza, accompanied by the Rabbanit. Nobody was aware of the destination or purpose of the excursion. When they reached Gaza, the Baba Sali directed the driver through many alleyways into the heart of a particular neighborhood. He asked the driver to stop near a humble home with chickens scurrying around in the yard. The Baba Sali put his hand out the window and touched one of the chickens with his finger, whispering to the Rabbanit, "This chicken is the reincarnation of a Jewish soul." Saying no more, he asked to be taken back to Netivot immediately.

For many years the Baba Sali owned a second home in Jerusalem, and on occasion would spend time there, even if it was only a few hours. Often, even when he was old and sick and the weather was

unfavorable for a journey, he would ask his assistants to bring him to Jerusalem, so that he could complete his quota of *Zohar* study over there. Once, on the return trip from Jerusalem to Netivot, he mentioned to his assistant, "This trip was worth it simply for the one paragraph of the *Zohar* I learned. One paragraph of *Zohar* learned in Jerusalem is worth ten pages of *Zohar* learned elsewhere."

A firsthand testimony heard from his close friend and confidant R' Sholom Dov Stern will be presented here in a story that has never been told before. During one of Rav Stern's visits to the Baba Sali in Netivot, the Baba Sali made a request to accompany him back to Jerusalem in his taxi[21]. When Rav Stern responded positively, expressing his joy at this great privilege that had fallen his way, the Baba Sali asked for his *Shabbat* clothes. When the guest inquired as to why the Baba Sali had decided to wear his *Shabbat* clothing in the middle of the week, he answered in a matter-of-fact manner: "Eliyahu HaNavi is wandering the streets of Jerusalem ... perhaps I will meet him ... I would like to meet him dressed in *Shabbat* attire."

He said something similar on another occasion. At times the Baba Sali would seclude himself in his room, instructing that all windows and doors be closed, so that no one would be able to see him. Once when he gave these instructions, he told his assistant with an enigmatic smile: "You need not worry; if Eliyahu HaNavi wished to come into my room, he would be able to enter even with all the windows and doors barred shut."

On a different occasion, when one of his close confidants was hurrying to a *Brit Milah*, the Baba Sali insisted that he remain, saying: "Your desire is to celebrate a *Brit Milah* together with Eliyahu HaNavi? I promise you that your wish can be fulfilled even if you remain in my house. Let us conduct a festive meal together in his

---

21. At that point the Baba Sali asked him whether the taxi driver was Jewish. He was extremely careful not to ride with Arab drivers, even if they charged much less than the Jewish drivers.

honor. When Eliyahu HaNavi hears that I am making a meal in his honor, he will hurry to join us".

When HaRav Sholom Chaim Porush visited the Baba Sali, soon after the miraculous victory of the Six Day War, the conversation turned to the war that had just ended. We have recorded the awesome words that he heard from the Baba Sali on that occasion: "Before the war, when there was a great threat to the existence of the Jewish nation, people came to me, very scared ... I calmed them and told them not to fear ... if they wished to recite Tehillim they should do so ... I lit candles in honor of R' Shimon bar Yochai and in honor of the *Baal Shem Tov*. I then told the people that in the merit of these righteous people, we would be victorious and down four hundred enemy planes"[22].

Imagine the great fear that people felt on the eve of the war – many testified that they parted from their loved ones in the way families parted on the way to the death camps. While everyone else was preparing for a difficult war with potentially grave consequences, the Baba Sali was speaking about a resounding victory for the Jewish army! While everyone else was talking of land battles with grueling tank combat, the Baba Sali already knew that this war would be determined in the air!

If you are wondering about the Baba Sali's connection to the *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of *Hassidut* we will share with you another testimony which was also heard from R' Sholom Chaim Porush.

---

22. The security officer in Yavne was responsible for maintaining the blackout imposed by the civil guard. He related that on the first night of the war, he had noticed lights burning in the Baba Sali's home and had knocked on the door. He explained the danger– the lights enabled the enemy aircraft to pinpoint settlements and to bomb them. The Baba Sali dismissed this saying, "The enemy has no more planes; they have all been destroyed." The security officer viewed this as no more than wishful thinking. Two days later an official report stated that all enemy planes had been destroyed in the first few hours of the war.

In the year 5726 [1965-66], after the publication of "*Be'er Moshe*" on the book of *Shmot* by the *Rebbe* of Ozerov, R' Moshe Yechiel Epstein, the *Rebbe* told R' Sholom Chaim who had edited the book and prepared it for publication that he had heard about a great Rav who had just arrived from Morocco, to whom he would like to present a copy of his book. He asked R' Sholom Chaim to go to the Baba Sali's home to bring him the book.

When R' Sholom Chaim entered the Baba Sali's home in the Bakaa neighborhood he told him about the *Rebbe*'s hope that he would enjoy the deep concepts contained in the book. The Baba Sali asked R' Sholom Chaim, "Is the book based on the ways of the *Baal Shem Tov*? I refuse to look at a book that does not follow in the path of the *Baal Shem Tov*!" When R' Sholom Chaim expressed his curiosity about the special relationship the Baba Sali seemed to have with the *Baal Shem Tov*, the Baba Sali responded, "It is something in my soul ... from the age of fifteen I have been connected to the ways of the *Baal Shem Tov*."

Then the Baba Sali added a sentence which is beyond the understanding of ordinary people such as ourselves: "Before my very eyes I saw the *Baal Shem Tov* and he did not say a single word to me. I then saw the *Maggid* of Mezeritch who spoke to me, but I am not permitted to divulge what he said."

Afterwards the Baba Sali asked how old the *Rebbe* of Ozerov was, and when he was told that he was born in the year 5650 [1890], he answered immediately, "We are the same age". The Baba Sali blessed the Ozerover *Rebbe* over and over as he leafed through the book. As R' Sholom Chaim took his leave, the Baba Sali emphasized to him, "Tell the *Rebbe* that I bless him to be able to fulfill all of his pure yearnings".

When the Ozerover *Rebbe* heard this final blessing he responded in great amazement: "How does he know of my hidden business?"[23]

---

23. HaGaon R' Sholom Chaim added that when Baba Sali visited *Mosad HaRav Kook* six

During the first visit of the *Rebbe* of *Shomrei Emunim* to the Baba Sali's home, the Baba Sali revealed to him some of the dreams and visions he had of the *Baal Shem Tov*, of his leading disciple, the *Maggid* of Mezeritch, and of his holy disciple, R' Elimelech of Lizensk.

In a similar vein, his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira told us that once when a close confidant came to see him, he found the Baba Sali enveloped in an aura of holiness, with a warm smile on his lips. When he realized that his guest had entered, he said to him, "The holy *Baal Shem Tov* was just here with me".

Another close confidant, HaRav Sholom Dov Stern from London, who was very beloved by the Baba Sali, remembers being a guest in the Baba Sali's home in Netivot on *Shabbat Parshat Mishpatim*, 5737 [1977]. On Sunday morning, the Baba Sali ordered that a grand meal be served in the guest's honor. They sat together for a long time. Suddenly the expression on the Baba Sali's face changed. For a moment he was silent, then he proclaimed, "There is great darkness in the skies; I do not know what has happened." There and then he ordered that the meal be terminated and hurried to seclude himself in his room. After a while it became known that at that very moment, ten twenty-five, the *Beit Yisrael*, the Gerrer *Rebbe*, had died.

One evening the Baba Sali was dining in his home on Sorotzkin St. in Jerusalem with a few of his close acquaintances, including R' Moshe Deitch, who reported the following incident to us. The Baba Sali was leaning his head on his clenched fists, as was his habit while engrossed in holy thoughts. Suddenly he raised his head and asked: "*Chacham* Yehuda! Who is the *Chacham* Yehuda?" None of those present knew to whom the Baba Sali was referring, not even when he repeated the question, this time adding the last name "Cohen". Only the following

---

years later, he was working there. He asked the Baba Sali whether he remembered him. The immediate response was: "Certainly! His honor brought me the book "*Be'er Moshe*".

morning did his questions become clear. In the neighborhood of Meah Shearim, the body of R' Chaim Yehuda Cohen zt"l[24] was found. An old man who had lived alone, he had died in the middle of the night; nobody was with him when he returned his soul to his Maker. The Baba Sali, who had never met him or seen him in his life, felt his soul departing and therefore wondered out loud who the sage Yehuda Cohen was.

We heard another facet of this story from HaRav Yisrael Gellis of Jerusalem, who was in the Baba Sali's home the following day. Suddenly the Baba Sali asked those around him: "Who is the *chacham* Yehuda Cohen? Does anyone know anything about him?" He said to Rav Gellis, "You are a Yerushalmi. Perhaps you know who this sage, Yehuda Cohen was." Not one of those present knew to whom the Baba Sali was referring. An hour and a half later, a loudhailer was heard in the street, announcing the funeral of R' Chaim Yehuda Cohen. The Baba Sali, who never needed to be informed of what was happening on earth, received constant updates as well on what was taking place in the heavens.

Such was the atmosphere in the home of the Baba Sali and this is what attracted great *tzaddikim* and those seeking to hear the word of Hashem to his home. Many of them traveled long hours for the privilege of seeing his holiness and tasting the taste of the Garden of Eden which affected all those who came into his vicinity.



24. Considered one of the most special people of Jerusalem, he was fondly nicknamed "Yudel the waker", for he would walk in the alleyways of his neighborhood in the early morning and in a loud voice wake the people to serve their Creator.

OVER THE MOON

The Baba Sali was particularly meticulous in his observance of the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush levana*. He would consistently recite the blessing on the eighth day of each month. According to the view of the *Shulchan Aruch* the evening of the eighth day is the first evening on which the blessing may be recited. The Baba Sali adhered to R' Yochanan's dictum: "Whoever blesses the new moon at its proper time is regarded as one who greets the Divine Presence." (Sanhedrin 42a). In anticipation of this grand and lofty experience he would don a special cloak and his face would radiate heavenly light.

He made his preparations for the *mitzvah* with great self-sacrifice, putting his entire being into it and spreading his enthusiasm to others. Even in temperatures close to zero or in heavy rain, he would not forego the opportunity to fulfill this *mitzvah* and would go outside with great joy. Furthermore, when he returned home, soaked to the skin, others would have to point out to him that he had gotten wet, for he had not felt the rain at all.

He was once in Lyons, France on the latest night for reciting *Kiddush levana*. Unfavorable weather conditions had prevented him from reciting the blessing earlier. A close watch of the weather forecast revealed that in the city of Marseilles, some 380 kilometers away, the skies had cleared. As soon as the Baba Sali was informed of this fact, he boarded an express train and traveled for a number of hours in order to recite the blessing at its proper time.

In the month of Kislev of the year 5712 [1951], while on a visit to Paris as a guest in the home of his student, R' Yichye Sheetrit, the final night for reciting this blessing had arrived and the Baba Sali was very distressed that he had not yet fulfilled the *mitzvah*. Suddenly at two o'clock in the morning, the Baba Sali awoke the student with whom he was sharing a room and urged him to go out and bless the

moon with him. "I had a Divine revelation that the clouds have dispersed," he whispered to him as they made their way to the courtyard.

In the year 5734 [1973-74], while visiting his son-in-law R' David Buso Shlit"a in Paris, he once walked all the way down from the fifth floor of the building in order to sanctify the moon. The family tried to dissuade him from exerting himself, pointing out that the sky was very cloudy and it was a pity to climb the stairs for nothing. He did not heed their words and made his way down all the stairs and out of the building. Then he looked upwards, and with a motion of his hand, it seemed as if he ordered the clouds to disperse, as if he were opening the curtain that was covering the window of his house.

In a similar incident which took place in Netivot on the eighth day of the month, his assistant informed the Baba Sali that it was cloudy outside and that there was no chance of reciting the blessing that evening. In response, the Baba Sali instructed his assistant to read for him from the *Midrash Rabba*. Twenty minutes later, the Baba Sali cut him off saying, "Let us go out to sanctify the moon." When the assistant suggested that he himself go out first into the bitter cold to check if the clouds had indeed dispersed, the Baba Sali responded, "The moon has already appeared. I have seen it".

He had the custom of distributing whiskey after *Kiddush levana*, inviting those present to join him for a *lechaim*. *Kiddush levana* was known by his family to be a particular auspicious time for him, when he was able to perform many wonders. Many people would hurry to his *minyan* in order to recite the blessing with him. In the final year of the Baba Sali's life, when the time came to sanctify the month of Nissan, he was approached by a young Torah scholar who had been married for eight years yet was unfortunately still childless. The man arrived with a bottle of whiskey, hoping that the Baba Sali would distribute his whiskey. The man was the recipient of great Heavenly

assistance, as it was just before Passover, and the Baba Sali had no whiskey left in his house. The young scholar produced the bottle of whiskey from his pack and gave the Baba Sali the honor of distributing it. The Baba Sali treated the young man very warmly and blessed him that he would soon have children. Less than a year later, the man was blessed with a son.

"YOUR HUMILITY MADE ME GREAT"

(Tehillim 18:36)

Although thousands upon thousands of devout Jews held the Baba Sali in high esteem during his lifetime, countless stories of his miracle-working came to light only after his passing. Miracles flowed from his home, bestowing life and bringing about salvation. The common thread in all the stories relating his miracles was that they were performed in a matter-of-fact manner, as if they were nothing out of the ordinary. Many of the stories involved the sick who had been healed, childless women who had become pregnant, the lonely who finally found their lifetime partner, and those with no means of earning a livelihood who were granted abundance as a result of his blessings. At times he would give petitioners a special bottle of water which he had blessed.

There were medical files that appeared to be lacking only a death certificate, which in the end were classified: "Medical Miracle". Even difficult cases brought to him, after all hope was lost, were immediately solved, even though many of his recommendations appeared to contradict reality. None of this affected the total humility that permeated his actions. He would often respond to those seeking his counsel with the question "Why are you coming to me?" or "What do you want from me in particular?"

His self-negation was especially marked when a great Torah sage was with him. The more he did to honor him, the more he felt that what he had done was insufficient. When *talmidei chachamim* took their leave of him, he would apologize for not having accorded them enough honor. An example of this is a story told by the *Rishon LeZion* HaGaon HaRav Ovadiah Yoseph *Shlit"a*, who was told by the Baba Sali during a visit to Netivot, "Had I known that you were coming to visit, I would have slaughtered a cow and a sheep in your honor." For this reason, visits from great Rabbis to his home were a difficult undertaking and he tried to avoid them.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related how in the year 5722 [1961-62], when he resided in Morocco, the Baba Sali once seated himself on the floor of his son Rabenu Meir's room. He lamented to his son that after much soul-searching, he had come to the conclusion that he was not worthy of anything. Why should he agree to have great numbers of people call on him when he was not worthy of it? The effectiveness of all his blessings must mean that his few merits were being deducted from him in exchange for the fulfillment of each blessing. He then asked his son if he would agree to take over his role so that he could conserve his strength in order to serve Hashem. When Rabenu Meir attempted to encourage his father, the Baba Sali refused to prolong the conversation, saying that he had already instructed his assistant not to allow anyone in to see him, so that he could sit in seclusion with his Creator. He was to inform those seeking him that the Baba Sali was very weak and no longer possessed the strength needed to bless the Jewish people.

The following day, the Baba Sali returned to Rabenu Meir and told him that that night his grandfather, the Abir Yaakov, had appeared to him in a dream saying, "My son, what have you done? How could you say that you would cease to bless the people of Israel; you have caused a great commotion in the upper worlds! Your words bear fruit and in the heavens they take your utterances very seriously. You must return immediately and reopen your gates to all those who knock, and bring salvation to the people of Israel, for the verse: 'O, that out of Zion will come Israel's salvations' (Tehillim 53) undoubtedly applies to you."

Do not think for a moment that this had any effect on the Baba Sali; as soon as he had related this to his son Rabenu Meir, he repeated his fear that all his merits would be taken away in exchange for the positive outcome of his blessings.

Once his son-in-law, the great sage R' David Yehudayoff, found him sitting on the ground deploring his situation. Shocked, he asked

him what had happened. The Baba Sali answered, "The entire world is mistaken about me, and many people think that there is something special in me ... I know myself, I know my value and I know that I am devoid of anything good. I fear that perhaps I am being given honor in this world in lieu of the little reward that I deserve ... how can I not bemoan my lot?"

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a relates that he would often lament his situation to members of his family, claiming that he was not doing enough to receive the presence of his Creator. His assistant in Tafilalet, R' Avraham Sabag, recalls how he would hurry to arrive first in the synagogue so that no-one would be there to stand up when he entered. This was his custom in his later years, when his name and great accomplishments had already become well-known. In his younger years, he had even gone so far as to order the members of the community not to stand up in his honor. If they did, he threatened, he would stop praying in the same synagogue with them. In spite of his status as the Rav of the community, and his awareness of his own powers, he did not think of himself as special and he refused to believe that his abilities were due in any way to his efforts.

While still in Morocco, where his name was famous, the Baba Sali tried to conceal himself. He would frequently travel to a city or village for a particular purpose; once there, he and his assistant would remain in the inn, not venturing out into the street. On one occasion, the Baba Sali spent two weeks in the city of Rabat without any of the local residents being aware of it. The local *Rabbanim* discovered his presence in their midst only when they needed his opinion in a complicated *halachic* issue and sent a messenger to his home in Budniv. The messenger returned from Budniv and informed the surprised *Rabbanim*, among them the head of the Rabbinical court R' Yehoshua Bardugo, that the Baba Sali was in fact staying in Rabat.

If anyone thought he could convince the Baba Sali of his uniqueness by pointing out his ability to perform great miracles, he would be

mistaken. He would explain, "There is no special blessing here; it is simply a matter of faith. When you genuinely believe, Hashem will provide for you, based on the depth of your belief. This is the true blessing and this is the source of success ... a high level of pure faith will result in an abundance of success ... I am not the reason and your salvation does not depend on me, for there are no miracles and no Divine Spirit here."

He customarily gave a phial of water as a *segula* to those seeking his blessing; he attributed its efficacy to the simple and pure faith of those to whom he gave it. He once said to the Rabbanit that if they had taken water from the faucet and at the same time strengthened their belief in the Creator of the Universe they would have been blessed. He would regularly say, "The secret is found in the letters of the alphabet: *emunah* (faith) which begins with the first letter, *aleph*, is what produces the *bracha* (blessing) which begins with the second letter, *bet*"[25].

When people informed him that his blessings had come true, or when family members would ask him to recall a great miracle that had taken place years before, he would declare that all the wonders were in the merit of his holy forebears. Of all his ancestors, he would attribute the success of his blessings mostly to the merit of his holy grandfather the Abir Yaakov.

In a Torah discussion with *Rebbe* Moshe Mordechai of Lelov the Baba Sali was quoted as saying, "Regarding Moshe Rabenu the Torah tells us, 'Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble' (Bamidbar 12:3). It was his humility that caused him to see the good in *Eretz Yisrael*,

---

25. From his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, we heard how he explained the effect of the bottles of water that he used to distribute – that the salvation was not dependent on the bottle of water, but rather on the deep intention with which he sweetened his blessing. Out of the goodness of his heart, and in his desire that everyone depart from him with a good feeling, he would give them something tangible; they would feel that had they received something from the *tzaddik*.

as opposed to the spies whose haughtiness resulted in their viewing it in a negative light. That is characteristic of the haughty person – he finds fault in everything, even changing good into bad. Upon seeing the oversized and beautiful fruits, the spies, rather than being amazed, pronounced them to be very strange and therefore concluded: 'Just as its fruit is unusual, so are its people unusual'" (*Rashi* Bamidbar 13:23).

The *Mishna* in *Massechet Peah* states: "Even though there is no required measure to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *peah*, it all depends on the size of the field, the number of poor, and the extent of the ענוה (*Peah, Perek* 1, *Mishna* 2). Rabenu Ovadiah MiBartenura explains that the amount which the owner leaves in the corner of his field for the poor is in direct proportion to the level of his ענוה, humility; the humbler he is, the more generously he gives. In another version Rabenu Ovadiah MiBartenura is said to have spelled the word ענבה, meaning "its grapes". The *mishna* now means that the amount the owner leaves over for the poor is based on the size and quality of the grapes. The Baba Sali explained that these two interpretations are dependent on each other. Someone who does not think too highly of himself does not see anything strange about a giant fruit but rather praises it as something special and thus is more generous, feeling he has more to give.

Not even family members or those very close to him, appreciated just how humble he was. Although he was well aware of the great power he possessed to bring about salvation to any Jew, whoever he might be, and he was certainly well aware of the holy work he was involved in, nonetheless he was cloaked in the greatest possible humility. This kind of humility is beyond ordinary human beings, even the wisest among them. It was a Divine level of humility, according to the words of R' Meir: (*Avot* 6:1) "Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake ... he is clothed in humility and fear of G-d". It was precisely where his greatness was apparent that his humility was found.



FOR THE SAKE OF THE JEWISH NATION

Although the Baba Sali was continually approached by innumerable people appealing to him about their personal problems, great and small, his essence was dedicated to the Jewish nation as a whole. He once told his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, "My spiritual life belongs to the Jewish nation." The Lubavitcher *Rebbe* described the Baba Sali as "A person of the general public." Let us understand fully the implications of this title.

While still in Morocco, the Baba Sali followed in the footsteps of his ancestors, traveling from city to village to inquire after the welfare of his brethren scattered throughout the country, focusing primarily on their spiritual needs and level of religious observance. Often he would appeal to their sense of generosity, collecting large sums to benefit the poor of his city as well as the poor of the Land of Israel.

When he lived in *Eretz Yisrael* his journeys had a different character and different goals. Often when he traveled, even those closest to him were not informed of the true purpose of the excursion. Rare glimpses of the reasons hinted that his journeys involved hidden goals aimed at saving the Jewish nation from evil decrees and to close the mouths of enemies and accusers of Israel. We find in the *Tanach* a weapon known as "מסע" (see Iyov 41:18 where the word "מסע" refers to a weapon similar to a slingshot. The word "מסע" also means 'travel'.) We can point to several occasions in which the Baba Sali's מסע was a journey into battle.

Most of his trips were not planned in advance. He would arise in the morning, express his desire to travel to a particular destination and transportation would immediately be arranged. One memorable journey, planned ten days in advance, was an excursion to the grave of the holy *tanna*, R' Shimon bar Yochai. He requested that his assistant arrange transportation at once and ensure that nothing should interfere with the plan.



During the entire journey to the grave in Miron, the Baba Sali displayed signs of great emotion. On arriving at their destination, he offered a short prayer at the holy site. As soon as he had finished, he requested that they return to Netivot. During the entire return journey too, the tension was clearly evident on his face. He asked the driver to proceed with extreme caution and urged everyone in the car make sure that the driver did not fall asleep at the wheel. Only when he finally arrived home did he relax a little. To the astonishment of those around him, he explained, "I saw with my own eyes a terrible calamity about to strike the Jewish nation. Had it not been for our safe return from Miron and our prayers, we would all have been doomed."



The Baba Sali at the entrance to the holy site in Miron

On the eve of Operation Peace for Galilee in 5742 [1982], when there was much tension in the North, he traveled without delay to Miron. After spending a long time deep in prayer by the grave of the holy R' Shimon bar Yochai, he emerged to tell his escorts: "Baruch Hashem, there is good news".

There were other times during that war when his face would be clouded by bad news from the battlefield. He would take the sadness to heart and his sorrow permeated his entire surroundings.

At the height of the war, tens of Israeli soldiers were killed by a bomb in the army headquarters in Tyre. A lavish meal was in progress when the news reached the Baba Sali's home. The Baba Sali entered the room and reprimanded the participants: "Jewish blood is being spilled like water and you continue to sit and eat to your heart's content!"

In Elul of 5730 [1970], a terrorist group hijacked an El Al plane on its way from Israel to the United States and forced it down in the Zarka region on the other side of the Jordan. Many of the passengers were Jewish, among them some well-known *Rabbanim*. Within a few hours the non-Jewish passengers were released, while the Jewish passengers were to be held hostage until the hijackers' demands were met by the Israeli government.

Important rabbis arrived at the Baba Sali's doorstep, asking him to pray on behalf of those held captive by cruel Ishmaelites. At first the Baba Sali refused to listen to them but instructed them to wash their hands to dine with him. Only during the meal did the guests have an opportunity to tell the Baba Sali about the hijacked plane and the impossible demands of the hijackers. The Baba Sali responded:

"Do you really think I was waiting for you to come before trying to awaken heavenly mercy for the captives? From the moment these difficult tidings became known to me two days ago, I have had no rest, but spent the entire time standing in prayer before Hashem to

save them. I have not eaten nor slept a wink, so distressed was I over the fate of the hostages. Now I have good news – after a night of tears, before going to pray, I lit candles to elevate the souls of the righteous so that they might awaken heavenly mercy to save the hostages. I then saw a great light; from Heaven it was revealed to me that the hostages will soon be released unharmed. Now that I have been informed that our prayers have been accepted, together with those of the entire nation, there is no longer any need for worry. I therefore requested that a thanksgiving meal be prepared in honor of this great news we have just been given from Heaven."

With his eyes which saw great distances and with his gaze which pierced the heavens, he could discern what was taking place elsewhere in the present as well as view what would take place in the future. Heading his list of concerns for the Jewish nation was the welfare of his Jewish brethren in the Land of Israel, who fight a constant war for survival. On many occasions he was heard praying intensely to the A-mighty on behalf of the Jewish nation. Only later was it found out that precisely at that moment a terrorist act had taken place.

In another incident, when a plane full of Jewish passengers was hijacked by terrorists, the Baba Sali spent many hours crying over their lot and praying for their salvation. When it was discovered that at the exact time that weeping and supplication were heard from his room, the hostages were released, those close to him tried to tell him that it was his merit which had saved them. He immediately silenced them, saying, "It was not my merit but rather the merit of my holy forefathers ...my witnesses in the heavens can testify that the pain I felt was greater than that felt by those on the hijacked plane.[26]



26. Similarly, we heard from one of his close confidants R' Sholom Dov Stern, that once while traveling from Jerusalem to the Baba Sali's home in Netivot he was involved in a car accident

from which he was saved only through great miracles. On his release from the hospital he came to receive the Baba Sali's blessing. When he complained about pain in various parts of his body, the Baba Sali responded, "Believe me, it hurt me much more than it hurt you." From then on when the Baba Sali traveled to Jerusalem, whenever he passed the area where the accident had taken place, he would recite the blessing "שעשה לי נס במקום הזה." -"Who performed a miracle for me in this place." He felt the pain of his fellow Jews, and when they were saved, he felt redeemed along with them.

We find this attitude in a letter from the Baba Sali to his disciple Raphael Amsalem: "You should know, my dear friend Raphael, from the day I received your telegram, I was extremely worried, even though these days I am not feeling well, (you should not know from such things) and I am constantly lying down. Nonetheless, from the moment I heard what had happened to your father, I forgot my own pain and I have been thinking only about him. My sorrow did not subside in the least until I received a letter from his daughter and her mother that his eyesight was beginning to return.

"WHO PURSUES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND KINDNESS" (Mishle 21:21)

Concern for Klal Yisrael was always at the forefront of his mind. He was always aware of news of difficulties and tragedies; the knowledge of even one person suffering from pain or unable to earn a comfortable living caused him sleepless nights.

The poverty which accompanied the miseries of World War II greatly disturbed the Baba Sali. If earning a livelihood had not been easy until then, the war made economic conditions so much worse that many people could no longer earn their daily bread. He worked tirelessly to aid these unfortunates, giving away large sums from his own personal funds and sending his faithful agents to solicit donations for the needy. Even when he was away from his community, he would encourage his family, headed by Rabenu Meir, to aid the poor and to give from their own pockets for the sake of the unfortunate.

The destitute were always invited to dine at his table during festivals. He would serve them himself, making sure that they ate until they were satisfied. One year, the Baba Sali was away from Erfoud for the first few days of *Sukkot*. On his return on *Hoshana Rabba* he discovered that the poor had not yet been invited for the final days of *Yom Tov*. He immediately instructed his family to prepare a sufficient amount of food to feed all the poor who were to be invited to dine with him.

Before the *Pesach* holiday, the Baba Sali himself would make the rounds from house to house. From one house he would collect *Kimcha D'Pischa*, while at the next he would dispense it. One year he returned home from a journey on *Erev Pesach* and asked whether his family had distributed funds to cover the needs of the poor people. They answered affirmatively; one of them added that he knew for a fact that they

had used the funds to buy *matzah*, wine, fish, and meat for the festival. The Baba Sali listened intently and then asked whether clothing had been purchased for them as well. When he received a negative answer he immediately commissioned a group of tailors to sew enough garments for all the poor of the city for the entire festival. Realizing the sheer volume of clothing involved, the head tailor approached the Baba Sali and explained to him that even if "... the master of the house is insistent," (Avot 4:15), the task is too much to finish in time for the festival. The Baba Sali instructed them to begin work anyway; meanwhile he sent messages to the poor that the tailors needed each person's size for the clothing they were making them for *after* the festival. Even if they would not be able to rejoice at having received new clothes in honor of *Yom Tov*, they would at least feel good that someone cared for them.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, described for us to what extent the *mitzvah* of hospitality was kept in his home. Before *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*, when guests regularly dined with him, he would ask those preparing the meals what type of fish they were planning to serve. He insisted that they purchase freshwater fish because it is considered of higher quality and tastes better than sea fish. He made sure that his guests were honored with not only the best food but he would insist that the most beautiful cushions be placed on the guests' seats to make them feel welcome and cheerful. At the table, they were treated with the utmost respect. He went to great lengths to teach them the *piyutim* and would sing with them for hours. No poor person ever left a feast at the Baba Sali's home without his spirits lifted.

One of his close confidants came to break his long and arduous fast at the Baba Sali's home on *Motzaei Tisha B'av* of the year 5724 [1982]. He realized at once that he had entered a house of mourning. The sad news had arrived that evening from Morocco that Rabbanit Simcha, wife of Rabenu Meir, had passed away. The sorrow was so

intense that no one thought of breaking the fast. That is with the exception of one person, the Baba Sali himself. He was in the kitchen preparing a satisfying meal for the household and for their guest. Even after being "caught", he refused to leave the kitchen until he had finished preparing the meal, saying, "It is not every day that I have such an opportunity to fulfill with my own hands the *mitzvah* of *hachnassat orchim."* We can learn from here just how greatly he desired to serve his guests himself but was prevented from doing so by his family.

His grandson added that when someone would come to him to tell him of the birth of a son, the Baba Sali would immediately give the person money to help defray the costs of the *Brit Milah.* When a young man who was about to get married, or the parents of a bride would approach him, he would provide them with money for some of the necessary electrical appliances. He was also a great supporter of yeshivot and *kollelim* and would set aside large sums of money for charitable organizations. He personally supported the courts of many *Rebbes* and other holy people who did not have the means to cover all their expenses. Not only that, but on several occasions, when visited by a *talmid chacham* who did not have much money in his pocket, the Baba Sali would ask how much he his journey had cost, and he would pay for it himself.

Our Sages taught us: "Anyone who gives even a small amount to a pauper is blessed with six Heavenly blessings and one who comforts a pauper with words is blessed with eleven heavenly blessings." (Baba Batra 9b)." He would assure the people whom he supported that they were giving him the opportunity to do this *mitzvah* while in fact he knew their sad plight. He was constantly searching for discreet ways to assist them. In his noble manner the Baba Sali was "walking with righteousness and speaking with truthfulness," (Yeshayahu 33:15), concealing the fact of his giving with soothing talk and kind words.

Outsiders might have concluded that the Baba Sali was extremely wealthy, yet he immediately gave the money that reached his hands to the poor. Much of the money was given to him by wealthy Jews as gifts for his own personal pleasure; for him, however, assisting other Jews during their times of need constituted the greatest possible pleasure.



The Baba Sali's hand-drawn stamp in one of his books

"FOOD THAT HEALS"

Many crowded around him for the unique *segulah* of receiving leftover food and drink from his holy hands. This was spiritual nourishment; its essence was supernatural. Most people appreciated the merit in the food, while others had to be forced to eat it, as the following story told to us by his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira testifies.

In his later years, when the Baba Sali was in constant pain, a professor from Soroka hospital in Beer Sheva came to see him. After the doctor had examined him and prescribed various medicines, the Baba Sali offered the doctor some almonds from the bowls of dates and nuts which he always had set out on the table to offer his guests.

The doctor, who had never met the Baba Sali before and was unfamiliar with people of his stature, refused, explaining that many years earlier it had been discovered that he had an allergy to almonds. He was not permitted to taste even a minute amount. Once when he had disregarded the doctors and tasted an almond, he had had a severe reaction; his entire body broke out in an itchy rash that lasted for weeks. The Baba Sali was amused and tried to persuade him to take some.

When the doctor persisted in his refusal, the Baba Sali said: "It appears that this doctor has no spark of holiness ... if he refuses to eat the almonds, I will not take the pills he has prescribed for me." The professor agreed to eat one almond. The Baba Sali insisted that he eat more and more.

A few days later, the doctor came to one of the family and told him with great emotion that no signs of the rash had appeared. Today we know that the doctor is totally cured of his allergy. For two decades now he has thoroughly enjoyed eating almonds.



The Baba Sali at a *seudat mitzvah* with HaGaon HaRav Raphael Kadir



The Baba Sali in conversation with his cousin Rav Eliyahu Abichazira





SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

It would be inadequate to state that no one ever left his home without having been offered food and drink, for this was the way every visit to his home began. The moment a person entered his room he would immediately be served a drink and fruits from the tray that sat on the table. Furthermore, his close confidant R' Moshe Deitch told us, anyone appointed to run his household was first and foremost taught an iron-clad rule: "Nobody who comes into my house will ever leave without being offered a plate of cookies and a steaming hot cup of tea". Only after the guest had partaken would the Baba Sali listen to what his guest had to say and bless him. Many, when describing this behavior, cite *Chazal*'s adage: "The verse states 'One who is of a generous disposition will be blessed' (Mishle 22:9) – do not read the verse as 'will be blessed', but rather 'shall bless'" (Sotah 38b).

R' Avraham Biton, who was very close to the Baba Sali, told us that the first time he came to his home in Netivot, at the age of nineteen, he was offered food and drink. When the Baba Sali observed that the young man was embarrassed, he told him very simply: "If you refuse to eat and drink, you may as well leave!"

To many his demeanor was one of pure generosity. Others, however, who had the merit of being present when the curtain to his inner sanctum was raised, witnessed even more. They were able to see how a single quiet word could uncover hidden layers of meaning and thought relating to the foods on his table. From his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira we heard the following frightening story.

One day two great Torah scholars visited his home, R' Shimon and R' David. The Baba Sali greeted them warmly and instructed that the table be set in their honor. In the middle of the meal, the Baba Sali took a bottle of cognac from the table and poured a full glass for each of his guests and for himself. When he offered a glass to R' Shimon, R' Shimon's face turned white and he did not know what to do. For

many years he had suffered from heart trouble and on several occasions had been hospitalized for lengthy periods. The doctors forbade him to consume any alcohol. What was he to do now with this full glass of cognac?

While the Baba Sali was reciting the blessing over the drink with his eyes closed in great devotion, R' Shimon took advantage of the moment and hinted to the assistant to take away his glass and empty it. If he thought that the Baba Sali did not notice what he was doing, this was only because he felt that such a simple action would be of no significance to the Baba Sali. He quickly realized that he had made two mistakes: there are no acts that the Baba Sali deems insignificant, and nothing takes place without his being aware of it.

Having finished drinking, the Baba Sali looked at the two scholars. When he looked at R' Shimon and his expression changed from joy to sorrow. "What did you do with the drink?" the Baba Sali asked R' Shimon. The visiting scholar had no choice but to admit that he had given it to the assistant to pour away. He apologized for acting in an underhanded manner, but he explained that he was worried about his health.

"How unfortunate," the Baba Sali clapped his hands to emphasize his regret. "This was an auspicious moment in the heavens; I saw that we could now bring about great salvation which could have reached the Throne of Glory. This is because the first letter of each of our names: *shin* (*Shimon*), *daled* (David), and *yud* (*Yisrael*) spell the Name of Hashem. Because you refused to drink with us and to join us, the hour and the opportunity have passed".

Incidents took place in which people discovered how the Baba Sali saved them from difficult situations through such feasts. With what appeared an innocent invitation to a feast which was taking place in any event, the Baba Sali prevented dangers from harming them.

The following well-known incident took place in the year 5734 [1973-74] when the Baba Sali participated in a dinner in his honor in the home of one of his faithful followers living in Beer Sheva. In the middle of the dinner he inquired about the *rabbanim* and *dayanim* of the city. When he heard that the great *Kabbalist* HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu was a judge in the local rabbinical court, he immediately sent messengers to invite him to the dinner. He declined the invitation because he was in the year of mourning for his mother. When his response was relayed to the Baba Sali, he instructed that no effort be spared in bringing him immediately to the dinner.

The determined messengers returned to the Rav's home and warned him that, if he continued to refuse, they would bring him by force. R' Mordechai decided to go with them and to explain to the Baba Sali in person why he was unable to dine with them.

When R' Mordechai entered the room where the meal was being served, the Baba Sali sat R' Mordechai next to him and poured him a glass of *araq*. They began discussing Torah, with the Baba Sali revealing his great erudition, his vast knowledge in Talmud and the *halachic* authorities and expertise in the depths of the *halacha*. As the discussion continued, R' Mordechai apologized that he was unable to participate in the dinner. The Baba Sali, however, claimed that this dinner had the status of a *mitzvah* meal, for he wished to rejoice and thank Hashem for all the good He had bestowed upon him. R' Mordechai heeded the Baba Sali's request and joined him in the obligatory meal.[27]

---

27. As an aside we should mention a testimony from his "representative" in Tafilalt, R' Avraham Sabag. When his father died, he apologized to the Baba Sali for not eating with him, for the custom in Morocco was that a person in his year of mourning did not eat outside his home. The Baba Sali gave him three answers, of which each teaches a valuable lesson. "Firstly, my home is your home. Secondly, eating in my home is serving Hashem and may it serve to elevate your mother's soul. Thirdly, and this is the deciding factor, all the meals here are all honor of my grandfather the Abir Yaakov, so you have nothing to worry about."

Just before the dinner ended, police officers suddenly arrived at the house, asking whether the judge R' Mordechai was there. To the startled company they explained that a very violent man had appeared that day before the *Beit Din*. After being sentenced he had gone on a revenge campaign against the judges. He had already attacked two of the judges. He had poured a bag filled with mud and filth over the first judge, and beaten the second judge so badly that he was in need of hospitalization. The families of the judges had called the police, demanding that they protect the home of Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, lest the man harm him as well. On arriving at his rented room and not finding him there, the police feared that perhaps the man had inflicted some violence on him. The entire Beer Sheva police force was mobilized to find Rav Mordechai Eliyahu.



The Baba Sali in conversation with the Rishon LeZion HaGaon HaMekubal Rav Mordechai Eliyahu Shlit"a

As this story unfolded, the Baba Sali smiled and said: "Nu, R' Mordechai, where would you rather be, here at a *mitzvah* celebration or suffering in the hands of that violent man? I invited you here in order to save you from harm."

The police waited to escort Rav Mordechai back to his room. When they arrived at the house the violent man emerged from the shadows where he had been hiding, intending to attack R' Mordechai. The police, however, apprehended him before he could do any harm.

Another frightening story was told by an eyewitness who enjoyed an especially close relationship with the Baba Sali. The scene was a feast to commemorate the *hillula* of the Noam Elimelech of Lizensk and the great joy on the Baba Sali's face was quite apparent. During the course of the feast, the Baba Sali served whiskey from an enormous bottle to all the participants, about sixty people. When he had finished serving, he took note of two people who had not taken a drink. When he asked them to explain their refusal, they both explained that they suffered from heart trouble and that their doctors forbade them to consume any alcoholic beverages. The Baba Sali responded with a dismissive wave and immediately passed them cups, blessing them with "health and longevity". One of them took the cup and drank the contents, while the other was hesitant about preferring the Baba Sali's advice to his doctor's. The following day that man passed away.

When they came to tell the Baba Sali of the man's passing, he responded in great sorrow, "What could I have done? I tried to help him, but he refused to be helped."

This scene, described to us by his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, shows how much importance the Baba Sali placed on the food and drink he gave out to those who came to see him. A few days before his passing, he was extremely weak and lying in hospital, when a few of his loyal devotees came to visit him. He immediately poured them cups of *araq* and drank with them, at the same time bestowing blessings upon them. Even in the final days of his life, almost devoid of strength, he did not cease to bring an abundance of good to those seeking his counsel.



"FROM THE LOBBY TO THE BANQUET HALL" (Avot 4:16)

The Baba Sali's home in Netivot was small and simple although it served as a "meeting place for the Sages" (Avot 1:4) and as the "peak of the mountain" (Brachot 30a) for the tens of thousands who came there to be given a breath of life. He who was satisfied with a "measure of carobs from one *Shabbat* to the next," (Brachot 17b), did not see his house as a "court" but as a home that served his needs. He would take strong issue with anyone who suggested that the house should be extended to suit an empire of such far-reaching influence.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira told us that not long before his grandfather departed this world, he was informed by some of his followers that a larger house had been built for him. They described the grand entrance to the house, its many rooms and its overall area. One of them described it as "literally a palace". They expected him to be thrilled at the idea of moving to this magnificent edifice, but his reaction was quite the opposite: "Do I need a palace? I am nearly one hundred years old; our Sages describe a man of that age 'as if he were dead, passed away, and ceased from the world.' (Avot 5:25) Is there any difference whether I live in a small and simple home or in a mansion? The place where a person needs a mansion is not here in this lowly world, but rather in the World to Come. It is there that he must build a mansion for himself. You can all testify that I spend entire days on the couch. It is here that I pray and learn and here that I receive people coming to see me, and it is here that I eat my meals. Does it matter in the least whether the couch is in this house or another one, whether it is on this floor, up in the attic, in the middle of a staircase, or even in the street? You have not built the mansion for me, but for yourselves."

This was the Baba Sali's outlook on life in this world. His sojourn in this world lasted nearly one hundred years; he made many stops along the way, seeing each as the next step along the corridor leading

to the banqueting hall, (see Avot 4:16) the grandest and most elegant mansion which he carved out for himself in the Heavenly Academy.

While he appeared frail and weak, little more than skin and bones, and in spite of his very advanced age, he was in good health, astounding everyone who knew how hard he worked and how little he ate. His unceasing efforts in sacred matters had no negative effects on his body with its seemingly supernatural powers.

His many fasts and acts of self-denial did in fact weaken him extremely, at one point bringing him almost to the verge of death.

His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related to us an incident that took place when his grandfather was very ill and at the end of his strength. Some of the older women in the family were bewailing his difficult condition. Their bitter lamentations seemed to contain words of parting. The Baba Sali suddenly opened his eyes and sent them all away. After they had left, he said to his son R' Meir, "Did you all think I was about to die? You will see that it will be I who will eulogize them after they die." Over the next few years, those old women all left this world while he regained his strength, returning to his fasts and afflictions.

In the following years, his strength grew making him even more formidable in his service of Hashem. His body showed no signs of weakness or loss of power. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, described his grandfather's ease of mobility in spite of his being over ninety. He had tremendous vigor which he used to serve his Creator without flagging for even a moment. He had no trouble walking up and down the stairs to the fifth floor apartment of his daughter in Paris. He did not tire for a moment and did not even need to take a break in the landings between the steps. "He would run up the stairs like a youngster".

He would often converse with his offspring about the history of the family, recalling events that had taken place eighty and ninety years

earlier. He would conclude with a warm smile, "With us death does not reign - only life." His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related on the anniversary of his passing, how he would often summon his son Rabenu Meir to join him in a festive meal. During the course of the meal he would recount awesome revelations of what he had seen in the Heavenly Academy. Once he told him, "I was promised by the *Melech HaMashiach*, by Eliyahu HaNavi and by my saintly grandfather that I am destined to greet the *Mashiach* and he will hold my hand in his." On another occasion, he summoned his son to share with him a secret which he had just discovered; "It has been revealed to me, while I was awake, that I will merit holding the hand of the Messiah."

His son Rabenu Meir accepted all this as if it was nothing out of the ordinary. Similarly, when they came to tell him that his father was not well and the doctor requested that he be hospitalized, he reacted very decisively: "I am the one who is ill and he is healthy ... he has nothing ... this doctor has no idea what he is talking about. When it comes to my father, illness cannot take hold of him."

After his passing, the great *Kabbalist* HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu Shlit"a, with whom he was very close, delivered a eulogy. He quoted the words of the Baba Sali who had said to him several times that he was promised from heaven that the final redemption would take place during his lifetime. His great disciple, the saintly *Kabbalist* HaRav Yichye Shneur zt"l related in his eulogy that the Baba Sali revealed to him that during the final three years of his life he constantly dreamt that the Messiah was coming. "There is no falsehood in the True World," concluded R' Yichye, "Rather our many sins tipped the scale and therefore this righteous person was taken from us"[28].

---

28. Perhaps this is the place to cite the words of the great Gaon, HaRav Raphael Alnekava zt"l, Chief Rabbi of Morocco and author of the book, "The Gate of Serving Hashem." One year as Pesach was approaching, the Abir Yaakov announced to his community that on a particular

On the 17th day of *Nissan* 5743, [30th Aril, 1983] at the height of the *Pesach* celebration, came the sad news of the passing of his firstborn son Rabenu Meir, after terrible suffering, which he accepted as an atonement for the sins of the nation. The Baba Sali loved his son with rare intensity, and had been known to declare with palpable joy, "Thank G-d I have merited seeing my son take my place during my lifetime." For him the passing was sudden; he had not been prepared for such news.

R' Moshe Deitch was especially close to the Baba Sali and was present when he received the news of his son's passing. He told his grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira that at the time they did not wish to inform him of the death but suggested that he go to visit R' Meir in his home. The Baba Sali responded, "I am aware that I have lost the most precious diamond I have." On arriving at Rabenu Meir's home in Ashdod, he hurried to climb the stairs to the room where his holy body was placed. There he met his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira and declared, "I surrender!"

Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira commented, "Nobody ever believed that my venerable grandfather could be defeated by anything in the world, not by ministers, nor kings, nor princes, not by criminals, nor by evil people. His entire essence was one of "Rejoicing like a powerful warrior to run the course (Tehillim 19:6)" and nothing in the world ever caused him to surrender. His leadership was from the perspective of "The voice of Hashem comes in power." (Tehillim 29:4). Countless stories show that he was not afraid of anybody. People who were so strong that their breath could kill would capitulate totally when

---

day the Messiah would arrive and that they would celebrate Pesach in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. When that longed-for day finally came, they all waited eagerly for the arrival of the poor man on the donkey. Morning and night came and went. They asked the Abir Yaakov, "Where is the Mashiach?" He answered them, "I have been informed by the heavens that there are people who have violated very grave sins and it is their sins that have delayed his arrival and revelation."

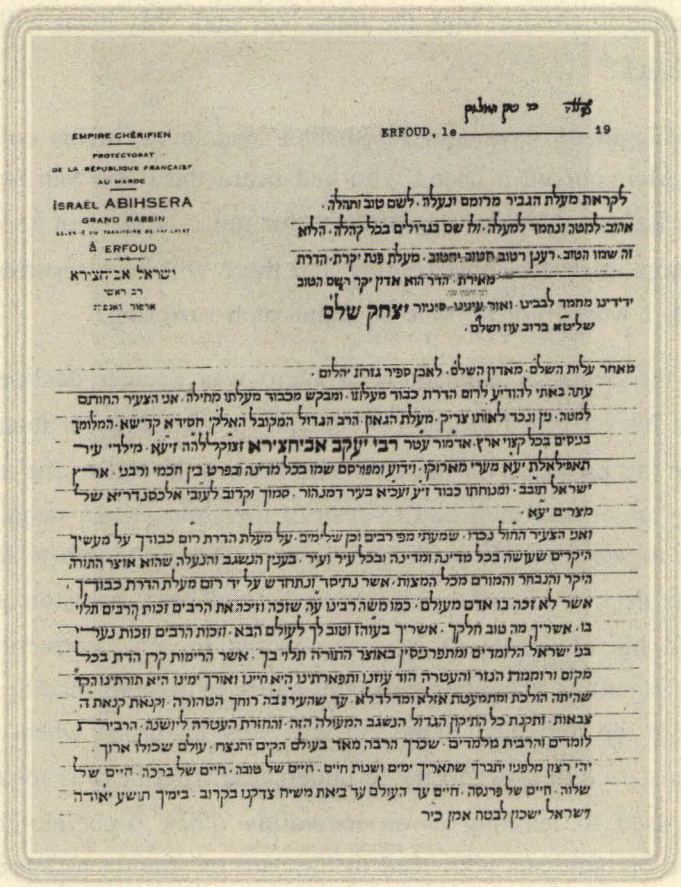
meeting him. Could anything in the world conquer him? He who fasted six days a week, who would sit day and night learning Torah, who was willing to give his life to alleviate the suffering of another Jew - would the Baba Sali surrender? Now, when he saw that my father was taken from him, he announced to us that he surrendered."

During the *shiva* he mourned his son greatly and cried over his immense loss. When his disciple HaRav Yehuda Sheetrit, the Rav of Afula offered words of eulogy in a tear-choked voice, the Baba Sali broke into heartrending sobs, at the same time encouraging R' Yehuda to continue with his words of lament. He wanted R' Yehuda's words to arouse him to "bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Vayikra 9:6). When his close friend the *Kabbalist* R' Yoseph Eliyahu Deitch came to comfort him, the Baba Sali said, "My heart will always remain black."

The Maggid of Jerusalem R' Shabtai Yudelevitz in his eulogy for Rabenu Meir quoted a friend who had heard the Baba Sali say, "The death of Rabenu Meir is very difficult for me ... had I not known that the redemption is fast approaching and there will be a resurrection of the dead, I would not be able to stand such suffering."

With the death of Rabenu Meir there was a clear decline in the health of his esteemed father. He became so weak that for many hours a day he lay prostrate on his bed. The household had to make sure it was very quiet and they had to restrict the times when people could come in to see him. He no longer possessed the strength to learn for hours the deep works of *kabbalah*, as he had been accustomed to, so he asked his assistants to read the words to him, correcting their mispronunciations. There were many shifts of people reading to him throughout the day. The Baba Sali was very disturbed when a reader slowed his pace in order to try to understand what he was reading, for he was used to learning at an incredibly quick pace. He therefore requested his students who read to him not to attempt to learn at this time, but simply to read quickly.

Rabenu Meir's passing had another effect on the Baba Sali, in addition to the incredible weakness which overtook him, in that he began speaking about his own impending passing. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that the members of the family who remembered his dreams and visions which seemed to imply that he would not die, would remind him of what he said in past years. His response was, "I was certain, but the term of the certainty was only while my son was in this world. Now that my son, in whom I took great pride both in this world as well as the Next, has left us, all of these certainties and promises hang in the balance."



EMPIRE CHÉRIFIEN
PROTECTORAT
DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
AU MAROC

ISRAEL ABIHSERA
GRAND RABBIN

& ERFOUD

ישראל אב־יחצירא
רב ראשי
ארפוד ואבזרזת

ERFOUD, le _____ 19

לקראת מעלת הגביר מרומם ונעלה. לשם טוב ותהלה.
אוהב למטה זנמחד למעלה. ולו שם בני־חלים בכל קהלה. הלא
זה שמו הטוב. רענן רטוב חסוב. יחסוב. מעלת פנת יקרת. הדרת
מאירת. הדר הוא אדון יקר השם הטוב
ידידינו מחמד לבביו. ואוב עיניו. פיניור **יצחק שלום**
שליט"א ברוב עוז ושלום.

מאחר עלות השלום. מאדון השלום. לאבן ספיר גזרתו יהלום.
עתה באתי להודיע לרום הדרת כבוד מעלתו. ומבקש מכבוד מעלתו מתילה. אני הצעיר החותם
למטה. נין ונכד לאותו צדיק. מעלת הגאון הרב הגדול המקובל האלקי חסידא קדישא. המלומד
בנסים בכל קצוי ארץ. אדמור עטר **רבי יעקב אביחצירא** זצוקל"ה זיע"א. מילדי עיר
תאפילאלת יע"א מערי מארוקו. ירידתו ומפורסם שמו בכל מדינה ובפרט בין חכמי ורבני. ארץ
ישראל תובב. ומנוחתו כבוד ז"ע ועכ"א בעיר דמנהור. סמוך וקרוב לעובי אלכסנדריא של
מצרים יע"א.

ואם הצעיר החול נכדו. שמעתי מפי רבים וקן שלימים. על מעלת הדרת רום כבודך על מעשיך
היקרים שעושה בכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל עיר ועיר. בענין הנשגב והנעלה שהוא אוצר התוה
היקר והנבחר והמורם מכל המצות. אשר נתיסר ונתחדש על יד רום מעלת הדרת כבודך.
אשר לא זכה בו אדם מעולם. כמו משה רבינו עה"ש שזכה וזיכה את הרבים זכות הרבים תלוי
בו. אשרייך מה טוב חלקך. אשריך בעוה"ז טוב לך לעולם הבא. זכות הרבים וזכות נערי
בני ישראל הלומדים ומתפרנסין באוצר התורה תלוי בך. אשר הרימות קרן הדת בכל
מקום ורוממת הנזר והעטרה הוד עזנו ותפארתינו היא היינו ואורך ימינו היא תורתינו הקדושה
שהיתה הולכת ומתמעטת אזלא ודמדלדלא. עד שהעירונו בה רוחך הטהורה. וקנאת קנאת ה'
צבאות. תתקנת כל התיקון הגדול הנשגב המעולה הזה. והחזרת העטרה ליושנה. הרבית
לומדים והרבית מלמדים. שכרך הרבה מאד בעולם הקיים והנצח. עולם שכולו ארוך.
יהי רצון מלפני יתברך שתאריך ימים ושנות חיים. חיים של טובה. חיים של ברכה. חיים של
שלוה. חיים של פרנסה. חיים עד העולם עד בואת משיח צדקנו בקרוב. בימיך תושע יאודה
וישראל ישכון לבטח אמן כיר

A rare letter in the Baba Sali's handwriting

THE LAST CURTAIN

On the evening of 20 Tevet 5744 [26th December 1983], the Baba Sali invited several of his close acquaintances and family members to participate in a feast commemorating the *hillula* of his grandfather, the Abir Yaakov. Because of his great weakness, the meal was less elaborate than usual and fewer guests were present. Nevertheless, the Baba Sali was in a joyous state of mind. He spoke at great length about the Abir Yaakov's Torah insights and sang from the liturgy he had composed. The next afternoon, having learned since daybreak, he conducted an additional feast, ignoring the pleas of his family, who were concerned that it would be too stressful for him. A few hours later, he became still weaker. A doctor had to be summoned and on his recommendation, the Baba Sali was taken the following day to Soroka hospital in Beer Sheva for a series of comprehensive tests.

Although the tests produced no particular findings beyond his general weakness, the doctors preferred to keep him in the hospital for a few days under observation. His grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira tells us that in fact the doctors could not find any illness in his holy body. Every organ in his body was functioning, with his heart working like that of a young man. As for his liver – in front of the eyes of the doctors he drank a few glasses of *araq* with a group of his followers. The alcohol did not seem to affect him in the least.[29] In light of these findings, the doctors were convinced that the weakness was only temporary, resulting from his frequent fasts and his

29. His grandson, Moreinu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, relates that the Baba Sali's host once honored him with a full glass of Araq. Only a few hours later did the host discover his grave mistake; the bottle from which he had poured the drink was not Araq for drinking, but rather Araq concentrate from which several bottles were made. An ordinary person would not have been able to finish a full glass of it without coming to harm. The Baba Sali, however, not wishing to embarrass his host, had drunk the entire glass.

extraordinary efforts in serving Hashem. They planned to release him within the next few days.

The moment it became known that the Baba Sali was in the hospital, Soroka's central switchboard was inundated with hundreds and thousands of telephone calls from all over the world, inquiring about his health. At the same time large crowds of concerned Jews began to organize prayer shifts, while at the plaza in front of the *Kotel HaMaaravi*, multitudes gathered in prayer on behalf of the saint of the generation.

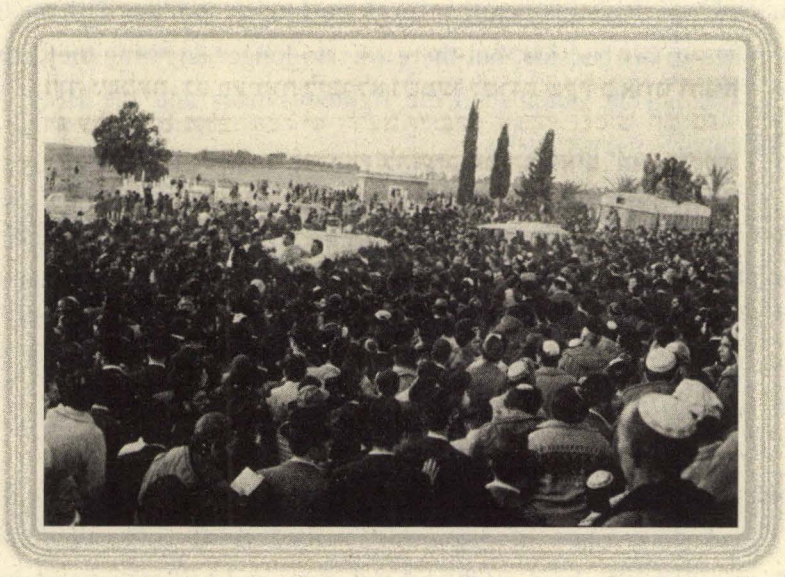
On *Shabbat*, his situation worsened and he became progressively weaker. He had great difficulty eating and drinking and had to be hooked up to an intravenous infusion. During prayer times someone would read the prayers out loud to him and the Baba Sali would move his lips together with the reader. Even during the *Shabbat* meals his lips were moving constantly, but the family members near his bed were unable to make out what he was saying. They noticed that he was also counting with his fingers while he was speaking, but because they did not understand what he was saying, they did not know what the counting meant. Even when he awoke in the middle of the night, the assistants noticed his lips moving.

The one thing they were able to gather from what he was saying was various allusions to his making ready to depart from this world. Several times during his final hours, his assistants realized that he was motioning them to approach his bed. When they bent over in an attempt to understand what he was whispering, they heard him say, "Arise! Arise! Wake up, wake up!" On *Motzaei Shabbat*, when he was visited by family members who succeeded in understanding what he was saying, he kept repeating, "May my passing atone." They tried to reassure him that he would soon regain his strength. His response to that was, "What am I, what is my life? I deserve to burn. If only this would serve to atone for all the troubles of the Jewish people."

During the early morning hours, nobody knows precisely when, he returned his holy and pure soul to the Creator of the Universe. At about eight o' clock his heartbeat was no longer audible. The doctors were called to his bedside, but there was no longer anything they could do. "...The angels vanquished the righteous ones and the Holy Ark was captured." (Ketubot 104a).

That day tens of thousands gathered in the city of Netivot to accompany the Baba Sali to his final resting place, expressing the grief of the nation as a whole, for whose sake he had given his entire life and the pain of the individual which the Baba Sali had taken to heart.

That day marked the completion of the final chapter of an incredible life. Ninety-four years of gloriously exalted spirituality, all equally good, all filled with hard work and toil, fasts and self-afflictions, lofty *tikkunim*, immense efforts at raising the Divine Presence from the dust and at bringing about redemption and salvation for the Jewish nation.





The crowds at the Baba Sali's funeral

The following inscription appears on the Baba Sali's tombstone:



His memory lives on in the hearts of his thousands of students and the tens of thousands who grew up on his legacy.

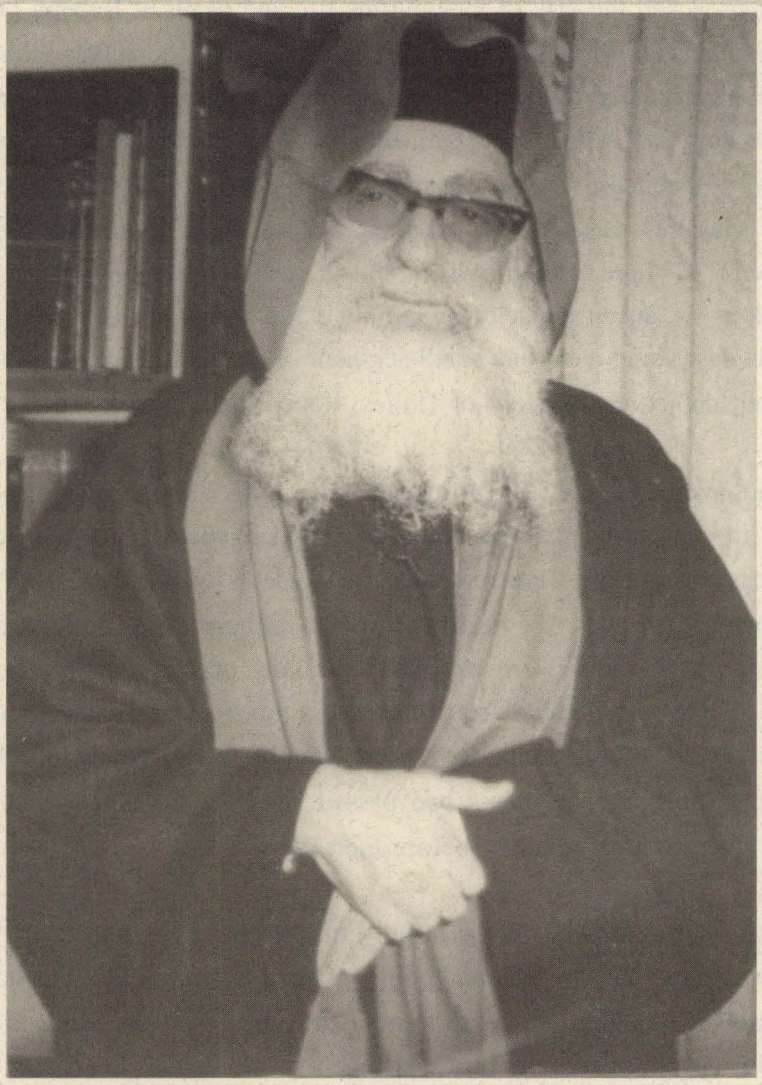


THE RADIANCE OF RABENU MEIR

Writing about the Abir Yaakov caused our hand to tremble, in the realization that daring to write about him is comparable to leaving footprints on holy ground. When we approached the task of viewing the life and death of Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, through a physical eyepiece we felt ourselves violating that which is holy. When we tried to present a comprehensive account of the holy life of the Baba Sali, there was no doubt that the question would still remain: "Have you managed to complete all the praises of your Master?" (Brachot 33b) - is there not so much more that can be written? Is there a pen which can describe the awe which now envelops us, at our audacity in spilling a few drops of ink to form the words describing even one small segment of the multi-faceted splendid portrait depicting the Holy of Holies, Rabenu Meir Abichazira?

We have been privileged to hear from people who merited spending time in his company. We noted the sudden change in their facial expressions as they were reminded of incidents which they witnessed with their own eyes. We heard the tremor in their voices and felt them shudder, as if the person they were speaking of was standing before them. Some of his close acquaintances declined our repeated requests to talk with us, claiming they were simply too afraid to speak of Rabenu Meir. Twenty years had passed since he left this world, yet they still saw him standing before their eyes.

Had we not viewed this as a holy mission, had we not heard with our own ears that the time had come to write about his life, the stories themselves would cause us to tremble so much that our hands would not be capable of writing, however much we wished to do so, lest they blemish the beauty and splendor which characterized the saintly manner of Rabenu Meir Abichazira.



'MEIR' – AN ILLUMINATION

"HE ROSE AND PLANTED THEM" (Yoma 38b)

The saintly Rabenu Meir was no ordinary "*tzaddik* of our generation", but someone from a previous era, whom Hashem preserved in His storehouse to revive and enrich our impoverished generation.

When speaking of his holy father, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira cites the words of HaGaon HaRav Meir Shapiro zt"l, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat *Chachmei Lublin*. He explained the *Gemara*, "R' Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R' Yochanan: 'The Holy One Blessed be He saw that the righteous were few, therefore, He rose and planted them in each and every generation.'" (Yoma 38b): R' Meir Shapiro asked why R' Yochanan used the expression "to plant". It implies a connection between the act of sowing and the arrival of the souls of the righteous in later generations. The *Gemara* could have used an expression such as "He rose and placed them". We can gain a tremendous insight from this explanation: The later generations are simply not worthy of "growing" *tzaddikim*. These few righteous people whom the Creator places in His world had already been planted in His orchard several generations earlier. During those earlier generations, however, they remained mere seedlings until the time came for them to descend into this dark world and to cause the glory of the past to shine upon it. In every generation, Hashem chooses one seedling to send down into this world, someone who is, so to speak, still embedded in the soil in which he had been initially planted and preserved.

We all know how lowly our generation is; we are embarrassed even to put into words the sharp decline which distinguishes us from previous generations. Without this enlightening explanation we would remain incredulous, wondering where this lofty soul came from, in what soil it grew. We can now understand clearly that the path which

R' Meir trod, on which he rose to unimaginable heights, was not carved on this earth. This was an ancient path, just as his soul was, from a previous generation.

"G-D OF MEIR – ANSWER ME" (Avoda Zara 18a)

It was only when the Baba Sali and Pricha had been married for twelve years that they merited the birth of their firstborn on 10 Tevet 5677 [4th January 1917]. These were years filled with heartache and anguish, for fourteen years had passed from the time the Baba Sali had married the first time – years in which he experienced more than once the great pain of having begotten children who did not survive.

R' Amram was a frequent and welcome visitor in Tafilalet. An emissary of the *Kollelim* of R' Meir *Baal HaNess* in Tiberias, he was always greeted warmly and with a great deal of respect. He was a man of great piety and a Torah giant whose "fear of sin takes priority over his wisdom, therefore his wisdom endured." (see Pirke Avot 3:11-12), which earned him the nickname 'R' Amram the Pious'. While in town, he would take up residence in Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, so that he could discuss words of Torah with the local scholars who learned there. During that time, noticing the hidden pain that enveloped the Baba Sali, he asked him the source of his anguish.

The Baba Sali told him all that had happened, that he did not yet have any children and he was extremely concerned as his wife was now expecting. R' Amram said to him, "Now I know why the "Reason for All Reasons" saw to it that I should spend so much time in Tafilalet, for I have with me a tried and tested *segula*. If you use it, you are guaranteed that this child will survive. I have a small earring of copper which should be placed on the child's ear from the day he is born. If it is a boy, then you should call him by the name of the holy *tanna*, R' Meir *Baal HaNess*. The Baba Sali listened and accepted his words.

In another incident shortly before the birth of Rabenu Meir, the Baba Sali had a dream in which he saw the vision of a man whose face shone. When he asked him who he was, he answered, "I am a *tanna*", and then disappeared from before his eyes. The next day, the Baba Sali told his dream to his teacher and *Rebbe*, R' Moshe Turgeman. The Baba Si's interpretation of the dream was that the Baba Sali was about to have a giant of a son who would have the stature of a *tanna*. He explained that the man in the dream did not need to reveal his name because "סתם תנא, ר' מאיר היא" ("a nameless *tanna* is R' Meir") – when a *Mishna* quotes a *tanna* without mentioning his name, it always refers to R' Meir (see Sanhedrin 27a). The Baba Sali listened to the words of his *Rebbe* and when his son was born, he named him 'Meir'.

From his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazaira, we heard that years later the Skulener *Rebbe* visited both the Baba Sali in Netivot and Rabenu Meir in Ashdod. On the same day, when he returned to Yerushalayim, the *Rebbe* related, "In Netivot I saw a *tanna*, and in Ashdod I saw an *Amora*." Furthermore, one of the major *halachic* authorities of our generation, a frequent visitor in Rabenu Meir's home, was once heard saying as he left the house, either to himself or to his escorts: "Seeing Rabenu Meir Abichazira gives us some insight into the level of sanctity of the *tannaim* and *Amoraim*.

A PRAYER OF DAVID (Tehillim 17:1 – 87:1)

In the first few months after the birth, the happy parents, together with the entire illustrious family watched the continuation of their golden dynasty with great excitement. Then the baby suddenly became critically ill. Prayers were recited for his recovery and intense anxiety caused the entire family many sleepless nights, for this child was their pride and joy.

When his father saw that only one step separated the child from death, he resolved to knock on the door of the attic where Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu* secluded himself. This was highly unusual, for

everyone knew that Rabenu David was absolutely not to be disturbed while learning in seclusion. With the life of his only son hanging in the balance, the Baba Sali fulfilled the words of our Sages: "Whoever has a sick person in his house should go to a sage and have the sage plead for mercy on his behalf." (Baba Batra 116a).

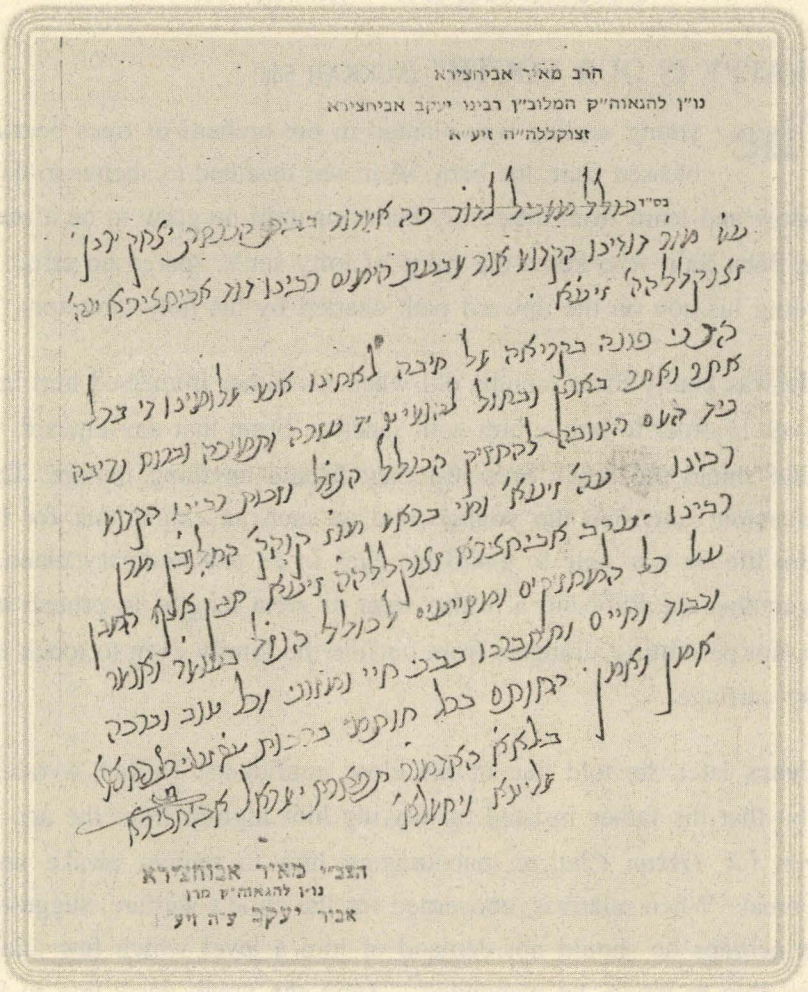
When Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu* heard how seriously ill the child was, he descended from his attic and entered the room where he lay, burning with fever and racked with pain. He took the child in his two hands and went out with him to the porch of the house from where he turned his eyes towards heaven and said "Master of the Universe! You have brought much affliction upon me and I accepted it all with love and joy. I never questioned Your Attributes which are all mercy. Even when many of my own children died and I did not merit seeing joy and continuity from them, I never questioned and never complained. I will ask You now that You let this child live and not remove him from this world!"

Within a few moments, the child's fever dropped noticeably, and his general condition visibly improved. Rabenu David also added the name *Shalom*[30] to his name, promising the Baba Sali that this child was destined to become the "Light of the Jewish nation". ('Meir' means 'illuminates'.) Expressing many words of blessing to the child and to his parents, he returned to his attic.[31]

---

30. According to another version of the story, which we heard from HaRav HaGaon R' Masud Malul Shlit"a, already at his *Brit Milah*, he had been given the name 'Meir Shalom'. This was because the night before the Brit, R' Sholom Sharabi (Rashash) appeared to the Baba Sali in a dream and asked him to call the child by his name.

31. For a period in his life, R' Meir resided in Ashdod and opened a *Kollel* with the name "Maskil LeDavid" (Tehillim 142:1), naming it for his uncle Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*, stating over and over again that he owed his life in this world to his uncle, for it was all in the merit of his prayers.



הרב מאיר אביחצירא
נו"ן להגאוה"ק המלוב"ן רבינו יעקב אביחצירא
זצוקללה"ה זיע"א

הצ"ו מאיר אבוחצירא
נו"ן להגאוה"ק מרן
אביר יעקב עה"ו זיע"א

Rabenu Meir's letter of recommendation on behalf of the *Kollel* Maskil LeDavid

"REJOICE YOUNG MAN IN YOUR CHILDHOOD" (Kohelet 11:9)

"HAPPY IS OUR YOUTH" (SUKKAH 53a)

The young sapling was planted in the orchard of trees bearing blessed fruit; the baby Meir was destined to shelter in their shadow and learn from their holy behavior until he grew to be a man. The Baba Sali, who knew the value of lofty souls, spared no effort in guiding his son on the upward path charted by his holy ancestors.

He was barely three months old when his father immersed him in a *mikveh* in order to imbue him with sanctity. From that day onward, he would shield the boy's eyes lest they beheld anything impure. This immersion sanctified the young child to such an extent that for his entire life he was able to guard his eyes in an extraordinary manner. His mother the Rabbanit a"h also went to great lengths to protect her son, not permitting strangers from outside the family even to touch the baby carriage.

Years later, he told one of his close confidants, HaRav Avraham Biton that his father insisted on waking him nightly from the age of seven for *Tikkun Chatzot*, encouraging him to remain awake until daybreak. When relatives, concerned for the child's welfare, suggested that perhaps he should not demand of him a level which few adults were able to attain, he responded, "'Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it.' (Mishle 22:6) If he does not become accustomed to waking up at midnight now, he will not be able to do so at an older age either." Throughout his life, Rabenu Meir justified the education instilled in him by his saintly father.

R' Sholom Dov Stern who was on very close terms with the family, once asked Rabenu Meir whether he was familiar with the French language spoken by many Moroccan residents. Rabenu Meir, taken

aback, responded: "French? G-d forbid! For fourteen years I was secluded with my father and involved purely in Torah and serving Hashem."

In the writings of his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, we find that at an age when most children need to play or be mischievous, he was never seen playing with his peers. His eyes were focused, never wandering beyond his four *amot* of Torah and serving Hashem. It is well-known that even during his youth he spent five years secluded in his room, devoting his entire being, his strength and senses, to elevating himself spiritually, without any contact with the hustle and bustle of the outside world. The many upheavals he experienced in his youth, including the exhausting flight from the wrath of the wicked Moulay Mohammed, may his name be obliterated, left no lasting impression on his soul. The expression, "Let the world fall apart" virtually came to pass and still the young man maintained the holiness which he had developed with such dedication.

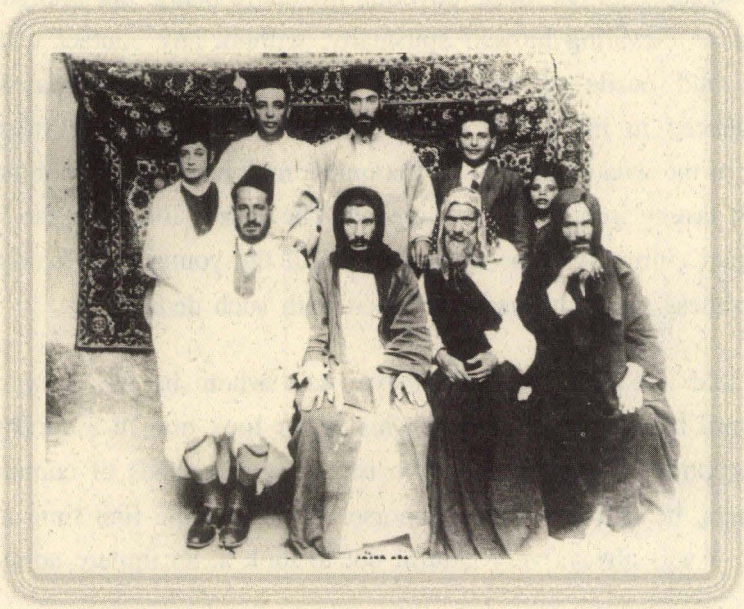
He told HaRav Yitzchak Morsiya, with whom he was very close, that until his *Bar Mitzvah* when his father took him in a carriage to the reception, a grand celebration involving thousands of community members, he had never seen a horse. "This was the first time in my life ... I was always very careful not to look at an impure animal."

A frequent visitor his home related that in his later years, Rabenu Meir told him: "In Morocco, for forty years I lived in seclusion and never saw a woman -- that is sanctity!" We can deduce from here that these forty years began in his childhood, for in the year 5725 [1964-65] when he immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, he was only forty-eight years old.

IN STORMY DAYS

The tragic passing of *Ateret Roshenu* brought atonement to the community of Tafilalet, and saved it. At the same time it created a

void which impacted first and foremost on the Abichazira family. The Baba Sali, on whose shoulders the burden of leadership had fallen, decided not to remain in Risani, but to uproot himself and settle beyond the reach of Moulay Mohammed, may his name be obliterated. Rabenu Meir was only three years old at the time, yet his father took careful steps to protect his young soul from the effects of the upheaval. The family's wanderings could not be allowed to impact on the upward path that had been mapped out for him.



Seated (from right): Rav Moshe Amar, Rav Yichye Adahan, the Baba Sali, Rav Yaakov Masud Abu

Standing (from right): the young Moshe Sheetrit (the Baba Sali's attendant), Mr. Avraham HaKohen, the Baba Chaki, Rav Yoseph Abichazira, and Rabenu Meir

As soon as they had settled in Budniv, the Baba Sali brought in a tutor from far away to oversee Rabenu Meir's education. In spite of being extremely busy with the affairs of the community as well as with the reopening and expansion of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, he also took time out from his daily schedule to learn Torah with his son.

The difficulties of life in the shadow of leadership did not affect Rabenu Meir whatsoever. The head of the family's long absences from home, the urgent meetings in the Rav's house, the throngs constantly seeking the Rav's counsel – none of this disturbed the child's steady diligence in learning Torah. In fact, he spent most of his time away from home, in the *beit midrash* of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, but even when at home he paid no attention to what was taking place around him.

We should point out that his ability to ignore the challenges which leadership placed upon his father includes the whole of the year 5682 [1921-22] when the Baba Sali was absent in *Eretz Yisrael* arranging publication of the books of his saintly brother Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*. He came home only after the *Rabbanim* and leaders of Morocco repeatedly begged him to return. When he complied, with the approval of the venerable sage R' Shlomo Alfandri, he devoted entire days to re-establishing the bond with his only son, who was destined to take his place as leader of the community not too far in the future.

"HIS TEACHER WHO BRINGS HIM INTO THE WORLD TO COME" (Baba Metzia 33a)

Even during his years in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Baba Sali continued to lead the Jewish community of Tafilalet, now concentrated in Budniv. He had exerted total control over the region, and his grip on the reins did not relax for a moment. He delegated the community and all of its dealings to a group of leaders who became the Baba Sali's right-hand men. They were his younger brother, the Baba Chaki, their stepbrother R' Masud Sheetrit, and the saintly R' Yaakov Elzara known as *Baba Yago ben Baba*.

The Baba Sali's other great charge, the Yeshiva and its *Sedarim* were placed under the direction of R' Moshe Turgeman, the *Baba Si*, who was regarded as the Baba Sali's rabbi and teacher. R' Yichye Adahan, whom the Baba Sali held in high esteem, assisted him in the

day-to-day running of the Yeshiva It was also to R' Yichye that the Baba Sali entrusted responsibility for his only son's guidance during his absence.

R' Yichye Adahan, whose many virtues were well-known within the Abichazira family, merited being counted among the righteous members of this golden dynasty, as the son of the daughter of the Abir Yaakov. Being close in age, he and Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu* were raised together in the home of the Abir Yaakov. Their saintly grandfather permitted them, his two favorite grandsons, to sit in his room while he was engrossed in his learning.

When the Abir Yaakov was no longer alive, R' Yichye became exceptionally close to the Abir Yaakov's eldest son, Rabenu Masud. After Rabenu Masud's passing, he loyally followed his cousin Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*. When it was decreed that Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu* leave this world, R' Yichye bowed to the leadership of the Baba Sali, despite the latter's being some twenty-four years his junior.

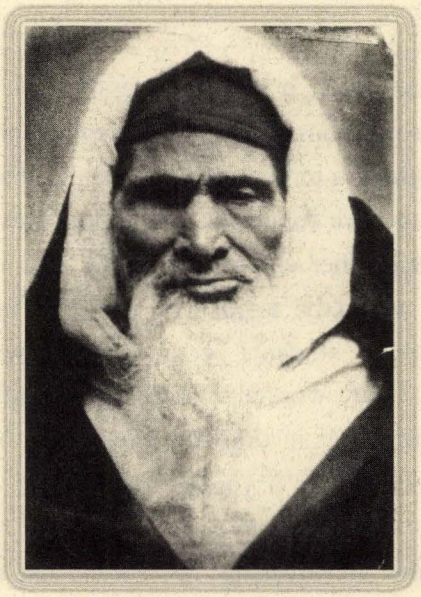
In return, the Baba Sali appreciated his cousin's merits and constantly sang his praises. He testified that R' Yichye successfully completed *taanit hafsaka* at least one hundred times.[32] It was this saintly individual whom the Baba Sali asked to keep a watchful eye on the Yeshiva, and to imprint on it his stamp of holiness.

A letter to him from the Baba Sali, dated 21 Kislev expresses the value and admiration the Baba Sali felt in his heart for his saintliness.

His choice of his cousin R' Yichye to oversee the affairs of his household did not disappoint the Baba Sali. R' Yichye was the leader of the entire family, paying special attention to Rabenu Meir, keeping him on the path charted for him from the beginning by his father.

---

32. The Baba Sali told those close to him that one year R' Yichye completed two *taaniot hafsaka* during the scorching month of Tamuz. This was in addition to the regular fasts which he undertook every Monday and Thursday.



Rav Yichye Adahan



Tombstone of Rav Yichye Adahan

"MY CHILD, WHEN YOUR HEART BECOMES WISE"

(Mishle 23:15)

R' Yichye Adahan made a great impression on the child's tender soul. They spent many hours together, reviewing his lessons until he no longer had the strength to continue - the child, that is. For his father it was not enough to have found his son a great Rav, but he also paid the *melamed* to teach other children from the best families in Erfoud whom he thought would be a positive circle of friends for Rabenu Meir. While the other students were satisfied with mastering the material, Rabenu Meir worked harder and harder, not only in understanding the text, but in drawing inferences for other situations, far more than expected from a young man his age.

His esteemed father too oversaw his Torah, and also his character, and good deeds. Strengthening one area did not come at the expense of another, as can be seen from the time a fierce debate broke out among the students of the Yeshiva regarding how to explain an opinion in *Tosafot*. The students and their *Rabbanim* strove to find the correct interpretation. One of the *Rabbanim* of the Yeshiva, HaGaon HaRav Yaakov ben Hamu zt"l, a leading *halachic* authority as well as an expert in matters of marriage and divorce, disagreed with Rabenu Meir regarding this *Tosafot*. The disagreement continued for three days, neither budging from his interpretation. When he heard of this, the Baba Sali came to the *beit midrash* and chastised his son for having the audacity to argue with his Rav. Rabenu Meir was so taken aback by his father's reprimand that he stepped back in fright and hit a pillar, making his head bleed. A few days later the Baba Sali summoned Rabenu Meir and HaRav Yaakov ben Hamu to his room and asked each of them to present the way he understood the *Tosafot*. Then the Baba Sali dismissed HaRav Yaakov ben Hamu and asked Rabenu Meir to remain behind. Only then, not in the presence of his teacher, did he say to Rabenu Meir, "Although your interpretation of the *Tosafot* is the correct one, as I saw at once, nonetheless you should

not have argued with your Rav in front of the students, lest this diminish his value in their eyes."

In the writings of his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, we find that the Rabbanit treated her beloved only son, the apple of her eye, in the same way she treated the other Yeshiva students, whom she cared for in her home, refusing to give him preferential treatment. Furthermore, the Rabbanit would sometimes give clothing of her son's to less fortunate students. When the Baba Sali commented on this, she refused to stop, claiming, "In my eyes, every student in the holy Yeshiva is like his mother's only son". Rabenu Meir in turn related to her with respect and admiration, realizing her great self-sacrifice in repressing some of her natural motherly love, lest it interfere with his growth.

When members of the family told the Baba Sali that his son was hardly eating and drinking and was undertaking many fasts, far more than a young man of his age was able to handle, the Baba Sali responded: "You have nothing to worry about. No harm will befall him, for he is being nourished spiritually."

His righteous mother once saw that evening had fallen and her son had not yet returned from school. She went to look for him and found him in his classroom, still engrossed in his learning. The sun had already set and a small candle which he had found in a cupboard provided the light he needed. She entertained the notion of telling him to stop and return home in order to get some sleep and gather the strength to learn the following day, but she decided first to consult his father. The Baba Sali told her, "Leave him, for this is how a person grows."

As he grew into an independent young man, he practiced what has been said of Torah scholars: "These are the Torah scholars, who appear similar to women (in that they are non-aggressive and physically weak) yet they perform feats of heroic strength like men." (Yoma 71a) On one

occasion he spent two full days on a complicated *sugya*, without tasting food or drink. The Baba Sali wished to have him take a break, yet this time it was his mother who prevented him saying, "Leave him; this is how a person grows."

And as the two of them kept a watchful eye on him to ensure that he did not harm himself, while at the same time moving the boundaries further and further, how Rabenu Meir grew!

With parents such as these and with such a manner of education, a person truly can grow.

"LET YOUR HEART CHEER YOU IN THE DAYS OF YOUR YOUTH" (Kohelet 11:9)

"AT FOURTEEN HE ATTAINED UNDERSTANDING"

(Based on Avot 5:28 – "A forty year old attains understanding")

At the same incredible pace at which he skipped past his childhood days Rabenu Meir also circumvented his teenage years, showing maturity and wisdom from his youth. His father, who had taught him Torah and was aware of his great qualities, spared no effort in facilitating his rapid development, opening before him new avenues and widening his treasure of knowledge.

Rabenu Meir related the following story to his children, describing the learning practices of the sages and students of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov in Tafilalet. It gives us a clearer picture of the Abichazira family's understanding of what it means to "know Torah". The story was told to us by Rabenu Meir's son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a.

One day while a group of scholars were debating Torah ideas, they began searching for a particular *pasuk* which eluded them. There were few concordances of *Tanach* available at that time, and those that were had not reached Morocco. Memory and general knowledge were their weapons in the "battle of Torah"(see Megillah 15b). Eventually they located the *pasuk* and settled the argument.

The same day, a member of the family, Rav Shmuel Abichazira, went missing. He failed to arrive at the *beit midrash* and when his family was asked where he was, they had no answer. For two weeks no one had any idea of his whereabouts until he suddenly reappeared in the *beit midrash*, full of joy.

He told his friends in the *beit midrash* that having seen how much *bitul Torah* was caused by searching for that *pasuk*, he had decided to

learn the entire *Tanach* by heart! He had secluded himself for two consecutive weeks, reciting the entire *Tanach* over and over until he became totally fluent in it. "This will no longer be cause for *bitul Torah*, concluded R' Shmuel, "Anyone searching for a *pasuk* in *Tanach* can ask me and I will provide him with its precise location."

When Rabenu Meir grew older, he related to someone close to him that, while he was still a young man, a complicated *halachic* question was posed to his father, who asked him to study the topic and to come up with a clear *halachic* ruling. As always, he researched the topic comprehensively. Deeply immersed in the rivers of Torah extracting pearls of wisdom, he lost track of time and did not realize that he had been standing on his feet the entire night. He would have gone on longer, had his father not entered the room to inform him that the time had arrived to recite the morning *Shma*. The young scholar was so engrossed in his learning that he could not believe how much time had passed.

The young Meir continued to develop his all-encompassing knowledge in all areas of the Torah. His "battle for Torah" produced victories which led the amazed observers to proclaim, "We see just how far the power of *Torah* reaches".

From where do have the audacity to testify so confidently about his vast treasure and depth of knowledge in Torah during those years, when we have no written evidence to support what we are saying?

Although nothing is recorded in writing, we do have reliable testimony heard over the years from his esteemed father, the Baba Sali, and related to us by Rabenu Meir's son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira:

On one occasion, all the Sephardic Sages of *Eretz Yisrael* came to visit the Baba Sali in his home in Netivot. He conducted a festive meal in their honor. At the conclusion of the meal he showed them the *piyut*

"Kel Elokim Uzenu", composed by Rabenu Meir when he was fourteen. They studied it, then the Baba Sali said to them, "All the Torah insights which you have come up with over the years do not come close to what my son Rabenu Meir has taught us in this *piyut* which he composed at the tender age of fourteen."

This testimony, whose reliability is based on the greatness of the one testifying, obviates the need to search for other proofs, which we would find hard to interpret, with our limited ability to judge and understand.

"TORAH WITH THE INTENTION OF TEACHING – THIS IS A TORAH OF KINDNESS" (Sukkah 49b)

If at the age of fourteen Rabenu Meir was able to introduce new ideas in his *piyutim* which the heads of Yeshivot were not able to produce through their learning and *shiurim*, there is no doubt that even then he was capable of standing at the helm of the Yeshiva and overseeing the Torah education of its most gifted students.

Indeed, when the Baba Sali decided to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, in 5693 [1932-33] he suggested that Rabenu Meir, at the age of sixteen, should take over the reins of the Yeshiva. The Baba Sali had led the community during its most difficult times, rehabilitating the community of survivors who had escaped the sword of Moulay Muhammad. He knew very well that placing the Yeshiva in the reliable hands of his son was not an act of abdication and did not even imply a lowering of the Yeshiva's standards. Being acutely aware of the depth and clarity of his son's learning, the Baba Sali determined that Rabenu Meir was the most worthy of taking over leadership of the Yeshiva, even though he was not yet married.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, tells us that the best students remember Rabenu Meir's *shiurim* for their sparkling clarity and depth. Before they had even opened the works of the *Rishonim*,

he would develop the *sugya* based on the *Rishonim*'s interpretations. Especially because Morocco was not known as the birthplace of Yeshivot and there were those who claimed that *Chazal*'s words in the *Gemara*, "Yeshivot are not commonly found in *Chutz La'Aretz*" referred to Morocco, it is interesting to note the daily schedule of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov which had not changed since its founding in Tafilalet. In the decades since its inception it retained the charm stamped on it by the Abir Yaakov. The *Rabbanim* of the Yeshiva were chosen from among the outstanding scholars in Erfoud. The regulations were closely supervised by the watchful eye of the *Rosh Yeshiva*. The dormitory rooms were in the home of the Baba Sali, who occasionally sent one of his assistants to monitor the students' activities and to check on them while they were asleep. This extra firmness in dormitory life was felt to guarantee the success of the Yeshiva.

Attendance at the daily *sedarim* was also strictly guarded. Emphasis was placed not only on accomplishment in learning, but, with the guidance of the Baba Sali, the students would assess their *Yirat Shamayim* (fear of heaven), which played a key role in determining each student's status in the Yeshiva. Once while reminiscing over his days in Yeshiva in Erfoud with some young Yeshiva students in Ashdod, Rabenu Meir explained that it was the Yeshiva's practice to conclude each day with the study of *mussar*. However, unlike other Yeshivot where the time set aside for the study of *mussar* has a fixed duration, Rabenu Meir instituted that their study of *mussar* continue until they fell asleep!

In addition there was an iron-clad rule that for the students to be ordained as certified *shochtim*, (ritual slaughterers) they had to be able to delve into a *Gemara* and analyze it with the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Tosafot*. This practice has been described in *Chazal*'s expression, "*Smuchin min haTorah.*" (Brachot 10b) In context, the *Gemara* is asking, 'From where in the Torah do we learn that juxtaposed Scriptural passages may be expounded?' In a play on words, '*smuchin*', meaning

'juxtaposed', also connotes Rabbinic ordination, thus the expression means "ordained by the Torah."

In contrast to the general practice in Morocco where a *shochet* or *bodek* would receive ordination based on his knowledge of the relevant *halachot* and his skill in sharpening the knife, the Yeshiva in Erfoud would not ordain anyone who did not pass a very rigorous test in *Gemara*, *Rashi*, and *Tosafot*. The Baba Sali feared that once the students received ordination entitling them to perform ritual slaughter, they would immediately fulfill the adage *"Tekef lismicha sh'chita."* (Brachot 42a) Literally this means that an animal should be slaughtered immediately after 'leaning' (*smicha*) is performed. In a play on words, the term '*smicha*' also refers to Rabbinical ordination, implying that as soon as they received their ordination, they would go out and make use of it to slaughter, without a thorough study of *Shas*. The Baba Sali was adamant in his declaration: "Anyone who cannot analyze the *Gemara*, *Rashi*, and *Tosafot* properly is liable to destroy worlds with his *sh'chita*".

The following exception to the rule gives us insight into the rule itself. Rabenu Meir once deviated from his normal practice and wrote a letter for a student, certifying his mastery of the material. So many limitations were placed on this certification that it was quite clear that it was only given due to extenuating circumstances and was not meant as an authentic *smicha*.

The case involved someone very close to the family who had come from Algeria to study in the Yeshiva in Erfoud. One day the young man was called up to serve in his home country's armed forces, which would have threatened his observance of *Shabbat* and *kashrut*. The Baba Sali and the *Rabbanim* of the Yeshiva at first refused to permit the student to travel home but he still needed to obtain an exemption to prevent his enlistment. In order to arm him with a document certifying his progress in learning and accomplishments, Rabenu Meir

wrote a letter addressed to his brother and mother. Careful scrutiny of that letter reveals how precise Rabenu Meir was in his choice of words, each of which had been carefully weighed.[33]

It states clearly that in Yeshivat Abir Yaakov it was not sufficient for the student to have mastered the *Gemara*, *Rashi*, and *Tosafot*, but he must "swim in the sea of Talmud in all its disciplines", before being ordained to work in holy service.

Rabenu Meir did not educate his students simply to learn. An ability to repeat entire sections of the *Gemara* or even total mastery of them did not merit a student any special compliments. He expected his students to dive into the sea of Talmud without a single hair remaining above the water. He aimed at broadening their breadth and depth of learning, and also at opening up the gates of heaven before his students and to raising their learning to greater spiritual heights.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, describes his father's remarks, made in an affectionate tone to the students at the end of a learning session: "Where is your excitement?" he would ask. "Why does your face not express that you have understood the *sugya*? Why does your face not light up? Do you have a new insight into the Rashb"a? Did you see him? Did you feel the author of the work standing right here before you?"

Rabenu Meir felt strongly that the role of the *Rosh Yeshiva* was not limited to teaching Torah alone, but also to transmitting the "fear and love" which must surround the learning.

A student who merited great closeness to Rabenu Meir describes how in his daily shiur Rabenu Meir would appear strong as a lion, with great excitement and devotion to Hashem that would light up his

33. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, pointed out to us that his holy father's golden language and perfect style of writing was very similar to the the Chid"a's!

face like the rays of the sun. The daily shiur would last for many long hours without any break and without his showing any sign of weakness.

This is merely a thumbnail sketch of the Yeshiva under Rabenu Meir at the tender age of sixteen. While most young men his age are just beginning their serious learning, he had already risen to such heights that his father relied on him to fill the role of *Rosh Yeshiva*. If we remember that his partner in the running of the Yeshiva was Rav Moshe Turgeman who was already a very old man and was still considered the primary Rav of his father the Baba Sali, we see just how much faith his father placed in his ability to lead the Yeshiva.

"TO TEACH HIM TORAH AND TO TAKE A WIFE FOR HIM" (Kiddushin 29a)

During his grueling journey to *Eretz Yisrael*,[34] the Baba Sali happened upon a particular city where he met a very respectable Jew who suggested that his righteous daughter marry the Baba Sali's son. The Baba Sali was very taken by this suggestion but refused to postpone his journey. He sent a letter from there to his brother, the Baba Chaki asking him to expedite this *shidduch* and to prepare for the wedding.

During the period in which the Baba Sali resided in *Eretz Yisrael*, the leaders of the Moroccan community relentlessly sent letters beseeching him to return. One letter even contained the convincing argument that his only son was about to get married and if the father of the groom was missing, the wedding date was likely to be delayed. The Baba Sali replied by telegram that the wedding must go on as planned and should not be delayed for even one day. There was no reason in the world to delay this great *mitzvah*.

---

34. Regarding the difficulties of traveling during those days, see the words of the Baba Sali in the chapter "they journeyed and they encamped"

Indeed Rabenu Meir's wedding took place without his father's presence. The fact that the Baba Sali was willing to miss the wedding of his only son for whom he had waited fourteen difficult years, shows how much importance he placed on living in *Eretz Yisrael* whose very air makes one wise. (Baba Batra 158b) Years later, the Baba Chaki related to Rabenu Meir's children how before the wedding he had received a list of instructions from his holy brother, among them strict orders to gather all the poor of the city and sew as fine clothing for them as for the members of the family, so they would feel as comfortable at the celebration as the rest of the community.[35]

That instruction might give the impression that there was plenty of money available, but that was far from the reality. With the Baba Sali away, the burden of supporting the *Yeshiva* fell on the family. It was only with great difficulty that they were able to gather sufficient funds to support the students. The Baba Sali's directive to his brother, however, was very firm and he did his utmost to fulfill it in its entirety. A few days before the wedding, one of the wealthy residents of Tangiers died and bequeathed all his wealth to the Abichazira family. The amount involved equaled – the cost of the wedding!

The wedding was celebrated in all its glory and splendor by the Jewish community who had gathered from all over Morocco to rejoice with the groom, another shoot on the holy tree of greatly admired leaders. HaRav Masud Malul, *chazan* of the Baba Sali's synagogue in Erfoud, who remembers the lavish wedding, recalls that it was impossible to find any place large enough for the tens of thousands of people who came to celebrate, so there was no choice but to hold the

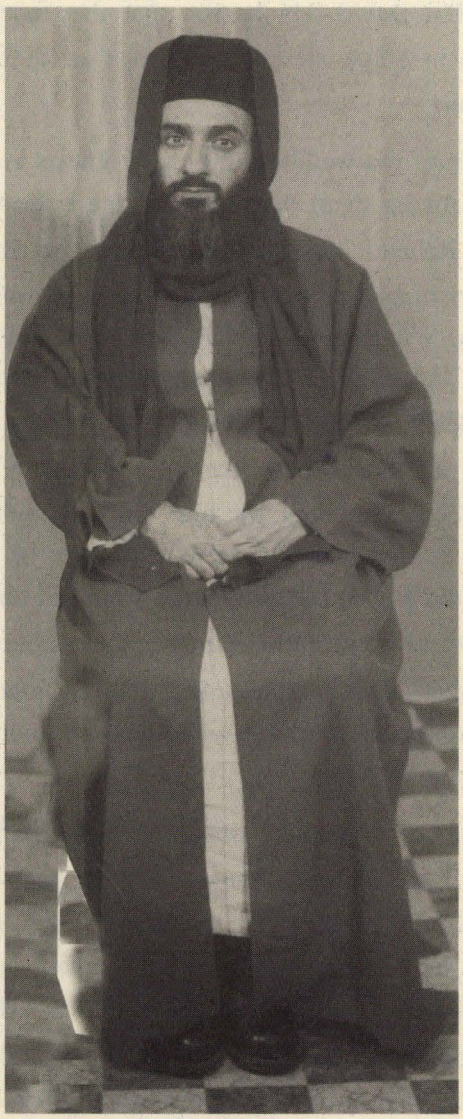
---

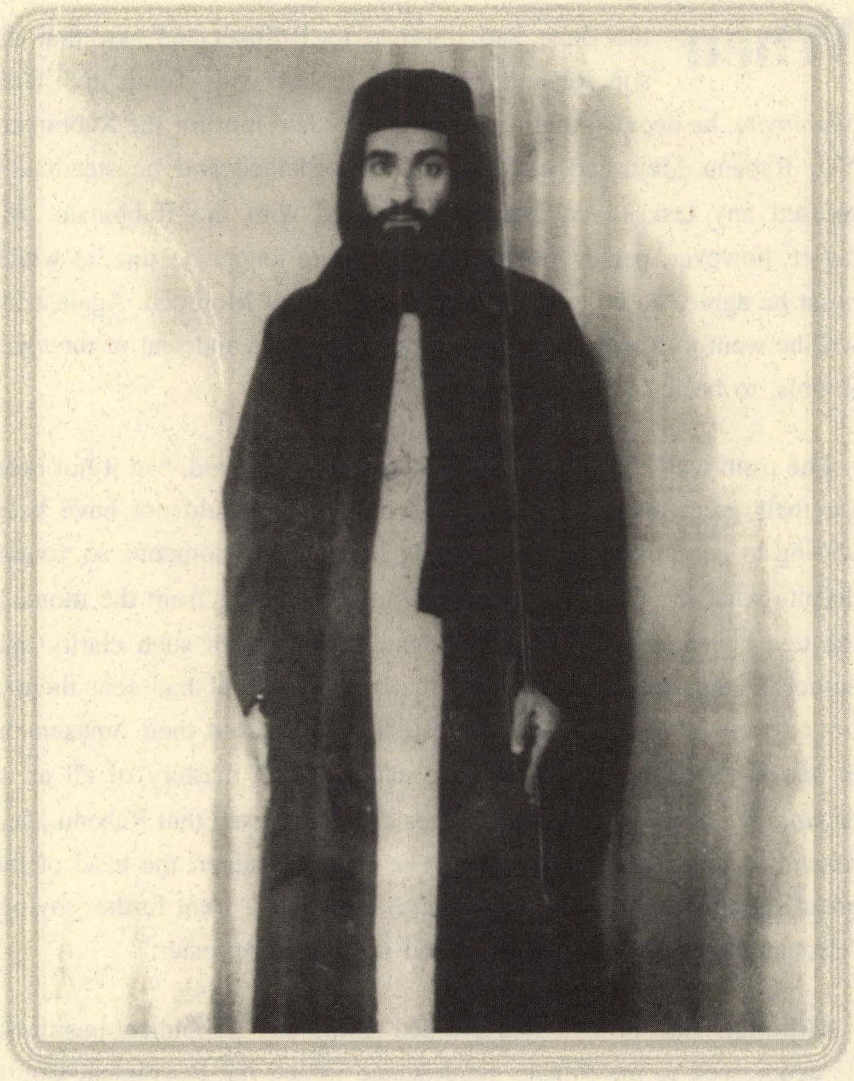
35. The same applied to Rabenu Meir's *Bar Mitzvah* which also was celebrated with the entire community. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related that prior to the *Bar Mitzvah*, the Baba Sali went around to approximately fifty cities in the Tafilalt region and gathered more than sixty orphans of *Bar Mitzvah* age and had them join Rabenu Meir's *Bar Mitzvah* celebration. He provided them with good quality clothing and saw to it that they had *tefillin* of the same standard as his son's.

wedding in the open air. The main streets were transformed into *simcha* halls, with the men on one street and the women on the next. The chef who cooked the meat for the wedding told Rabenu Meir's son, Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira, that they needed six tons of meat! This gives us some idea of how great an event the Baba Sali was willing to miss.

On the morning of the wedding, the many guests began to assemble in Erfoud, chief among them the family of the bride who had not yet met the groom. Rabenu Meir was concerned that the guests would disturb him by visiting him in the attic where he was accustomed to learn in isolation. What did he do? R' Masud Malul testified that he went down into the empty synagogue, slammed the door shut and locked it very tightly. There he sat and learned until the time of the wedding. During all those hours, the family did not know where he was. Some went out searching for him, but he could not be found. Only as the time for the wedding drew near, after he had finished the *Mincha* prayers, did Rabenu Meir emerge from his sanctuary. Directly from the room where he secluded himself, the groom was brought by his uncle the Baba Chaki to the *chupa* with a *Gemara* in his hand, and he did not cease his learning until the very moment they began the wedding ceremony ...

Less than a year had passed since the Baba Sali had made the pilgrimage to the Land of Israel. He was already back in Tafilalet after seeing that he would not be able to sit and learn Torah and serve Hashem in quiet and privacy the way he yearned, because his name had become well-known throughout *Eretz Yisrael*. Hordes of people came knocking on his door and giving him no peace. In addition a letter arrived for him from his primary teacher, HaRav Moshe Turgeman, the Baba Si where he issued a "Rabbinical decree" - an ultimatum that he must immediately return to Morocco. The Baba Sali was willing to miss the wedding of his only son, but he could not ignore a clear directive from his Rav.





IN THE PATH OF LEADERSHIP

"LOVE WORK AND DESPISE LORDLINESS" (Avot 1:10)

When the Baba Sali returned to Tafilalet and saw that his son Rabenu Meir was replete with Torah and *Yirat Shamayim*, he decided that it was time to ordain him for the Rabbinate. Yet, Rabenu Meir had no desire to be ordained and he steadfastly refused any tasks even remotely involved with the Rabbinate. His father, however, persevered until he could no longer decline, at which point he agreed to be tested by the *Rabbanim* of Morocco. Against his will he went to Rabat, the capital city of Morocco and seat of the chief Rabbis, to be tested.

The truth was, as the *Rabbanim* themselves admitted, had it not been for their great respect for the Baba Sali, they would not have been willing to administer such a comprehensive test to someone so young, despite what his teachers said about him. However, from the moment the test began and the answers began flowing with such clarity and authority, the *Rabbanim* realized that the Baba Sali had sent them a truly precious vessel. After the test, they expressed their amazement at his all-encompassing knowledge and his total mastery of all areas of *halacha*. One of the elderly judges even suggested that Rabenu Meir remain in Rabat and replace him. The chief examiner, the head of the great Rabbinical Court, R' Yehoshua Bardugo zt"l, went further saying, "He came to be tested and he ended up being the tester."

Although until now he had avoided taking any Rabbinical positions, he acquiesced to his father's request and joined the Rabbinical Court. He took on very difficult cases, doing his utmost to bring harmony to Jewish homes. His appointment by his father was a true illustration of the words of *Chazal*: "'Despise lordliness' – a person should not place a crown on his own head, but others should crown him." (Avot D'*Rebbi* Natan 1). From the time Rabenu Meir was appointed as Rav, he began to feel a certain love for the work involved in the Rabbinate.

"AT THE TIME THE RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS IN A CITY" (see *Rashi* Bereishit 28:10)

In the year 5705 [1944-45], Rabenu Meir was appointed Rav of Midelt on the recommendation of the Rabbinic leadership of Morocco. He fulfilled the task in a remarkable manner. A local resident, his trusty assistant R' Yehuda Turgeman, testified that not only was he held in high esteem by the Jewish community but even non-Jewish residents saw him as a very special individual, going so far as to kiss his cloak as he passed through the streets of the city.

Rabenu Meir's leadership of the community of Midelt went beyond his official duties of answering *halachic* queries and officiating at weddings, for he had tremendous influence on all aspects of the Midelt community. With his extraordinary piety, Rabenu Meir brought a feeling of pride to the city and a new sense of worth to the community. This was not the result of any masterly sermons nor of any expressions of outrage against those who did not comply; it was simply the spiritual splendor which radiated from all his actions. In the words of our Sages: "When the righteous person is in a city, he is its magnificence, he is its splendor, he is its grandeur."[36] (*Rashi Bereishit* 28:10)

---

36. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira once compared the way R' Meir led the community, to an incredible incident which took place during the days of R' Moshe Teitelbaum, author of "*Yismach Moshe*":

After a time had elapsed following his appointment as Rav of the city, R' Moshe requested an increase in his salary allocated from the community fund. Typical of community leaders, who administered community funds for purposes they deemed important, the leader turned down the request claiming that he had seen no great changes in communal life since R' Moshe had taken the position, for the Rabbi spent his entire time studying *Torah* and had no connection with people.

The "Yismach Moshe" responded, "Tell me, since I have assumed this position has even one person died young?" The leader shook his head. "Has any woman miscarried? Has any community member taken ill? Has anyone had to declare bankruptcy or lost his livelihood?" R' Moshe received negative answers to all his questions. "You should realize," R' Moshe continued,

As an example of the new spirit he had instilled in the town, we can cite the testimony of one of the townspeople that in the "seven plentiful years" which Rabenu Meir spent in Midelt, no person died an unusual death and no woman miscarried and there was not a single case of divorce in the entire city. This latter statistic is even more impressive when we take into account that the custom in those days was to marry at a very young age, before the transition from childhood to maturity had been completed, and hardly a day passed without a divorce. The situation reached such proportions that, on going out into the street one would often be confronted by the spectacle of divorce documents (*get*) being handed to a local woman. This situation ceased instantly upon Rabenu Meir's arrival and remained that way for the duration of his seven years' tenure as Rav of the city.

R' Avraham Biton, who was very close to Rabenu Meir and with whom he frequently discussed the divorce situation, related that Rabenu Meir had never signed a divorce document, always managing to restore tranquility to the troubled home. Rabenu Meir was not afraid to use the Chatam Sofer's well-known "threat" to men who refused to divorce their wives, quoting the *Mishna*: "A woman reacquires herself through a bill of divorce or through the death of her husband." (Kiddushin 2a). The Chatam Sofer would warn them that if they did not permit the woman to acquire her own freedom through the bill of divorce, then Heaven would have to impose the other method. "I, however," reasoned Rabenu Meir, "have another method: I would tell the husband who wishes to divorce his wife that I would never agree to arrange a divorce for him. If he continues to refuse to live in peace with his wife, there will be no choice but to invoke the other method."

"that my stay in this city and my *Torah* study within its walls bring great salvation to the city and prevent calamities from taking place. Tell me now, do you not agree that I deserve a higher salary for all that I do for the community?"

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira adds that even the commerce in the Jewish street of Midelt was blessed with prosperity during that period. The fruits grown in Jewish orchards were of higher than usual quality, making them famous in the entire area. The Jews of Midelt understood very well why everything in their daily lives was blessed. Many of them would customarily approach Rabenu Meir seeking his blessing prior to carrying out any business transaction.

One day, a local resident entered his Rabbinic court wishing to divorce his wife, for they had been married for several years and were not blessed with children. When Rabenu Meir heard the despondent man, he interrupted him saying, "Listen! Until today you had not come to me for a blessing. Why not try seeking my help as well ... wait precisely one year to the day before invoking this drastic measure." One year later to the day, the man invited Rabenu Meir to officiate as *sandak* at his son's *Brit milah.*

Once when he lived in Ashdod, a man came to him seeking his blessing for livelihood. Rabenu Meir looked at him and asked him whether or not he was married. The man responded that he was forty-two years old and still single. Rabenu Meir, said, apparently to his confidant R' Avraham Biton who was sitting next to him, "A couple once came to me seeking divorce because they were unable to have children. I convinced them not to take this drastic measure and I promised them that they would indeed be blessed with children. The heavens fulfilled my blessing and that very year they were blessed with a son."

At this point Rabenu Meir turned to the man and asked him, "Tell me, is this the reason that I helped bring you into this world. Did you provide your parents with some sort of supernatural salvation, that you think you can now remain unmarried leaving an unattached branch on the family tree?" The man lowered his eyes and admitted that it was indeed Rabenu Meir's blessing that brought him into this world. He then promised to marry the first young lady suggested to him.

"THE WISDOM OF SHLOMO"

During the same period, a very distinguished gentleman resided in Midelt, one of the most well-known *tzaddikim* in Morocco – R' Shlomo Amsalem zt"l. He authored thirty-six works on various branches of the Torah. He was also well-versed in *kabbalah*. When Rabenu Meir was appointed as Rav of the city, R' Shlomo was about eighty years old. Even so, he accorded great respect to this young Rabbi who had not yet reached the age of thirty. His eyes would follow him as he walked through the streets, not turning away for a moment until he was completely out of sight.

The residents of the city, amazed at the great honor the elderly sage gave to Rabenu Meir, at first assumed it was due to the lofty family of leaders he descended from. The following incident, however, makes it clear that R' Shlomo Amsalem saw greatness in Rabenu Meir himself and this was the reason he accorded him such great honor.

The incident was recounted by Rabenu Meir's loyal assistant R' Yehuda Turgeman. He related us that Rabenu Meir was once invited to participate in a feast conducted by one of the dignitaries of the community. He sat next to R' Shlomo Amsalem zt"l who was seated at the head of the table following the words of *Chazal*: "At a banquet, accord the greatest honor to the eldest." (Baba Batra 120a). During the entire feast, R' Shlomo did not remove his gaze from the young Rav. Suddenly R' Shlomo's complexion changed, turning first red and then "the red coloring left him and his face turned white." (Baba Metzia 58b), and he was speechless. Several moments passed before he was able to even utter a few disjointed words: "Did you not see?" he wondered out loud, "A pillar of fire descended from the heavens upon the head of 'Baba Meir'!"

When it became clear that the Baba Sali's stay in *Eretz Yisrael* was intended to be permanent, Rabenu Meir returned to Erfoud, after seven years in Midelt.

When he left Midelt "Its magnificence left, its splendor left, and its grandeur left." (*Rashi* Bereishit 28:10). The incidence of divorce rose to its former level and calamities returned to afflict the people of the city. More than ever before the townspeople realized the power of the *tzaddik* which had protected them during his stay in the city.

IN THE SEAT OF HIS ANCESTORS

As the year 5712 [1952] drew to a close, almost two years after the Baba Sali's move with his family to *Eretz Yisrael*, Rabenu Meir was asked to return to Erfoud to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors in assuming the Rabbinate of the Tafilalet region. This had become the center for the Jews of Morocco who had not yet emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* following the establishment of the State of Israel. Two years later, when the Baba Sali returned to Erfoud, Rabenu Meir tried to return the reins of leadership to his father, claiming that he was merely a substitute. The Baba Sali refused to accept his old position, although his influence was once again felt in the entire region.

As was his practice in Midelt, Rabenu Meir's leadership was not passive. From the moment he arrived, he fortified Torah and Judaism in Tafilalet. With superhuman effort, he established institutions of Torah and *chesed* throughout the region, all united under the framework of *Chevrat Ahavat Shalom Chesed V'Emet*. He was assisted by the emissaries of the Lubavitcher *Rebbe* who established their own school system in Erfoud, numbering close to one thousand students.

The Tafilalet region contained tens of settlements, villages, and towns. Some of these villages numbered five hundred families, while other bigger towns were home to thousands of Jewish people. Rabenu Meir, in his capacity as head of the Rabbinical court of the region, insisted that each village and town have its own *mikveh* which adhered to the strictest standards of *kashrut*, a supply of food "*kosher l'mehadrin*", synagogues headed by Torah scholars, as well as their

other religious needs. It would be superfluous to add that all those taking up religious positions, were highly influenced by Rabenu Meir, and that nothing was done without his knowledge, blessing, permission, and approval.

ב"ה, ג' מרחשון, ה'תשי"ג
ברוקלין, נ.י.

שלמא רבא לתאי גברא רבא, תרח"ג הוו"ח אי"א נו"מ יושב על מדין, מנהל עדתו במישרים, איש חי רב פעלים, מאיר ומזהיר, עפיי' ואינבי' שפיר, בנש"ק, וכו' וכו' כבוד הדרת גאונו מוהר"ר מאיר שליט"א אביחצירא רב ראשי דק"ק ארפוד ואגפי' יע"א

שלום וברכה!

בנועם קבלתי מכתבו מיום ו' לירח תאיתנים שנת תשוב"ה, והנה ברך לקחתי וברך לו אשיבנה, ואכפול ברכותי שכתבתי לכהדר"ג לראש השנה, ענינא דכולא בי', לשנה טובה ומתוקה בגשמיות וברוחניות בטוב הנראה והנגלה.

מה שכותב כת"ר ששיגר לי מכתב מבשר טוב שנתמנה לראב"ד בעיר ארפוד ואגפי', הנה כנראה לא חגיעני מכתב הנ"ל. אבל ברכה בכל עת זמנה חוא, ואאחל לכהדר"ג שליט"א ברכתי לחצלחה מופלגה במקומו חחדש לכחן פאר בתור מרא דאתרא, וכידוע פירוש כ"ק אדמו"ר הזקן בעל התניא והשו"ע, שחענין כפשוטו מרא מלשון אדנות ובעלות, שהמרא דאתרא חוא חאדון והבעלים בעיר ולא רק ברוחניות אלא גם בגשמיות.

ת"ח ת"ח בעד תשורתו חיקרח תמונת פני אביו זקנו חרח"ג והרח"ח חמקובל ראש ומנחיג עדות בישראל על מבועי היראה ופנימיות התורה מוהר"ר יעקב זצ"ל אביחצירא.

ואחרון אחרון חביב, חיא בשורתו חטובה העולה על כולנה שביום כ"ד לחודש אלול נולד לו בן זכר ונקרא שמו בישראל דוד חי לאורך ימים ושנים טובות, והנני בזה להביע ברכותי שיגדלוהו ביחד עם זוגי' הרבנית תחי' ואת אחיו שליט"א לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים מתוך הרחבת הדעת באמת, ובימיו ובימינו נזכה לגאולה השלימה על ידי דוד משיח צדקנו דוד מלך ישראל חי וקיים, אמן.

בברכה

כבקשתו נשלח לו בחבילה בפ"ע ספרי קודש חקדשים אדה"ז זי"ע מן הנ[מ]צא תח"י: תורח אור, לקוטי תורה, ושולחן־ערוך. ובטח יאשר קבלתם.

A letter of blessing from the Lubavitcher *Rebbe* to Rabenu Meir on the occasion of his appointment as Rav of Erfoud

The leaders of his communities were not the only ones who followed his directives, for as was true with his saintly forefathers, the sphere of his influence included all the *Rabbanim* of Morocco. They would regularly write to him seeking his response to *halachic* queries, as well as for guidance on various leadership issues. The answers he provided in his own inimitable words were recorded. From time to time, *Rabbanim* from all over the land would call on him in his residence in Erfoud, wishing to take counsel with him and to enjoy the aura of his Torah and holiness. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, points out that many of these *Rabbanim* left their communities and remained in Rabenu Meir's home for weeks and even months.

Rabenu Meir developed strong ties with all the members of the community, so strong that they would not take one step without seeking his counsel and blessing. Rabenu Meir set new standards for connecting with the *tzaddik* which had been heretofore unknown among the members of the community. His son Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira described it in the following words:

"**His** connection to the community was strong and permanent. Every step anyone took in any area, whether it was plans to travel, business, marriage, moving to a new home, divorce, partnership, or changing businesses was not done without the knowledge, direction, and blessing of the *tzaddik*.

"**The** community was adamant about fulfilling the *tzaddik*'s will in all aspects, being very well aware from several incidents that anyone who did not fulfill his directive did not succeed. What he saw with his eyes was crystal clear and he had the ability to see far into the distance. Anyone who received his blessing saw great success in his business."

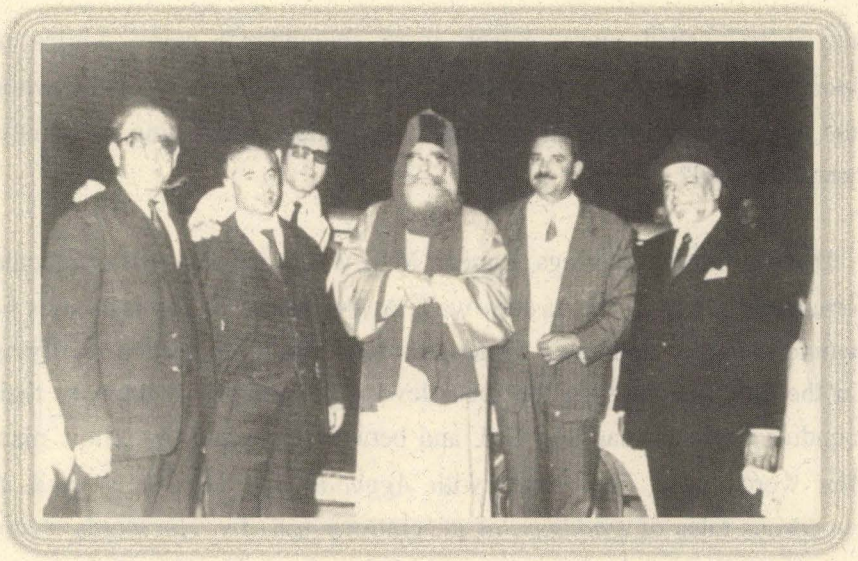
During those turbulent times, traveling of any sort came under the category of "He who guards his soul will distance himself from them." (Mishle 22:5) and the roads were all considered perilous (see Kohelet Rabba

3). Bandits waited at the crossroads ready to ambush innocent travelers and to do away with them in order to steal their belongings. The Jews of Tafilalet, however, traveled the roads with their heads held high and a song in their hearts. Fear was something which never entered their minds, for the blessing of the *tzaddik* made a lasting impression on them - not only his blessing for a safe journey but his blessing for a journey filled with an inner sense of tranquility.

As he had been taught in his father's home, Rabenu Meir always remembered the destitute and downtrodden, and would provide them with sustenance. The poor of the city were frequently invited to dine at his table. During festivals, the entire populace merited being his guests, as there was a rotation in which each member was invited to at least one meal. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira points out a very noticeable distinction between Rabenu Meir's leadership from the seat of his ancestors in Morocco and that of the period of his residence in Ashdod. In Ashdod simplicity of his life was outstanding. In Morocco he led the people in noble style, providing generously for the entire community. He lived in an enormous house which had room for the entire extended family, including the Baba Sali when he returned to Morocco.

Rabenu Meir's *Sukkah*, in the courtyard of his home, seated four hundred people; and all the residents of the city flocked to it during the festival. Anyone who entered its gates would remain until *Simchat Torah*. This was where they prayed, learned Torah, and sang praises to Hashem. They would hardly sleep the entire week.

During the days of *Pesach*, in addition to his custom of conducting lavish meals in his home to which all the residents of the city were invited, based on a rotation arranged in advance, Rabenu Meir would walk to a different synagogue every day in order to deliver a public discourse and strengthen the commitment of the congregation. At the close of the festival the whole community would come to receive his blessing, remaining until morning.



Rabenu Meir in the company of some of Erfoud's community leaders

"WHO ENLIGHTENS ('MEIR') THE EYES OF THE DIASPORA" (Chullin 59b)

As leader whose net was spread over all of the Jewish communities throughout the regions of North Africa, Rabenu Meir, following in the ways of his ancestors, would customarily leave his home in Erfoud and travel to other cities.

Many Moroccan Jews, even those who did not live in his vicinity, could not forget the events of Rabenu Meir's visit to their city, the scenes being as vivid in their memory as if they were taking place before their eyes. Wherever he arrived, all the residents would come out to the gates of the city, young and old, men, women, and children, to greet their leader with drums and dance. These scenes sanctifying the Name of Hashem were seen from one city to the other, as even the non-Jewish residents would speak in amazement about "Baba Meir who had come to their city."

The festive parade would make its way to the home of a local dignitary of the city, where a feast would be conducted in honor of

the distinguished guest. Sheep were slaughtered, many bottles of *machya* were placed on the table, but who could eat or drink while the eyes were drinking in spiritual nourishment, quenching the thirsty, yearning soul?

During those gatherings, Rabenu Meir was more than just a splendid ornament seated at the eastern wall. At the height of the festivities he would stand up and speak at length about whatever needed rectifying in the city, encouraging the local Jewish community to improve their conduct between man and G-d, and between man and his fellow man. His words were intertwined with *Aggadah* and *Derush* as well as wondrous tales of *tzaddikim* of generations gone by. His words would permeate their consciousness and their admiration for their leader became deeply etched in their hearts.

From there he would visit the local *Rabbanim* assembling them together with the community supporters. At times he would become heavily involved in a problem which required the intervention of government leaders, who had learned that it was not worth their while to refuse his requests. At other times he felt it appropriate to institute a particular ruling for the people of the community.

When the time came for him to take his leave, the residents of the city would escort him a long way and would remain standing until the clouds of dust from his car had dispersed. Even as each person returned to his home, he felt the truth of the well-known *Hassidic* explanation of *Rashi*'s comment: "The departure of a righteous person from a place makes an impression. Once he has departed from there, its magnificence has gone away, its splendor has gone away, its grandeur has gone away." (*Rashi* Bereishit 28:10). They explained that although the righteous person has left the city and thus the magnificence, splendor and grandeur have gone away, the impression he made remains recognizable in the city for a very long time.

"YOU SHALL NOT TREMBLE BEFORE ANY MAN"

(Devarim 1:17)

While someone with as pure a vision as R' Shlomo Amsalem zt"l, the *tzaddik* from Midelt, was able to see a pillar of fire descend from the heavens above the head of Rabenu Meir, the entire community viewed Rabenu Meir himself as a pillar of fire walking before them leading the way, guiding them down the proper path, smoothing out cracks and removing obstacles. Whenever a religious issue or the honor of heaven was at stake, he did not hesitate to stand steadfastly against those causing the strife. When he regarded the will of Hashem as his own will, he was assisted by the heavens in guiding the community in the path of Torah and fear of heaven, through open miracles visible to all. Even when the troublemaker appeared as "a wicked person who is enjoying good fortune," (Brachot 7b – the Gemara says that one should not contend with such a person), time after time Rabenu Meir proved that "He (the wicked one) cannot swallow one who is completely righteous." (ibid.).

"Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of Your great deeds" (Shir HaShirim). Rabenu Meir's name became known everywhere. He was revered not only by the entire Moroccan Jewish community, but even the non-Jewish rulers knew his name and were aware of his greatness through his deeds. Those who at first were not filled with awe on hearing his name were burnt by his coals, leaving painful scars not easily forgotten. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, writes that even the king of Morocco would seek his blessing once a year, a fact which became known throughout the kingdom and greatly impressed the members of the Royal hierarchy.

Rabbi David also related us one of the famous incidents from which we can learn how adamant his father was in protecting the honor of heaven, even if this meant challenging the mayor of a city. We see too the level of Divine assistance he was given, to the extent that the order of creation was altered for his benefit.

One day during the month of Elul, Rabenu Meir arrived in one of the main cities of Morocco, intending to remain there for a few days to breathe fresh life into the community which had invited him to strengthen its spiritual state. The first night of his stay, Rabenu Meir, wishing to recite the *selichot*, asked his host what time the people gathered in the synagogue. The host responded that the mayor forbade them to recite *selichot* because, he claimed, it disturbed the sleep of the neighbors.

It was clear that Rabenu Meir was not happy with the situation, yet the people could not defy a decision signed and sealed by the mayor himself. Rabenu Meir, however, did not hesitate and asked his assistant to summon all the communal leaders immediately. He asked them if it was true that their fear of the mayor was preventing them from reciting *selichot*. They admitted that it was, to their chagrin. Rabenu Meir instructed them to assemble all the Jews of the city that night in the local synagogue for the recitation of *selichot*. The midnight hour was fast approaching.

Slightly after two o' clock in the morning hundreds of Jews gathered in the synagogue with their *siddurim* in hand, in a mood of anticipation. Rabenu Meir himself was to serve as *shliach tzibbur*. Before *selichot* he spoke encouragingly, asking them to pour their hearts out to Hashem and urging them to make up for all they had missed until that day. He then began to pray out loud, with the congregation following. The sounds of prayer emanated from the synagogue, to the surprise of the non-Jewish neighbors who immediately summoned the police.

The police officers, hearing about the Jewish prayer service led by Rabenu Meir, made haste to the mayor's house for orders. With rings of sleep clearly visible under his eyes, the mayor listened intently to the police commissioner's report. Fuming, he ordered the police to halt recitation of the *selichot* immediately. One of the officers reported to

him that Baba Meir, son of the Baba Sali, was leading the group and was even serving as their *shliach tzibbur*. The mayor, now furious, sneered: "Who is this Baba Meir and who appointed him to so brazenly disobey the law?"

As soon as the words were spoken, the mayor suddenly found himself unable to continue. His body became paralyzed and his face became contorted. He sank helpless into his armchair while his racing eyes shouted that which he was unable to speak.

It was obvious that his trouble was caused by his disdain for the honor of the *tzaddik*. A messenger was dispatched to the synagogue to appeal to Rabenu Meir. As the messenger entered the sanctuary, the worshippers held their breath. There was utter silence as he hastily made his way to Rabenu Meir. Rabenu Meir, however, motioned that he was unable to interrupt even for the emissary of the mayor. To the congregation he signaled that they should continue praying with still more fervor.

At the end of *selichot*, Rabenu Meir turned to the messenger to hear what he had to say. With some trepidation the man unfolded before him the story of the mayor in his mansion, lying like a stone. Rabenu Meir said to him: "Go and tell him that he will return to full strength only if he promises not to persecute the Jewish people and permits them to practice their religious beliefs."

When the messenger told this to the mayor, he agreed by blinking his eyes to accept these conditions. In a matter of minutes his strength returned as if nothing had happened.

The mayor trembled as he waited for Rabenu Meir at his host's house. The door opened and he fell at Rabenu Meir's feet, begging his forgiveness. Taking advantage of the moment, Rabenu Meir demanded that the mayor sign an explicit commitment not to hamper his Jewish citizens in observing Jewish tradition down to its finest detail.

From that day on, the Jewish residents of the city encountered no more troubles in leading a Jewish life.

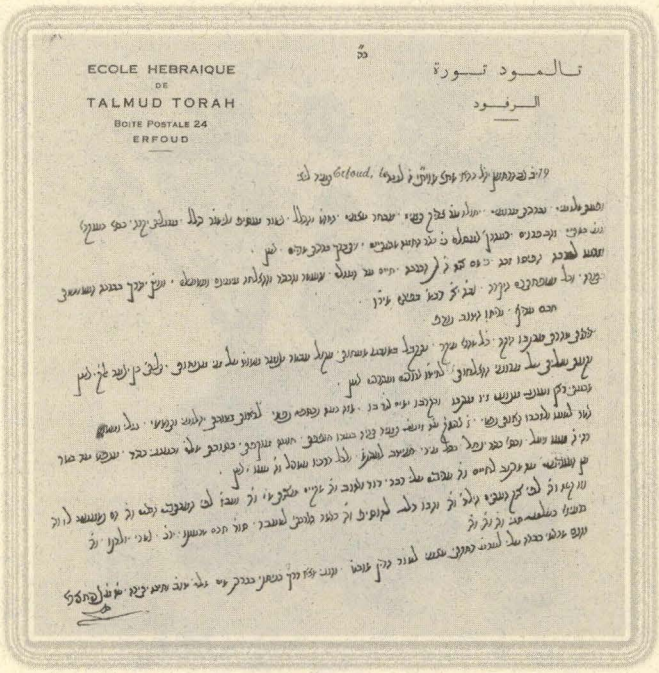
A similar incident took place in another city. When Rabenu Meir graced it with his presence, the whole community gathered to welcome him. The large assembly and the fervor it aroused did not please one of the non-Jewish neighbors, one of the wealthiest and fiercest people in the city. He sent a servant to scatter the crowd. This caused a great commotion which did not subside until Rabenu Meir's entourage arrived. When the heads of the community reported to Rabenu Meir how the non-Jew tried to make trouble for the Jewish community, Rabenu Meir waved his hand dismissively as if to say there was no need for them to get involved in this nonsense.

No sooner had Rabenu Meir entered his host's home accompanied by the singing and dancing of the entire community, when the gentile neighbor fell to the ground, writhing with pain. His family realized that this was the result of the degrading manner in which he had treated the Jewish community. They immediately made haste to where Rabenu Meir was staying to ask his forgiveness. Here as well, Rabenu Meir extracted a promise from the wicked man not to intimidate another Jew. Only when the man agreed to mend his ways and improve his relations with the Jewish residents, did Rabenu Meir bless him with an end to all his suffering.

Many such stories abounded during the years that Rabenu Meir stood at the helm of the Moroccan Jewish community and all the stories ended in the same way with a clear victory for Rabenu Meir, who was steadfast and merited miraculous Divine assistance.



Rabenu Meir with his uncle the Baba Chaki with members of the Erfoud community



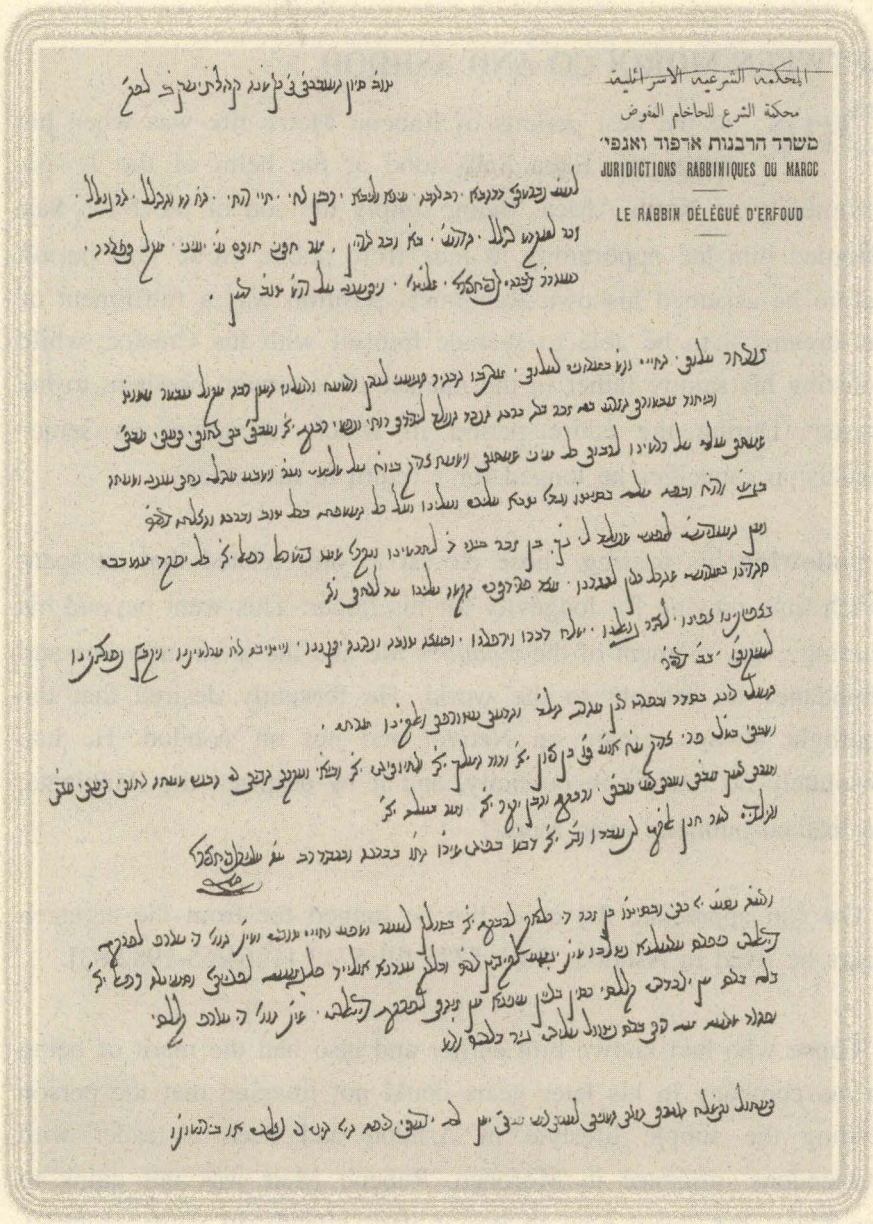
ECOLE HEBRAIQUE
DE
TALMUD TORAH
BOITE POSTALE 24
ERFOUD

تالمود توره
الرفود

A letter from Rabenu Meir to Rav Nissim Amsalem written on the stationery of the Talmud Torah in Erfoud.







المحكمة الشرعية الاسرائيلية
محكمة الشرع للحاخام المفوض
משרד הרבנות אדפוד ואנפי
JURIDICTIONS RABBINIQUES DU MAROC
LE RABBIN DÉLÉGUÉ D'ERFOUD

A letter written by Rabenu Meir on the stationery of the offices of the Erfoud Rabbinate

FROM OUR FATHER'S LAND TO THE LAND OF OUR FATHERS

BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ASHDOD

One of the best periods of Rabenu Meir's life was when his father the Baba Sali stood at the helm of the Jewish community of North Africa. Being simply the son of the Baba Sali afforded him the opportunity to hide from public view. This period before he assumed his own Rabbinical position was a fulfillment of his dreams – to be able to seclude himself with his Creator, while assisting his saintly father in the manner of a servant obedient to his master. During the entire period in which he served in senior leadership capacities he longed for a return to those days.

Following his passing, those closest to him related that he spent much time praying for longevity for his father. This went beyond his valuing every moment of the *tzaddik*'s life and the great influence and abundance he brought to the world. He fervently desired that the spotlight always remain on Netivot and not on Ashdod. He had absolutely no interest in publicity, and if he despised the Rabbinate, he loathed publicity even more.

We can appreciate the quiet life he longed for from the eighteen years he lived in Ashdod: from 5725 till 5743 [1964/65-1982/83].

Those who had known him earlier and also had the merit of being in his company in his later years could not imagine that the person leading the simple lifestyle in Ashdod had been a leader with tremendous influence in Morocco. Rabenu Meir was not quick to use force, but knew how to use it very effectively when required. The principal objects of his force were those who violated the dictates of the Torah and those who wished to disturb the lives of the Jewish people.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, offered the following explanation for the difference in conduct based on testimonies from those who had lived in Morocco and what we ourselves witnessed in *Eretz Yisrael*. Morocco was their natural habitat and the influence of this illustrious family on the Jewish community was felt by all, while in *Eretz Yisrael* they felt uprooted and planted in a strange land. Perhaps we can add the words of R' Yochanan: "Why are the Torah scholars of Babylonia '*metzuyanim*'? (in the *Gemara* this means 'adorned', here it is being used to mean 'excel'). Because the Babylonians are not native to their locale."

In addition we must remember that as leaders of the community they were unable to hide away, however when they arrived in Eretz Yisrael and totally refused any Rabbinate position, they were free to behave with their characteristic modesty and to seclude themselves within their four *amot*. The few sparks that were discernible were all that hinted at their true greatness.

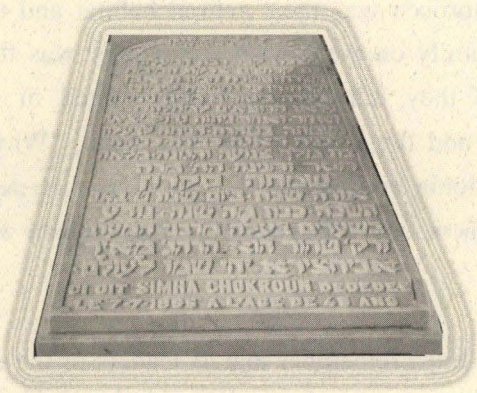
Rabenu Meir's close followers who merited being privy to more than he generally divulged to others, did not cease to be amazed each time he mentioned some of the exceptional achievements he attained in Morocco. To some of his closest disciples he revealed: "In Morocco, Eliyahu HaNavi was with us on a regular basis, in *Eretz Yisrael* this is more difficult." On another occasion he was known to have said: "In Morocco the Divine Presence rested upon us".

Even so, despite those high levels he was able to reach in Morocco, Rabenu Meir moved to *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5725 [1964-65]. His wife Simcha[37] has passed away leaving young orphans. For their sake

---

37. R' Avraham Biton, his close confidant, testified what he heard from Rabenu Meir praising his saintly wife Rabbanit Simcha who stood at his side her entire life, dedicated to serving him to enable him to serve Hashem. When he would awaken to recite *Tikkun Chatzot*, the Rabbanit would arise from her bed and make him a cup of tea and something to eat with it. She would

and for the purity of their education, he left the community he had been leading.



The tombstone of Rabbanit Simcha Abichazira

There are people who claim that he had desired to make the move years earlier, but refused to relocate until he was certain that his father had arrived to stay permanently in *Eretz Yisrael*. This would enable him to remain out of the limelight and in his father's shadow (as we mentioned the Baba Sali was absent from *Eretz Yisrael* during the years 5714-5724 [1953/54-1963/64]).

"YOUR CHILDREN'S PEACE WILL BE ABUNDANT"

(Yeshayahu 54:13)

At the risk of breaking the continuity of this chapter, perhaps this would be the appropriate place to dedicate a few lines to the great sacrifice Rabenu Meir made for the education of his children, which became the main reason for his uprooting and relocating to *Eretz Yisrael*. Leaving everything behind for his children's sake is not the

---

not go back to sleep afterwards, explaining with great piety: "if I cannot learn myself I should at least listen to the sounds of the Torah during this period of quiet when the children are sleeping and there is no one to disturb me."

only indication of the dedication he had for his children, for everything he had ever done for them involved great devotion on his part. We can understand something of what they meant to him and how much he did for them from the following incident which took place before he came to *Eretz Yisrael.*

As he was planning the move it became clear that he would have to leave all his belongings behind; we are speaking of many, many possessions. Rabenu Meir started to distribute some of them to the people of the community – mostly clothing and items which he had inherited from his holy ancestors. One of his children asked him, "My dear father, why do you not leave some of this for us?" Rabenu Meir took the hand of the young child and stroked it with his own saintly hands, saying, "Look my son and see with your own eyes – the flesh and bones, the skin and tendons, this is the inheritance I have given you. What need do you have for clothing when I have given you your entire being?"

The following quote from his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, shows his readiness to do anything for his children's sake: "My father once told us, 'I would give the flesh off my hands for you.'" Nothing more need be said.

In conversation with those close to him, he spoke of his leadership days in Morocco. In the middle of a vivid description of life in those days, he suddenly became more serious, saying:

"Our lives in Morocco were full of wealth and honor and even the non-Jews respected us, adhering to my wishes and more, even if it meant violating local ordinances. They regularly came to receive my blessing.

"When the Rabbanit passed away, leaving me with young children, I began to despise all the greatness and decided to move to *Eretz Yisrael* for the sake of my children's education. Until that point the

Rabbanit had educated them with great devotion. Parting from the city was very difficult for me. Jews and non-Jews alike were saddened by my leaving and pleaded that I stay. However I did not listen to them and I left for *Eretz Yisrael*, for nothing mattered to me more than my children's education."

In Morocco the Abichazira family was considered one of the wealthiest in the country; with his move to *Eretz Yisrael*, all this great wealth was left behind. What awaited him were days of hunger and deprivation, with the burden of caring for six children completely on his shoulders. At first they lived in a two-room apartment of barely forty square meters. Rabenu Meir, however, preferred the difficult life in *Eretz Yisrael* to the wealth of Morocco so long as his children would be raised in the environment he desired and would be educated in the holy Yeshivot.[38]

This in no way implies that in Morocco Rabenu Meir did not spend time with his children or left their education entirely in the hands of the Rabbanit. Furthermore, it is probable that his daily contact with his children was actually less during his initial years in *Eretz Yisrael*, as Rabenu Meir undertook fasts and declared a *Taanit Dibur*, a vow to speak nothing but words of Torah, for three years. He took this

---

38. Perhaps this would be the appropriate place to quote from the notes of one of Rabenu Meir's close followers who recorded his explanation of the verse: "*Lavan*, *Hatzerot*, and *Di-zahav*" (*Devarim* 1:1) as meaning the following: *Lavan* (lit. white) refers to clothing of honor, *Hatzerot* (Lit. courtyards) refers to residence, and *Di-zahav* (*zahav* means gold) refers to money and amassing of wealth. A person need not be so strict in these areas. On another occasion Rabenu Meir complained to one of his close confidants using a play on the wording of the pasuk: "לחשב מחשבות לעשות בזהב ובכסף ובנחושת" "To think thoughts of what to make with gold, silver, and copper" (*Shmot* 31:14) (כסף can also mean money). He would say that people's thoughts are mostly concerned with how to make money. He would then immediately add another pasuk: "אך את הזהב ואת הכסף" "but the gold and silver (or money)" and invoke the words of *Chazal* that the word אך comes to exclude or to lessen (*Yerushalmi Brachot perek* 9, *halacha* 1), meaning that people should lessen their pursuit of money.

upon himself in response to the general spiritual decline of the Jewish nation in its Land and the decline in values that was spreading to all strata of society. The authorities were taking the future generation and uprooting it from its glorious past. He would constantly bemoan the state of the generation and he would spend much time in prayer and performing other holy acts with the goal of strengthening the nation.

Even during this period of seclusion an atmosphere of spiritual elevation permeated the home. His manner was pleasant and he had a compassionate way of speaking, while his relationship with his children was majestic. He would awaken them at daybreak, insisting that they be in the synagogue praying *Shacharit* with the sunrise. He would have spiritual conversations with his children, aimed at refining their souls and helping them to achieve the proper perspective on life. He would neither preach at them nor punish them, rather teaching them by his example following the ways of the giants of previous generations: "Thus should you see and sanctify." (*Rosh Hashana* 20a).

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, tells us that while still a young boy, his father would seat him at his feet asking him to read from a *Mishna* or *Gemara* or suchlike. It appeared as if Rabenu Meir was falling asleep and not paying any attention, however "if I made a mistake with even a vowel of one letter of one word, he would murmur and tap me lightly with his foot."

One of those who merited coming under his wing describes for us the first time he met Rabenu Meir, about whom he had heard so much. His curiosity and his innate desire to witness holiness firsthand brought him and a friend to Rabenu Meir's home. Arriving at Rabenu Meir's home, they found him standing by the steps crying out loud: "*Yeshua veRachamim*!" ('Salvation and mercy!'). What the young man did not realize was that "*Yeshua veRachamim*" was the name of Rabenu Meir's youngest son. He assumed that Rabenu Meir was announcing an auspicious moment to pray for salvation and mercy. Only when he

requested that Rabenu Meir bless him during this period of salvation and mercy did he discover that the three year old child of that name was missing from the house and all the family members were busy searching for him.[39]

The two young men stood aside until searches turned up the child in good health. He had gone to a friend's home without telling anyone. The two guests now had the opportunity to witness firsthand the proper way to educate the child:

"***Yeshua*** *veRachamim*!" Rabenu Meir called out in a very paternal voice, "How I worried about you. You disappeared without telling me where you were. We did not know what happened to you!" He then proceeded to ask, "Did you eat anything at your friend's home?" When the child nodded, saying that they had given him a candy, his father asked, "Was the candy kosher?" Not only was the child, already bewildered by all the tumult surrounding him, not subjected to Rabenu Meir's wrath, but his father went so far as to show him what his priorities were.



Rabenu Meir in the company of a young child

39. To complete the story, it would be appropriate to mention here the entry of one of his followers who wrote in his diary, "Once I was sitting with Rabenu Meir as his son Yeshua veRachamim entered the room. Rabenu Meir commented, "I named my son Yeshua veRachamim so that salvation and mercy should arrive."

Turning to the two amazed young men, he invited them into his home saying, "A person must always safeguard his children!"

The children always returned his love and the awe they held him in was responsible for the high spiritual level permeating the home. One of the articles written following Rabenu Meir's passing contained the following quotation from his son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a:

"We would never look our holy father straight in the eye; we would speak to him with subjugation and great awe. My father gave me his *tefillin* as a gift yet I never donned them. How could I possibly allow his holy *tefillin* to come in contact with my body?"

"I will always remember that just before my wedding my father would not allow me to leave the house for some hidden reason which Hashem had revealed to him. I explained to him that I needed a pair of shoes for the celebration. My father took me to his room and showed me several pairs of his own shoes none of which bore even a speck of dust or showed any signs of age ... his clothing always appeared as good as new and he showed me that his shoes were shining even though he had worn them many times[40]. I will never forget the fear of G-d that overtook me ... would I dare put my feet in my father's shoes? I could never do so!"

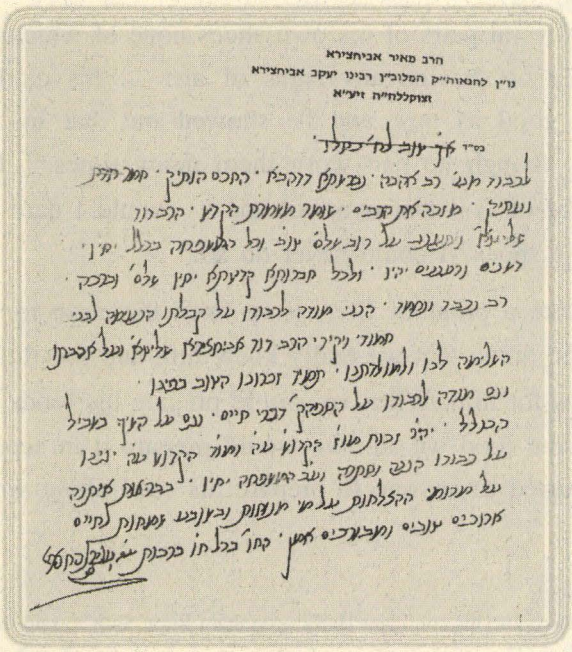
"He was like a pillar of fire, rising from the earth to the skies. It was inside the home that we really knew him and felt this fear out of our great love for him. When we would prepare his food, even though it was the same food we ate, we would prepare it in separate dishes. It never occurred to anyone to prepare his food along with everyone else's.

---

40. Regarding this point, his confidant HaRav Avraham Biton Shlit"a, said that Rabenu Meir once showed him where he kept all the clothing he had ever worn including the shoes. When R' Avraham asked why he kept everything, Rabenu Meir responded that he attached great importance to the clothing which had kept him warm while he sat and learned Torah and served Hashem.

"**We** hardly ever saw him eat, he would seclude himself in his room and while alone he would take a small amount to eat. However, when we did have the privilege of dining with our father at the table, who would dare eat any food? We would sit in fear, rejoicing at the great privilege we had in the company of such a *tzaddik* who had such power ... he, merciful and holy that he was, would insist that we eat so we could garner strength to serve Hashem."

When Rabenu Meir said: "I am certain that the Torah will never leave us or our descendants for eternity", it was clear that he was not only relying on the words of the *Gemara*: "the Torah naturally comes around to its home" (Baba Metzia 85a), but that he would put great effort in raising his children in the lofty environment into which they were born.



A letter from Rabenu Meir registering his son in a Yeshiva

PURIFYING THE CITY OF ASHDOD

When word of his planned move reached the borders of the Land of Israel, different cities vied for the privilege of housing the crown of Tafilalet. As soon as he arrived, offers for Rabbinical positions began streaming in from all over. The Baba Sali, who had only recently left Yavne suggested that he fill his position in that city. His uncle, the Baba Chaki, who served as Rav of Ramle and Lod wished to bestow upon him the position of Rav of Lod. The great *Kabbalists* who longed to have him in their midst urged him to live within the holy city of Jerusalem. The Chief Rabbis came to greet him with a request that he join the religious high court in Jerusalem.

Rabenu Meir confided to his dear friend R' Yitzchak Morsiya something never before divulged regarding his rejection of all Rabbinate positions. "In those days," Rabenu Meir explained, "the *Rishon LeZion*, HaGaon HaRav Nissim zt"l invited me to become Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. I told him that I cannot be Rav of any city that will not permit me to exert complete control in areas such as *Shabbat* and *kashrut* and to use this authority, for example, to close the streets on *Shabbat* and punish the recalcitrant. In Erfoud I would punish very severely until my father asked me to stop. I have no desire to punish anyone here, but what can I do in a place that does not give me the authority to establish religious law? Since he could not meet my demands, I decided not to accept any Rabbinical position."

In his early days in *Eretz Yisrael*, Rabenu Meir announced that he had elected to settle in Ashdod. This simple city, recently built as a housing project for new immigrants was viewed as a home for simple Jews whose main concern was earning their daily living and for whom simple faith was the highest attainable level. No one anticipated the great upheaval that would soon overtake the city of Ashdod, which would one day overflow with Torah and *Hassidut*, eventually becoming one of the strongest spiritual centers in Israel.

There was no better haven than Ashdod to avoid the tumult of the big city and to hide from the watchful eye of others. Ashdod was a city where hundreds of Jews attended the synagogues, yet ninety percent of them did not know how to pray. The local population comprised people of sincere faith who had the Name of G-d constantly on their lips, yet their spiritual accomplishments were alarmingly minimal. Among them were immigrants from North Africa and Georgian countries, who had been living in the cramped *maabrot* (temporary immigrant camps) and now had the opportunity to live in real quarters. Rabenu Meir elected to live among them – a new immigrant among veteran immigrants – a *ben aliyah* (a man of high spiritual status), among those who had made *Aliyah*.

His son Morenu Rabenu David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a relates a story which took place during that period. Some of his devotees spoke negatively about Ashdod claiming that it was devoid of any spirituality since it had no Yeshiva and no Torah. His response was: "Jerusalem is the holy city, Bnei Brak is the city of Torah, Ashdod will be the third." He did not explain himself.

In his final years he had the privilege of seeing the beginning of the establishment of *Haredi* communities in Ashdod and the beginning of the movement of G-d-fearing *Kollel* families to Ashdod creating an atmosphere of Torah and piety. His great happiness at this was obvious. As the first *Kollel* families arrived, he said, "There is now a great atmosphere of purity in the city." When the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat *Sefat Emet* (who was to become the *Rebbe* of Gur, the Pnei Menachem) visited him he described with satisfaction the *Hassidic* families who would come to see him: "We can see the holiness on their faces. From the moment they arrived there has been a greater feeling of sanctity in Ashdod." Few, however, are aware of Rabenu Meir's role in the metamorphosis that took over the city. He said to one of the Gur *Kollel* fellows who would visit him: "I spent much time praying for the welfare of this city."

At that time, when he would seclude himself in his room, when even his own young children hardly saw him, one of his relatives pointed out that perhaps he should relate more to the children. Rabenu Meir considered whether his response would be understood by the person he was speaking to and then answered tersely: "What choice do I have? I must purify the atmosphere in the city of Ashdod."

Chazal tell us that *Eretz Yisrael* is acquired through afflictions and Rabenu Meir certainly had his share of difficulties. In his latter days he told HaRav Zalman Groiz: "I had difficulties in *Eretz Yisrael* from the moment I set foot on the Land; in *Chutz La'Aretz* we were healthy, we had strength ... here it has been very difficult for us."

His afflictions went beyond the generally accepted price one pays for his share in *Eretz Yisrael*, fasting daily as a means of acquiring the sanctity of the Land, observing his "*taanit dibur*" (speaking only words of Torah) for three full years. Even absolutely necessary words (and with Rabenu Meir there was very little he said that would not be considered Talmud Torah), he alluded to only with hand motions without uttering a single word. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, recalls, "Even when we returned home from the Yeshiva, he would speak with his hands and would not utter a single word."

His saintly father, the Baba Sali, once asked him why he accepted this *taanit dibur* upon himself. Rabenu Meir explained that Eretz Yisrael is so special that much preparation is needed before actually settling the Land. Given that his *aliyah* was done in haste and without proper planning after the tragedy that had befallen him, he had to carry out this preparation only after settling the Land.

Perhaps this is the story of Ashdod ...

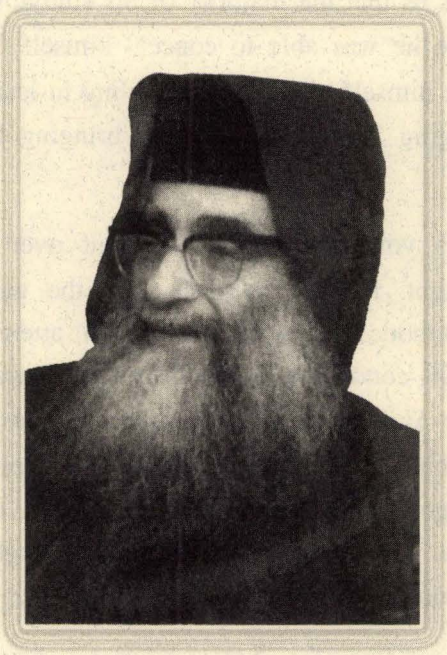
"*HAMEIR* - HE WHO ILLUMINATES THE EARTH AND THOSE WHO DWELL UPON IT"

If "a little light can push aside much darkness," (*Chovot HaLevavot Shaar* 5) imagine the power and influence of a great beam of light directed towards the dark wilderness ... Rabenu Meir's settling in the city of Ashdod not only prepared the ground for the metamorphosis of the city into a center of Torah and sanctity, but it also transformed the lives of the residents of the city, the simple people who lived there.

Despite their innocence, the people of Ashdod could not but feel the excitement generated by the light that suddenly shone in their city. Within a short time, hundreds flocked to his holiness. Although they may not have been immediately transformed into Torah scholars, their daily lives were no longer the same. Praying together with Rabenu Meir and simply being in close proximity to the great radiance illuminating their neighborhood had a profound influence on them. They began to send their children to religious schools and build kosher homes devoted to Torah and to the Jewish heritage.

Interestingly enough, the rapid transformation in the Jewish community of Ashdod was not accomplished with fanfares or great public rallies. As an illustration of Rabenu Meir's influence on the residents of his neighborhood, his son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira describes how his father walked to the synagogue to pray. It should not have taken him more than a few minutes, but because he walked with his cloak covering his face it took him half an hour. When he was recognized from the nearby houses, the simple Jews dropped everything and ran outside to kiss the hand of the *tzaddik* who lived amongst them. They would accompany him the rest of the way and by the time he reached the synagogue he was escorted by about one hundred people. Shortly after he arrived in Ashdod, his *beit midrash* temporarily housed in a local sports arena, had fifty *minyanim* - five hundred people.

Rabenu Meir instituted a practice that each *Shabbat* at least a *minyan* - ten members of his synagogue would dine with him at each meal. He would extend the invitation as people filed past him in the synagogue to wish him a *Shabbat Shalom*. What amazed many people was that someone invited for the night meal was never invited for the day meal, and not once was there a guest at his table who had been his guest the previous *Shabbat*. The rotation was strictly followed without a diary or any assistants keeping track. The purpose of inviting people to his house for *Shabbat* was to deepen the relationship, to find out what was happening in his home, to guide him in everyday conduct and to shine some light into his life.



Rabenu Meir when he immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5725

"ON THE TORAH"

"BE DILIGENT IN THE STUDY OF TORAH" (Avot 2:14)

Although we have already mentioned Rabenu Meir's great diligence in learning, it was only because it is not possible to portray his life story without touching upon this point which was so central in his life. However, it would only be fitting to devote an entire chapter to it.

He may not have succeeded in concealing his incomprehensible genius, but his incredible diligence in learning he managed to conceal very well. His family was well aware that he spent time learning, but they had no idea to what extent, for they hardly had the opportunity to witness him doing so. R' Avraham Biton Shlit"a who was very close to him, tells us that the majority of his studying was carried out in the attic where he was able to conceal himself from the view of others and devote himself to exhausting toiling in learning. He learned profoundly, plunging into the depths and bringing back great pearls of wisdom.

Already in his youth, he would sit bent over his books from morning until night. He not only shunned the games and playful activities of childhood; he would not even attend family events, including the feasts conducted by his father, the Baba Sali. He agreed to join the family *Shabbat* meals only after great insistence. Even the meals he had planned to eat on his own he would often forget, for he attached little importance to them. His family, very concerned for his welfare, needed to constantly remind him not to neglect his body, the housing for his soul.

This diligence, to which he had been accustomed from the days of his youth, remained with him his entire life. In his boyhood or as a young married man, during periods of calm as well as during stormy times, while in his father's home as well as after he took over his father's leadership roles, all these times were equally blessed for good,

for total dedication to learning Torah, for the ability to immediately immerse himself, allowing nothing to distract him.

Not many can testify regarding his method of study, for most of his in-depth learning was carried out in privacy. Only the closest family members who were fortunate enough to have been present in his home in Morocco, still remember him learning out loud, following the words of the *Zohar*, "Whoever brings forth words of Torah from his mouth must grind the words with his teeth and say them when they are whole." Commenting on the verse, "For they (words of Torah) are life "למוצאיהם" – to those who find them." (Mishle 4:22), *Chazal* tell us, "Do not read it as 'מוצאיהם' (those who find them) but rather as 'מוציאיהם' (those who express them)" (Eruvin 54b). Family members always remember the sound of his joyful and passion-filled voice resonating throughout the house – the melody of a soul singing to its Creator, eagerly awaiting the next moment of learning.

As the years passed and his health began to decline, he would bemoan not being able to learn with the same diligence he had accustomed himself to in years gone by. To gain insight into Rabenu Meir's view of "the way of Torah" (see *Mishna* Pirke Avot 6:4), all we need do is to listen to the words of the pious people who frequented his home.

On one occasion a group of people entered his room as he was analyzing the *Gemara*. They sat around him, at which point Rabenu Meir closed the *Gemara* sighing: "Until recently I would never place the *Gemara* down on the table, rather I would hold it in my hand. Now, however, as I am getting weaker and my strength is waning, I am left with no choice but to place the *Gemara* down on the table." He immediately added, "Today, however, I managed to raise the *Gemara* slightly above the table.[41]"

---

41. It would be appropriate to mention here that his father the Baba Sali was also accustomed to learning like this, as is brought in the section "Saba Kadisha", chapter "He is Unique, Who can Contradict Him."

On another occasion when his followers entered his room and found him trying to ease the burden of the unbearable heat with a small fan in his hand[42], he rationalized his actions, saying, "In the past I would not dare use a fan ... that is laziness ... but I no longer have any strength."

From these isolated incidents and personal statements as well as the little we can gather from reliable witnesses, we can sketch a picture of Rabenu Meir as someone who literally "killed himself over the tents of Torah" (in keeping with the saying of *Chazal*: "Words of Torah are not retained except by one who kills himself over the Torah" Brachot 63b). In fact the entire essence of his vitality was drawn from having "killed himself", as we find in the response of the elders of the Negev to Alexander of Macedon's question: "What should man do to live?" – "He should kill himself" (Tamid 32a).

How beautiful is the way Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira uses his father's own interpretation of the adage of our Sages to describe his father's conduct: "Righteous persons are greater in death than they are in life" (Chullin 7b). Rabenu Meir explained it thus - 'the righteous, the more 'they kill themselves' in learning Torah, become "more in life" – this way of learning makes them more alive, gives them vitality.'

"HIS LEARNING WILL PROCLAIM HIM ABROAD"

(Moed Katan 16b)

In spite of the fact that he fled from any position of authority and would distance himself from even the slightest bit of publicity, when it came to spreading the word of Torah he would "draw from the waters of Torah and give it to the flock gathered around his well." As *Rosh Yeshiva*, he established hundreds of students and gave *shiurim* on a regular basis. As the leader of the community, he did not refrain from speaking out when it was necessary. In addition, much time was

42. He inherited the fan from his uncle Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu*.

spent discussing words of Torah with students of the Yeshiva as well as with Torah giants.

Why do we mention his Torah discussions with the students of the Yeshiva in the same breath as his Torah-filled discussions with Torah scholars of world-renown? Because in his eyes the conversations were the same! This shows not only his humility, but also his total self-negation for the sake of Torah. The fact that he and the person he was conversing with were involved in a Torah discussion would already place them on the same level; it made no difference who his conversation partner was. The discussions all revolved around Torah, and in comparison to Torah we are all midgets.

The members of one of the top *Kollelim* in Bnei Brak arrived as a group at Rabenu Meir's home seeking his blessing. He inquired which *Gemara* they were currently learning and then said, "I will recall for you a shiur I gave on this *Gemara* fifty years ago in Morocco." Before they were able to absorb what was about to take place and before they were even able to recall the flow of the *Gemara* they were currently studying, he laid out the *Gemara* before them down to the last detail. He then began to go through the opinions of the earlier and later authorities, working his way down to the final *halachic* ruling. Not only were the *Kollel* fellows astounded by the breadth of the *shiur*, but we would also be amazed if we were to realize that Rabenu Meir departed from this world at the young age of sixty-six. This means that the profound and comprehensive shiur of which he had total recall was one of the first he had ever given in the Yeshiva!

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, remembers from his childhood how his father would prepare the *shiur* to be presented before the Yeshiva students as "one preparing a *shiur* to be delivered to the giants of the generation". This was, without exaggeration, his approach to delivering a *shiur*, to a Torah conversation, to giving a lecture, or to giving a *mussar* discourse.

He related to us the following story: one *Yom Kippur* night following his father's *drasha* which lasted for two hours and contained very deep thoughts encompassing the entire Torah, R' David, still a young boy, pointed out to his father that there was not a single person in the room who understood what he was saying, for all those present were simple Jews who barely knew when to answer *Amen*. His saintly father responded, "My son, you should know that the purpose of my *drasha* is not for others to understand ... I am speaking for myself – the angels above hearken to my words of Torah ... I am speaking because one must speak."

HIS GENIUS

In his younger days, the very fact of the exalted positions he held such as that of *Rosh Yeshiva* and as leader of his people testified to his greatness. During the years he resided in *Eretz Yisrael* when he held no official position, there were occasional opportunities to peek through the curtain at the endless expanse of his knowledge in all areas of the Torah, and glimpse his genius. Great Torah scholars were so astounded by his incredible knowledge that they described him in *Chazal*'s words: "The Torah is his own" (Kiddushin 32b).

Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira describes his father's genius in terms we can relate to:

"**There** are those considered Torah giants who are not so great in *Midrash* and *Aggadah*. There are experts in *halacha*, whose strength in being able to issue *halachic* rulings camouflages their deficiencies in other areas. Many are experts in *Kabbalah*, yet this is at the expense of expanding their treasure of knowledge in the revealed areas of the Torah. Many people have attained great scholarship in *Hassidut*, having the entire discipline on the tip of their tongue. It is rare, however, to find someone with wisdom in all areas.

"**My** father, unlike all of the above, was a genius in all disciplines – in the revealed as well as the hidden realms of the Torah, in *Gemara*

as well as *halacha*, in the earlier as well as later commentaries, in *Midrash* as well as *Hassidut*."

Not everyone merited a glimpse of Rabenu Meir's Torah. A frequent, almost daily visitor to his home told us that during all those years he hardly heard any דברי תורה from him with the exception of a bit of *Hassidut* and of ways to better serve Hashem. However those who did merit perceiving the glimmer of the luster of his Torah, were astounded time after time as they discovered that the greatness inherent in his words during one visit would pale into insignificance compared to what they were about to hear during the next visit.

During the initial visit a person may have been dazzled by his great breadth of knowledge encompassing the entire *Shas*, while the next time he would be amazed at Rabenu Meir's uncanny ability to delve into any topic down to the final detail of the *halachic* ruling and to find support for all of these rulings in early sources. One visit's conversation may revolve around the order of *Kodshim* (relating to offerings in the *Beit HaMikdash*), while during the next visit the conversation may center on intricacies in the laws of the *Sabbath* dependent on a hairsbreadth, or perhaps on precisely defining some of the complex laws relating to monetary matters and litigation. The next time the visitor may feel totally out of his depth as the conversation would turn to the works of the Arizal, which were beyond his comprehension.

One of his followers was present when Rabenu Meir was visited over the *Chagim* by a Rabbi from one of the congregations in Ashdod. He was curious to hear the conversation between Rabenu Meir and the great scholar. During the scholar's visit, the man recorded all the sources quoted in the course of conversation. Unsurprisingly, by the time the conversation came to a close, almost the entire gamut of tractates of the Talmud was covered, with each quotation accompanied by a statement of its precise location. We are speaking of a discussion

lasting no more than half an hour focusing not on issues discussed in the Talmud but rather on *Hassidut* where the Talmudic citations were merely side points to the treasure of Hassidic sayings which liberally spiced the conversation.

His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates the following story: One of his callers once quoted a particular passage from the *Gemara*. Rabenu Meir cut him off in mid-sentence stating firmly: "there is no such *Gemara*." The surprise was clearly visible upon the faces of all those present - some of them took *Gemaras* in hand and began searching for the quotation. In a short time all of the *Massechtot* in *Shas* were perused until it was clear that indeed there was no such *Gemara* and the man was clearly mistaken. This search through *Shas* that took a significant amount of time for a group of people was accomplished by Rabenu Meir's brilliant mind in a mere second.

His insights into all aspects of the Torah, the written Torah as well as the Oral Torah, were so vast that they filled hundreds of notebooks. From time to time he would destroy the notebooks or store them in some unknown place. To his close confidant R' Yitzchak Morsiya who once asked him why he destroyed the notebooks containing his insights, Rabenu Meir replied with great humility, "Read the Torah of the Chatam Sofer - there you will smell the fragrance of true Torah recorded purely for its own sake. I, on the other hand, derived great joy and pleasure from my insights; it was therefore not purely for its own sake." On another occasion when questioned why he did not preserve his insights for the public good, he responded cryptically, "The written material is in Heaven." To this day no one truly understands the reasons behind his actions.

Not only was he a great genius in all areas of the Torah itself, but he also possessed incredible knowledge in any subject related to Torah study, such as calculation of the months as well as the constellations. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira tells us that he never

kept a calendar. Calculations of the various dates and times, such as the festivals and anything dependent on the time of day such as the beginning and conclusion of *Shabbat* and times of sunrise and sunset, were all carried out in his head.

The order of the generations from Adam until the present – the judges and prophets, *tannaim* and *Amoraim, Savoraim* and *Geonim, rishonim* and *Achronim*, the years they lived, their history and their legacies, from the east to the west, in each and every Diaspora – were on the tip of his tongue. Hassidic *Rebbes* and their followers visiting him would ask him for information about the Sephardic sages. His response included not only the information they were seeking, but to their amazement he was able to recall for them lesser known incidents involving their own Hassidic dynasty as well as stories of great Torah scholars living in their region. On the night of *Tisha B'Av* after having completed recitation of the *Kinot*, he would remain for hours discussing the *Midrashim* of the *Kinot*, while enumerating all the tragedies that had befallen the Jewish nation from the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* until the present. He would mention each calamity in every country in every generation without skipping even one.

On occasion, when he quoted something in the name of one of the giants of the generations, he would add a concise description of that person's philosophy as well as his unique greatness in Torah. In notes he took of Rabenu Meir's teachings, one of his close disciples cited a deep concept related to him by Rabenu Meir in the name of the *Maggid* of Mezerich. Rabenu Meir's concluding words were, "These are very appropriate words for the one who said them. He had incredible knowledge of the revealed as well as the hidden aspects of the Torah ... the *Baal Shem Tov* would refer to him as 'my disciple and my contemporary.'" As an aside, Rabenu Meir added that the *Baal Shem Tov* said something similar about the author of "*Toldot Yaakov Yoseph*".

As he had seen from his saintly father, Rabenu Meir drew from the well of *Hassidut* and he often quoted Hassidic thought, as he intertwined one beautiful saying with another, crowning them all with his own words of wisdom.

A well-known *talmid chacham* visiting Rabenu Meir introduced himself as one of the *Rabbanim* of Yeshivat *Panim Meirot* in Bnei Brak. Rabenu Meir responded with the history of the family of the *Panim Meirot* who was a descendant of the Ta"z. The information was all new to this Rav.

In a different conversation Rabenu Meir described the works of the *Rishonim* as being "good for the soul" because they were all written with Divine inspiration. He then added: "All lived in poverty with few exceptions ... "the Rama" was wealthy."

On the day of the anniversary of the Arizal's passing some of his followers would come especially to hear Rabenu Meir's sacred words. One person took notes and his records will provide us with just a peek into the breadth of knowledge he displayed as he related the life and times of the *tzaddikim*:

"The Ari was an Ashkenazi; the Chatam Sofer who wrote that he was a Sephardi, was the first and only one to make this claim...

"His family name was Ashkenazi - Luria, the same family name as the Maharsha"l and some claim they were related. They did not share the same view when it came to the study of *kabbalah*. The Maharsha"l would not follow the *kabbalah* and his *halachic* rulings did not follow the *Zohar* ... It happened once that the Ari's students visited the Maharsha"l and they showed him that they were aware of his thoughts, as they proved that in the middle of his *Amidah* he was concentrating on a *halachic* matter...

"The Rama", who was a Kabbalist and would act in accordance with the dictates of the *kabbalah*, also authored a commentary on the *Zohar*.

The Shl"a, who was a disciple of the Maharsha"l was a distinguished *Kabbalist* as well...

"The Ari was a spark from the soul of Moshe Rabenu ... his mother's name Sarah was also the name of the mother of the *Baal Shem Tov*...

"The Ari, who lived in Egypt, learned the revealed disciplines of the Torah from the Radba"z and was a primary disciple of the author of "*Shita Mekubetzet*" – Rav Bezalel Ashkenazi. The "*Shita Mekubetzet*" on *Massechet Zevachim* was actually authored by the Arizal but the manuscript was later burned. In his responsa "*Avkat Rochel*", the *Beit Yoseph* answers a question posed by the Ari in the area of the Torah's usury laws. There he writes, "The question of a sage is already the majority of the answer." But in the responsa "Rav Pealim" written by R' Yoseph Chaim of Baghdad, he questions whether the Ari was the one who actually wrote the question, believing that it must have been written by one of his students, because the Ari had no need to ask questions of others, for the entire Torah was revealed to him.

"There are opinions that the Arizal met the Rama"k in Safed."

"The Arizal was once asleep on *Shabbat Parshat* Balak when his lips began to move and he began to speak out loud. The students witnessing this became frightened by what they saw and, fearing for his welfare, decided to wake him. He asked them, "Why did you wake me? What I have just learned regarding Bilaam's donkey would take more than eighty years to record!"

"He was thirty-eight years old at the time of his passing, and the people of his generation used an expression that was a play on the words of the *Gemara*:

"חל עליו חובת הביעור". The *Gemara* is referring to the obligation to destroy *chametz* and the time it is חל (takes effect) – here the numerical

value of חל (38) is being used rather than the word itself, thus: "The obligation to destroy it is חל (38)".

"**My** revered ancestor Rabenu Yaakov felt a very close connection to him, referring to him in his own writings as "Rabenu HaAri" "My Teacher the Ari."

"**The** Ari passed away during the nine days of mourning leading up to *Tisha B'Av* because his passing was as difficult as the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*".

It would be appropriate here to cite from the notes of Rabenu Meir's son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, describing his father's unusual familiarity with the conduct of his holy ancestors.

"**He** was thoroughly familiar with the ways of the giants of our family dating back several generations - how they prayed, their *halachic* rulings, their roles as leaders, their blessings, how they acted with the local authorities, as well as their insights into educating children.

"**He** would probe the family and elders of his generation and pry out of them the most minute details of dates and times of visits by Rabbinic messengers in the region, correspondences with the sages of the generation, the travels of our holy ancestors, their *kavanot* (the intentions they concentrated on) while praying, their daily schedule, their *halachic* rulings, areas in which they were particularly stringent and the reason behind these stringencies ... precise dates of every incident. Even things that appeared insignificant to others were very important to him ..."

As an aside, it is important to clarify that in direct contradiction to those experts whose treasure of knowledge was limited to collecting miraculous and glorious stories involving the *tzaddikim*, none of which had any practical influence on their behavior, Rabenu Meir was not

merely a "collector". While the "expert" tries to gain more knowledge, Rabenu Meir saw himself as a midget compared to the *tzaddikim*, his constant quest for details of their conduct was in order to be able to add to his own repertoire of saintly acts. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira points out that this was the manner of the Baba Sali as well. Even reading of a particular behavior of a *tzaddik* was sufficient reason to adopt the practice for themselves. They did not question the source of the custom, they did not delve into its origin, they simply viewed themselves as people of insignificance who would do well to emulate the ways of the righteous.

It was not only for his vast knowledge and expertise that Rabenu Meir was known nor for his genius. The best way to describe him is as possessing "greatness in Torah", immense greatness. This description can perhaps best serve us in helping us realize just how far our understanding is from being able to perceive the scope of his greatness.

"O G-D A NEW SONG WILL I SING TO YOU" (Tehillim 144:9)

Following in the ways of his holy ancestors, Rabenu Meir authored many sacred *piyutim* based on foundations of the Torah and interwoven with great wisdom and hidden meanings. Other *paytanim* (authors of *piyut*) considered Rabenu Meir's *piyutim* as masterpieces containing exceptional ideas written with incredible clarity. Their description did not include the wellsprings of ideas hidden in each line of Rabenu Meir's writings. The *Chazan* of the synagogue of the Baba Sali and Rabenu Meir in Erfoud, a family faithful known as "the *melamed*" - the teacher of the children, HaRav HaGaon Masud Malul, tells us that Rabenu Meir's *piyutim* were written only after he had mastered and gained a deep understanding of thousands of other *piyutim*, as well as *selichot* and other supplications recited on rare occasions. His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira adds that his father never wrote a rough draft for his poems or *piyutim*. "When he

had an insight, he would request a pen and paper and there and then pen the entire *piyut*."

He authored his first *piyut* at the young age of fourteen. As we mentioned, the Baba Sali greatly praised this *piyut* and was amazed by its many insights.[43] He explained one of the lines from his *piyut* to R' Masud Malul who became very excited upon discovering how such simple words could actually be very profound and enlightening. This was only one of the many facets of his *piyutim*.

That *piyut*, called "*Kel Elokim Tzur Uzenu*"[44], written in praise of the *Shabbat*, contained the following stanza: "I will place a sign - in תשר"י we are given our allotment". Rabenu Meir explained that the word תשרי in addition to being the first month of the year alludes to *Chazal*'s adage: "All of a person's income is fixed each year from *Rosh Hashanah* until *Yom Kippur*, with the exception of expenditures for the Sabbaths and Festivals and for teaching one's children Torah. For, in regard to these expenditures, if one spends less, he receives less and if he spends more he receives more." (Beitza 16a)

Rabenu Meir said: "It is not for naught that I quoted from the words of *Chazal* and used the word תשרי in the *piyut* (and not *Rosh Hashana*). An analysis of this word will reveal that it contains allusions to each of the above-mentioned exceptions to a person's sustenance being decreed at the outset of the year. The word תשרי can be viewed as a mnemonic for the words: "Torah (ת), *Shabbat* (ש), *Rosh Chodesh* (ר), and *Yamim Tovim* (י) which are not included in the calculation of each person's budget as decided at the beginning of each year. The *Gemara* makes no mention of *Rosh Chodesh*, but I believe that expenditures for *Rosh Chodesh* are also not detracted from the monies allocated at

---

43. See chapter "Let your Heart Cheer you in the Days of your Youth" for a description of the Baba Sali's view of this *piyut*.

44. The *piyut* appears in the book "*Yagel Yaakov*" (published Ashdod 5746) p. 243.

the start of the year. To emphasize this point, I added *Rosh Chodesh* to this mnemonic."

"Furthermore", Rabenu Meir explained to R' Masud, "not only has one not lost whatever he invested, but from Heaven his profits will multiply." This is alluded to in the numerical values inherent in the words represented in "תשרי". If we take the first letter from each word derived from תשרי, the remaining letters of that word are in some way double the value of the first letter of the word. This means that one who spends in these areas will be compensated for double that amount.

In the word לימוד (meaning learning and referring to תורה in the mnemonic תשרי) – the first letter "ל" has the numerical value 30, while the remaining letters in the word have double this value – 60 (10+40+6+4).

The first letter of the next word represented by the mnemonic תשרי – שבת is "ש" which has the numerical value of 300, whose "minor *gematria*" is 3 (3+0+0). The remaining two letters of שבת have numerical value 402 or "minor *gematria*" 6 (4+0+2) – double the "minor *gematria*" of the first letter.

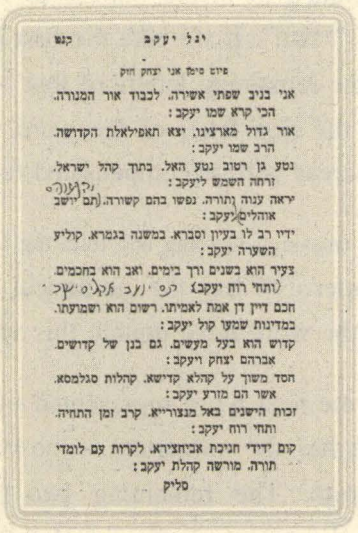
Similarly, the first letter of the word represented by the next letter "ר"- ראש, referring to *Rosh Chodesh*, has the numerical value of 200 or "*minor gematria*" 2 (2+0+0). The remaining letters "א" and "ש" add up to a value of 301 whose "minor *gematria*" is 4 (3+0+1).

The first letter of the word מועד (referring to יום טוב – the letter "י" in the mnemonic תשרי) is "מ" whose numerical value of 40 is precisely double the value of the remaining letters - 80 (6+70+4).

We must keep in mind that this is only one aspect of only one word of the first *piyut* authored by Rabenu Meir when he was only fourteen years old!

As proud as the Baba Sali was of all of his son's *piyutim*, R' Moshe Deitch who was very close to the Baba Sali, tells us that there was a

special place in his heart for the sacred *piyut "Yachid Ram Yearot Chosef."*[45] While conducting a *Seudat Mitzvah* with his close adherents, he would instruct them to sing the *piyut* which brought him immense joy. When they sang it, he would be unable to conceal his excitement.



יגל יעקב קנט

פיוט פימן אני יצחק חזק

אני בניב שפתי אשירה. לכבוד אור המנורה.
הכי קרא שמו יעקב:
אור גדול מארצינו. יצא תאמילאלת הקדושה.
הרב שמו יעקב:
נטע גן רשוב נטע האל. בתוך קהל ישראל.
זרחה השמש ליעקב:
יראה ענוה ותורה. נפשו בהם קשורה. (תם) ישב
אוהלים ליעקב:
ידיו רב לו בעיון וסברא. במשנה בגמרא. קוליץ
השערה יעקב:
צעיר הוא בשנים ורב בימים. ואב הוא בחכמים.
(ותחי רוח יעקב)
חכם דיין דן אמת לאמיתו. רשום הוא ושמועתו.
במדינות שמעו קול יעקב:
קדוש הוא בעל מעשים. גם בנן של קדושים.
אברהם יצחק ויעקב:
חסד משוך על קהלא קדישא. קהלות סגלמסא.
אשר הם מזרע יעקב:
זכות הישנים באל בנצורייא. קרב זמן התחיה.
ותחי רוח יעקב:
קום ידידי חניכת אביחצירא. לקרות עם לומדי
תורה. מורשה קהלת יעקב:
סליק

Rabenu Meir's comments to the book "Yagel Yaakov"



Rabenu Meir writing a dedication in the book "Yagel Yaakov" for one of his close confidants.

45. The *piyut* was published in the book "*Yagel Yaakov*" (Ashdod 5746) – page 247.

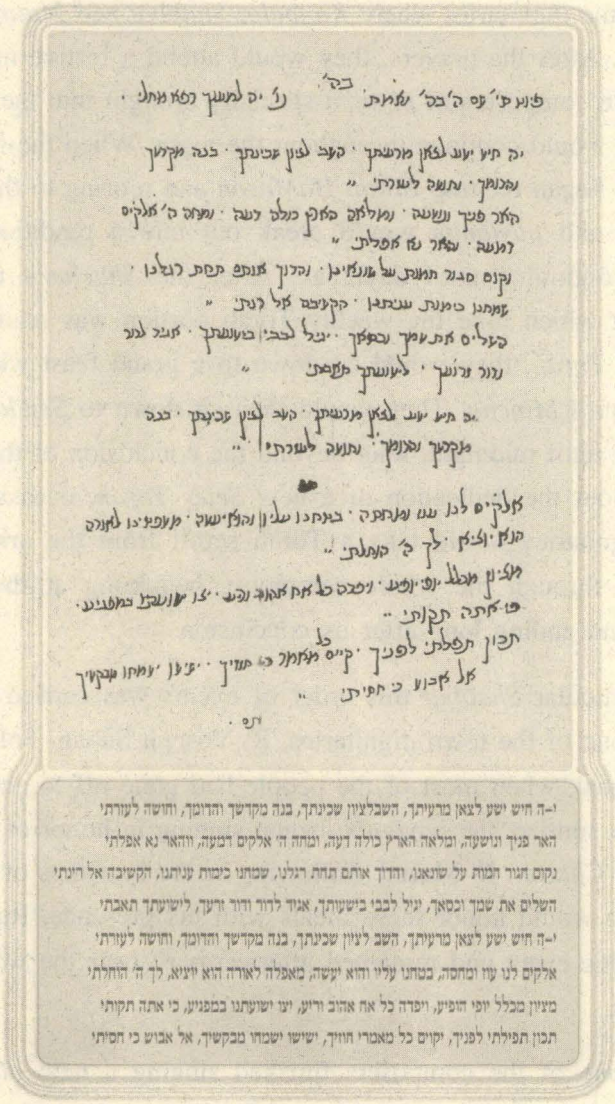
Anyone interested in the source of the *piyut* and the circumstances under which Rabenu Meir composed it, need only read the following story related to us by an eyewitness, R' Masud Malul.

In Erfoud, the ceremony for welcoming a new *Sefer Torah* into the synagogue began with a grand celebration on *Shabbat*. Prior to the onset of the *Shabbat*, the *Sefer Torah* would be brought to the home of one of the dignitaries where *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Maariv* services were held. After the prayers, they would attend a festive meal led by well-known composers of *piyutim* specially brought into the city; song and praise would continue throughout the night. When the majority of the people began reciting *Birkat HaMazon* and retiring to their homes, the Sages and *paytanim* would break out into a rendition of שירת הבקשות, continuing until daybreak. After the *Shacharit* and *Musaf* prayers, at which time the weekly Torah portion was read using the new *Sefer Torah*, they would sit down to a grand feast which would continue until *Mincha*. They would then sit down to *Seudah Shlishit*, continuing until midnight, long beyond the conclusion of the *Shabbat*. Even without the dedication of a new *Sefer Torah*, occasionally one of the dignitaries would take a Torah scroll from the ark and they would go through the whole ceremony, beginning at the onset of *Shabbat* and ending long after its conclusion.

One particular *Shabbat* this order of events was carried out in the home of one of the town dignitaries, R' Yoseph Sabag. Following the evening meal, when most of the people had gone off to catch a short nap before sunrise, the *paytanim* began singing in honor of the Torah, led by the *Chazan,* R' Masud. Following in the footsteps of his saintly father who would honor these meals with his presence, Rabenu Meir attended this event and remained afterwards to hear the works of the composers.

When one of the composers finished singing a new *piyut* of his, which had not yet been heard in public, Rabenu Meir stood up and said, "the melody is beautiful and pleasing to the ear, yet the lyrics

are not rooted in holiness, and the external beauty does not improve the content. However, since the melody is so beautiful, let us sanctify it". After just a minute Rabenu Meir burst into song, singing the holy lyrics, "*Yachid Ram Yearot Chosef*", whose words he had composed right then and there, while the composers listened with amazement.



A handwritten draft of Rabenu Meir's final piyut

Regarding this *piyut* as well, R' Masud was privileged to hear from Rabenu Meir a fragment of the meaning of the song whose stanzas hold hidden secrets. The *piyut* contained the phrase, "He established the earth on nothingness, drive out the son of this slavewoman, "דגל ישראל הרימה" raise the flag of the nation of Israel." Rabenu Meir explained it as follows.

From the days of David HaMelech, the flag of the Jewish nation displayed the symbol known as the "*Magen David*" (the Shield of David) – it was he who introduced the six-pointed star. These six points correspond to the verses of Tehillim 19:8-10:

תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש – The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul.

עדות ה' נאמנה מחכימת פתי – The testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise.

פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב – The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart.

מצות ה' ברה מאירת עינים – The command of Hashem is clear, enlightening the eyes.

יראת ה' טהורה עומדת לעד – The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever.

משפטי ה' אמת צדקו יחדו – The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous.

Each of these verses contains five words, the second word (corresponding to the index finger) being the Name of Hashem. The six-pointed "Shield of David" corresponds to these six mentions of Hashem's Name, as David HaMelech declared in the midst of his battle with Avshalom: "But You, Hashem are a shield for me" (Tehillim 3:4).

Furthermore, in Psalm 121 "A song to the ascents, I raise my eyes upon the mountains", the word שמירה – guarding is mentioned six times, corresponding to the six points on David's shield which allude to these six Holy Names.

1) אל ינום **שמרך**

2) הנה לא ינום ולא יישן **שומר** ישראל

3) ה' **שמרך** ה' צלך על יד ימינך

4,5) ה' **ישמרך** מכל רע **ישמר** את נפשך

6) ה' **ישמר** צאתך ובאך מעתה ועד עולם

"In my case as well, Rabenu Meir explained to R' Masud, "when I recite *'Degel Yisrael Harima'*, I have in mind the verses alluded to in the "*Magen David*", in order that we may strengthen our belief in the perfect Torah, in the trustworthy testament, in the upright orders, in the clear commands, in the pure fear of Hashem, and in the true judgments.

"FROM THE DAYS OF OUR FOREFATHERS YESHIVOT DID NOT DEPART FROM THEM" (Yoma 28b)

When Rabenu Meir first took up residence in *Eretz Yisrael* he had the opportunity to devote entire days to the pleasure and sweetness of Torah study, for hardly anyone was then aware of his greatness. Few had even heard of him and of those, only an isolated few actually made their way to his home. These were his finest years, when he would seclude himself in his tiny room and devote himself entirely to serving Hashem. However, when word spread of the "great lion" who had arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* and had chosen, of all places, to reside in Ashdod, "city of immigrants and Georgians", his house became a magnet for Yeshiva students and young *Kollel* fellows, laymen as well as those involved in sacred work, for Lithuanian *Rabbanim* as well as Hassidic *Rebbes*, for those studying the hidden Torah, and for *tzaddikim*.

Until now it had never entered the minds of young Hassidic *Kollel* fellows to visit Ashdod, let alone of *Rebbes* and *Rabbanim*, on whose maps Ashdod did not appear. However, as word spread of Rabenu Meir's arrival, like news of the sun rising from the east, the roads leading to Ashdod began to teem with life. His Torah began to proclaim his name abroad (see Moed Katan 16b) and his name became well known in the *batei midrash*. As *Chazal* tell us, "A Torah scholar is compared to a flask of balsam oil: if it is open its fragrance spreads, if it is covered its fragrance does not spread." (Avoda Zara 35b). At first only a small number came. Those wishing to learn from him and hear the word of Hashem, and those who were not even certain what they were searching for, yet they knew that whatever it was, it could be found there.

During those days, the name of his father the Baba Sali became well-known. The Baba Sali had returned to *Eretz Yisrael* and settled in Netivot. News of the incredible miracles he performed in such a matter-of-fact manner, and the open miracles that regularly took place in his room, quickly spread. Many who came to Rabenu Meir's home assumed him to be, like his father, an expert in "*Massechet Brachot*" (the art of bestowing blessings).

It soon became quite clear that he bore a remarkable resemblance to his saintly father, who had taught him *Torah* and bestowed his spirit upon him. He too became an expert in all areas of the Torah. It was true that he brought salvation to those who sought his blessing; it was also true that anyone who wished to could observe the many miracles taking place on a regular basis, but who came to his home to see miracles? Who would be interested in the miracles when his greatness burst forth from every crack, when right before their eyes he could be seen diving into the waters of the Torah and drawing pearls of logic and wisdom from the depths?

Many who merited benefiting from the illuminating light of his Torah emphasize that his was an amazing compound of genius in

Torah knowledge combined with close devotion to *Hashem.* When he spoke words of Torah, one could sense and feel that this was not simply another Torah scholar who had amassed incredible knowledge over the course of the years. All of his dialogues and discussions involving Torah proved that there was no contradiction between "His desire is in the Torah of Hashem" and "In His Torah he meditates day and night" (Tehillim 1:2) (see Avoda Zara 19a) – the Torah of Rabenu Meir was truly the Torah of Hashem. It is certainly not surprising to hear of the attraction many Torah scholars felt towards him as they made their way to Ashdod time after time, realizing that if they wished to hear Torah from a Rav who truly resembled an angel of G-d (see Moed Katan 17a), Rabenu Meir certainly met that criterion.

Talmidei *chachamim* very quickly realized just who he was. Whenever he opened his mouth to speak words of Torah it was quite clear that his entire being was pure and holy and filled with nothing but Torah. He combined vast overall knowledge on the one hand, with incredible clarity on the other, such that no one ever left his home with any doubt as to the correct path to follow.

As the *Gemara* tells us "When one saw R' Meir in the *beit midrash* it would appear as if he were uprooting the greatest of mountains and grinding them against each other" (Sanhedrin 24a), this was how Rabenu Meir appeared when conversing with the well-known giants of the generation, as he would break apart and grind mountains. This was done without any great fanfare, and without the loud noise that grinding mountains produces, but rather he effortlessly and calmly responded to people's queries in a way which even the greatest of Torah scholars could not match. He solved with ease difficulties which had occupied the sharpest of Torah minds for many long hours.

As his greatness in Torah was revealed, his home began to overflow with Yeshiva students and scholars who found it a fitting place to learn and discuss what they were learning. Young men would travel in groups to Ashdod to merit an hour of spiritual bliss, to discover at

least once in their lives that the *shiur klali* they heard in their Yeshiva was not the final word on a particular *sugya*, for there was much more to learn and to elaborate on. As they entered, Rabenu Meir would inquire what they were learning. He would immediately begin by citing all the views of the *Rishonim* in a very orderly fashion, quickly turning to the questions posed by the *Achronim* and presenting the various methods they used to explain the *sugya*. He would then analyze the questions of R' Chaim Brisker, not forgetting the precise path of methodology paved by Rav Shimon Shkop.

His sons would return home from their Yeshiva very eager to report to him what they had learned. They would present the *shiurim* given by their *Rabbanim*, clarifying the various approaches developed from in-depth learning and analysis of the *Rishonim* and *Achronim*. Once the view of the "*Ktzot HaChoshen*" as quoted in the *shiur*, was mentioned in passing. Rabenu Meir cut his son off in the middle and pointed out that the words of the "*Ktzot*" were not transmitted accurately. Without even going to the trouble of taking the book off the shelf, he recited the words of the "*Ktzot*" verbatim; there was no doubt who was right. A similar case occurred when one of his sons quoted from the "*Shaagat Aryeh*" and Rabenu Meir responded with a precise word for word quotation of the entire section.

If those visiting him were *Hassidim*, they would discern very quickly that they had much in common with Rabenu Meir, for his entire being was that of a *Hassid*. His treasure of knowledge of the history and concepts of *Hassidut* amazed visitors who happened to overhear a casual conversation between him and his followers. When anyone mentioned any Hassidic *Rebbe* he would suddenly reveal knowledge that no one imagined he had about the *Rebbe*'s entire history and ideology.

One of his confidants, a *Hassid* with vast knowledge on the subject of *Hassidut*, came to see Rabenu Meir with the name of a friend who was in need of salvation in a particular area. The Hassid happened to

mention that the name of his friend was Zinkover. When Rabenu Meir heard the name Zinkover he inquired, "Is he related to the family of the *Rebbe* of Apt?" Before the *Hassid* could even make the connection between the family name and the city in which R' Yitzhak Meir of Zinkov, son of the "*Ohev Yisrael*" of Apt, had served as *Rebbe*, Rabenu Meir had already turned to the history of that illustrious family. Many of the members of this Hassidic dynasty could not even pronounce the names of the cities where some of their dynasty served as leaders.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, relates the following story involving a messenger of the Lubavitcher *Rebbe* who arrived in Erfoud to visit Rabenu Meir. In typical Hassidic fashion, the *Hassid* began discussing the writings of *Habad*, displaying great expertise. In a little while, Rabenu Meir too began citing intricate details from the works of *Habad*, while the *Hassid* began to feel more and more uncomfortable as he realized that he had not provided Rabenu Meir with any new information. The family members, however, were not surprised for they were well aware of his complete mastery over the writings of *Habad* down to the minutest details, not only of the better-known works but even those which do not adorn the table of every *Habadnik*, such as "*Responsa of the Zemach Zedek*" which is not counted among the classic Hassidic works, but was actually authored by none other than the *Rebbe* himself.

Regular visitors to his home, who were permitted a glimpse, were well aware of the incredible breadth of his knowledge, not only of the works of *Habad*, but of *Hassidut* in general. There was hardly a Hassidic work in which he was not thoroughly versed. On more than one occasion, someone would quote from one of the great Hassidic *Rebbes* and Rabenu Meir would correct him stating that this quotation was really said by a different *Rebbe*. He would then supply the correct quotation attributed to the first *Rebbe*.

Hassidic works were always on his desk, in spite of the fact that the contents of all the Hassidic works were on the tip of his tongue.

Works such as "*Noam Elimelech*" and "*Toldot Yaakov Yoseph*" adorned Rabenu Meir's desk for forty years, appearing to outsiders as an inseparable component of his desk. At times he would open the book to analyze its contents, while on other occasions he would show a passage from the book to one of his callers. His attitude towards *tzaddikim* was a combination of fear and admiration. His description of the heavens shining over a *tzaddik* of the likes of R' Elimelech of Lizensk would cause those nearby to tremble. He tried his best to explain this feeling to others using terms they could relate to - the importance of keeping a distance while making an effort to come as close as possible to holiness - keeping a distance, but not cutting off ties entirely.

A frequent visitor to the house whose many discussions with Rabenu Meir involving Torah and *Hassidut* led him to form a close relationship with him, tells us that on one of his first visits, Rabenu Meir spoke about R' Elimelech miLizensk with great enthusiasm, yet at the same time was awestruck by his holiness. He actually trembled as he spoke of the great "*tzaddik* of the generation". The way he negated himself as he spoke so admiringly of the *Noam Elimelech* was difficult for this eyewitness to describe even twenty years later, for everything still appeared alive before his very eyes. The same witness pointed out that this description gave him a much more spiritual perspective on understanding the concept of the *tzaddik* of the generation and even today he views the book *Noam Elimelech* with different eyes.

As did his holy ancestors, Rabenu Meir expanded his knowledge of *kabbalah*, until he became the address for many people seeking assistance in understanding difficult passages in the *Zohar*. Among those frequenting his home were *Kabbalists* and hidden *tzaddikim* who came to discuss esoteric and lofty ideas with him. These conversations would continue for hours, with the average person having no idea what was being discussed. Those versed in the topics would sit mesmerized by his words which flowed like an ever-increasing spring. Even those

who could not understand the contents of that dialogue could feel that in this room stood the "*pargod*" – the curtain which Rabenu Meir had the ability to move aside in order to open the gates of hidden sanctuaries.

When he tried to encourage one of his close acquaintances to set aside time for study of "*Tikunei Zohar*", the person responded that he did not understand it, to which Rabenu Meir replied: "true, but your soul understands".

Even those who had no knowledge of *Kabbala* at all heard from him some of the concepts in the name of the Arizal. He would explain the ideas in a way that could be understood even by those lacking the proper background. His words penetrated to the very depths of the soul in a very clear and understandable manner. As an example let us take some of the things that Rabenu Meir said regarding improper thoughts:

"It is cited in the name of the Arizal, began Rabenu Meir, "that sinful thoughts are far more damaging than the sinful act itself. This is because a sinful act is purely animalistic with no spiritual content whatsoever, while thoughts are spiritual in essence. The thought can therefore cause more damage than the act itself." In support of his words, Rabenu Meir cited from the *Gemara*: "Thoughts of sin are worse than sin itself" (Yoma 29a and *Rashi*'s commentary there). Although the *Gemara* also states "The Holy One Blessed is He does not regard a bad thought as a deed" (Kiddushin 39b), implying that a negative thought is not so damaging, Rabenu Meir explained that this refers to simple people who are not punished by Heaven for their thoughts. The righteous, however, are punished for improper thoughts as the *Gemara* states: "The Holy One Blessed is He is exacting with those around Him (those who cleave to Him – *Rashi*) even to the extent of a hairsbreadth" (Baba Kama 50a). Rabenu Meir concluded: "The fact that ordinary people are not punished for the destruction wrought by their thoughts is a tremendous kindness from Above."

Many who benefited from the light of his Torah referred to it as "Yeshiva *shel maala*" "the Heavenly academy" and this was no exaggeration. Those who merited being part of that Yeshiva will forever bear its legacy.

"SEFER TORAH – THERE IS NO LIMIT TO ITS VALUE" (Baba Metzia 58b)

We must beware lest our amazement at his remarkable breadth of knowledge prevent us from investigating the roots of his incredible growth. Without knowing the extent of his toil, we could assume that Rabenu Meir was no ordinary person and thus there is nothing in his actions that we lesser people could even hope to emulate. It is imperative that along with understanding his lofty level and his greatness in all areas of the Torah, that we be aware of the superhuman effort he put into his learning from the early days of his youth.

Although he possessed an incredible memory, a "cemented cistern that loses not a drop" (Avot 2:8), we cannot ignore the fact that even a "cemented cistern" does not flow on its own and the drops of water do not just appear. Similarly, when R' Elazar ben Arach is described in the *Mishna* as an "ever-intensifying spring", we know that a spring does not bubble up out of nowhere but is the continuation of a flow from underground sources. We can therefore say that his unfathomable treasure of knowledge was first and foremost a direct result of the vast amount of time he devoted to studying the Torah in a state of purity, not omitting any book or discipline, and devoting most of his life to it.

He had a special fondness for newly published works. This explains how so many books published only in limited editions, obtainable only in select stores in the *Haredi* centers of Bnei Brak and Yerushalayim, made their way to his home in Erfoud. He had a special agreement with "Gitler Publishers" in Tel Aviv in that every few weeks they

would prepare a package of the best Torah literature, to be sent to the home of Rabenu Meir. His children, so accustomed were they to the arrival of these packages, assumed that the parents of all their friends also received monthly shipments with the return address: "Gitler, Bil"u Street, Tel Aviv."

From images etched in childhood which can be viewed as firsthand testimony, we hear with what anticipation he would open the packages arriving from *Eretz Yisrael*, of the love with which he would stroke the cover of a book, how he would "swallow" page after page, night after night. When he would finally put the book down it was as if he were announcing: "I know everything that is written here". Once he whispered to his close confidant R' Avraham Biton that he would never place a book in the bookshelf until he had finished learning it.

We can learn even more about his love for holy books from the following incident recalled from the treasure of memories of his son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira. One day his father sent him to purchase a particular book for him. When he returned from the store he informed his father how much the book had cost. Rabenu Meir responded: "My son, the price you paid was only for the cover; the book itself is priceless!"

The respect he showed each holy book and the way he related to them shows us how much he valued holy books. He took very good care of his books, and there was not a single book in his library including the older ones, which contained even a single crease.

Shelves crammed with books of every type crowded his library - thousands of books on all disciplines of the Torah. Rabenu Meir was not merely a collector of books; he was thoroughly versed in the contents of each book down to the final detail. As was customary in those days, many of the books had identical covers, yet a quick glance was all it took for him to recognize a book on the shelf. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, relates that on more than one

occasion Rabenu Meir would call him and ask him to bring him a particular book from the shelf which was very high up. While he was still carrying the ladder he would tell him,. "the book is the third from the right, on the second bookshelf from the left, third from the ceiling." With the covers of all the books being almost identical, even the simple identification of the books from such a distance was incredible enough. For Rabenu Meir, however, this was par for the course and this ability did not require any special explanation beyond: "I know my books. I studied each of them many times. How could I not identify one book from among the rest?"

The following story shows us the manner in which Rabenu Meir learned his books backwards and forwards, gaining mastery over the contents -

One of the members of *Kollel* "*Maskil LeDavid*", located near Rabenu Meir's home, once met his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, as he was emerging from his father's room, a thick bound manuscript in his hand. He related the following story: "This manuscript deals with the subject of *mikveh.* The author organized it in a very clear manner according to subject. I perused the notebook and found that it contained many new insights. Knowing that my father spends large amounts of time dealing with these complicated issues, I decided to bring it to him to review it. When I brought him the manuscript, he immediately leafed through it from cover to cover, as one who simply turns the pages. He then returned the manuscript to me saying, 'I have seen what is written.' When I expressed surprise that a person could learn from just a cursory glance, he showed me several examples where it was quite clear that he was very much aware of what the author had written, and he told me that if I wanted to I could test him on all that is written in the manuscript."

His familiarity with anything written was not merely superficial; it was not even knowledge as we define it. The following story helps us

understand what Rabenu Meir meant when he said he was "familiar with a book."

To some of his close confidants, he revealed a glimmer of the way his mind worked when he mentioned that there are new Torah publications being published constantly. "It is not only the study of the holy *Zohar* which has the ability to purify and sanctify; study of the holy "*Ohr HaChaim*" also fills a person with holiness." Any book whose author learned Torah with utmost devotion brings sanctity to those who learn it." A moment of silence serves as a small introduction to what has not yet been said. "By studying the book", here he chooses his words carefully, "I can perceive the soul of the author ... from between the lines of his book I can read of his acts and his conduct during those times when he was not learning. I can even point to the particular chapter in Tehillim which most moves him."

Even from the way he handled the book that was passed to him we were able to see how the image of the author seemed to be reflected at him. At times he would kiss the book while at other times he would put it aside without even opening it – all this without knowing the contents of the book or the name of the author.

HaGaon HaRav Avraham Biton Shlit"a merited a very close relationship with Rabenu Meir through his realization that one thing that brought Rabenu Meir special joy, was a good book with which he was not yet familiar. For a period of eighteen years he had the privilege of bringing many books to Rabenu Meir. Rabenu Meir would tell him the name of the book he was looking for and he would search from one store to the next until he found it. Once, when he asked Rabenu Meir to describe the types of books he should bring, he responded: "Books of responsa we have more than enough of. I would love books on *Hassidut* and *kabbalah*, for it is there that I can find proper ways to act and work on character development." On one occasion Rabenu Meir requested that he try to obtain the book "*Degel*

Machane Yehuda" which could not be found in any store, explaining, "I heard that it contains examples of proper conduct." Eventually after much searching, his confidant found an old copy of the book in a used bookstore in Jerusalem's Meah Shearim neighborhood.

To his dear and close friend HaRav HaGaon R' Yitzchak Morsiya Shlit"a, Rabenu Meir mentioned that he would spend large amounts of time studying books on *mussar* and *Yirat Shamayim*. This comment was said to Rav Morsiya after he had given Rabenu Meir the responsa book "*Darchei Yoel*" as a gift, hinting that he wished to enter into a discussion with him on matters of in-depth learning and *pilpul*. Rabenu Meir rejected his request, for the reason given above. Some time after he had given Rabenu Meir the book, he came to visit him and noticed that Rabenu Meir had just put the book "*Darchei Yoel*" down. Realizing that his guest had noticed this, Rabenu Meir justified his actions saying, "I just happened to glance at the book; generally I study books of *mussar* and fear of Hashem."

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, emphasizes that his love for sacred books was so great that he valued only the content and paid much less attention to the monetary value. In fact, in this way many valuable, rare old books were taken from his home, with his generous permission. On more than one occasion someone would spot an old original edition of a book in his library and immediately offer to exchange it for a new copy, as if he were honoring him with a present and "saving" him from the effort required to decipher the old book's "broken letters". Rabenu Meir understood the market value of books very well and knew exactly what these acquisitive people were up to, taking advantage of his good nature by taking old books that were in his possession. His response to such suggestions was generally, "If you have any need specifically for the old book then by all means, take it and enjoy it. It makes no difference to me what the style of the letters is or the date of publication." In this manner many books were taken from his library, among them a

first edition of the "Levush" as well as the books written by the "*Chid"a* which had still been in the author's possession after their publication, and to which he had added comments in his own handwriting appending his signature - "*Chid"a.*"

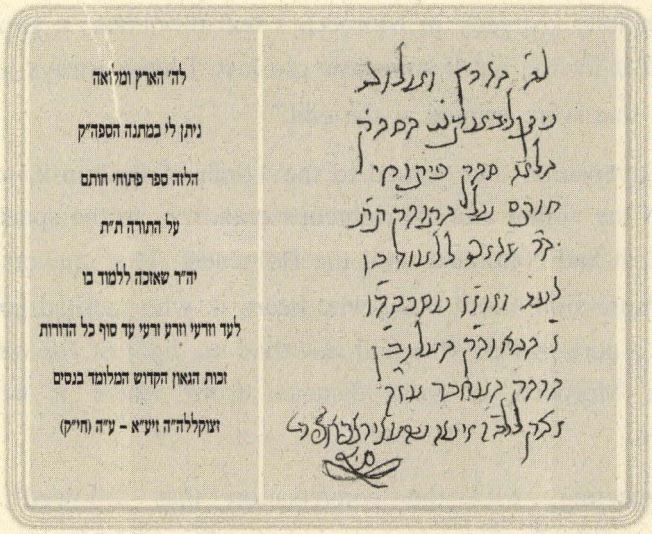
His love for books was implanted in his heart from the early days of his youth and only grew as the years went by. Many a guest who had visited the home of his father, the Baba Sali, had to part with some of his own precious and rare books, for he could not stand by and watch this child who so yearned for a new book. Clearly his desire for the books was not simply to adorn his bookshelves. He would fill himself with more and more knowledge, for there was always room for more.

Many emissaries from abroad who were guests at the Baba Sali's home would have to remain a few additional days to allow the Rabbi's son sufficient time to devour another book. In this manner, he learned the book "*Shev Shmateta*" by heart during the visit of a guest from *Eretz Yisrael*, and he knew it through and through until his final days.

In another incident, when a guest from *Eretz Yisrael* had taken his leave before Rabenu Meir had the opportunity to complete his study of the "Shl"a" ("*Shnei Luchot HaBrit*"). Rabenu Meir broke out in bitter tears as parting with this book was very difficult for him. He refused to be consoled and would not stop crying, until his father the Baba Sali took the book, undid the threads of the binding and distributed it for some of his students to copy for him. While the book "*Shnei Luchot HaBrit*" was published many times, not one of them contained such a powerful story as this unknown edition of it.

In the possessions of another messenger from Hebron who had arrived at the house of the Baba Sali in Tafilalet, Rabenu Meir found the book "*Yakhel Shlomo*" by the grandfather of R' Shlomo author of "*Tiferet Shlomo*" from Radomsk. This rare book and its contents found favor in the eyes of the eight-year old child who asked the guest if he

could leave the book for him so he could study it. When the messenger refused to give up this important work, the boy burst into tears, his bitter cries reaching his father's room. The Baba Sali called his guest and asked him if he would agree to give his book to the child, suggesting an exchange deal. "You may take any book from my library," he said as he looked over his immense library, "in exchange for the book which my son desires." The guest agreed and Rabenu Meir now had another important work to enrich his treasury.



Rabenu Meir's inscription on the title page of his copy of *"Pituchei Chotam"*. The inscription reads: "To Hashem is the world and everything in it". This holy book *Pituchei Chotam* on the Torah has been given to me as a gift. May it be Your will that I and my descendants merit to learn from it till the end of days.

Close to sixty years later a Jew from the Diaspora arrived at his home in Ashdod, to see him and to seek his blessing on a matter of great importance. Knowing of Rabenu Meir's great love for new and rare books, he thought to himself, "I will present him with a new gift." As soon as he came in and sat at the table, he took from his belongings the book "*Yakhel Shlomo*". This rare book which had just been published in a new edition had not yet reached the bookstores in *Eretz*

Yisrael and he was certain that a gift of this sort would be a source of great pleasure for Rabenu Meir.

Rabenu Meir took the book from the man, glanced at the title page and then turned to the final pages. His face lit up. He seemed to be speaking to himself but his words caused the hair of those present to stand on end, particularly the guest who knew how rare the book was and of how few people had even heard of its author. "Ah, *'Yakhel Shlomo'*, that precious book authored by the *Rebbe* of Radomsk, grandson of the Ba"ch and Ta"z! He was a great author; the book was printed in Italy. Already in Morocco I had this book; a guest of my father left it for me but it somehow got lost. I have always longed for the notes that were printed at the end."

The conversation then turned to the Torah of Radomsk, to the life history of the author and his righteous grandson, to the sparks of that dynasty that had continued until the Holocaust. That conversation left a great impression on all those who heard it, who merited hearing the words of a pure *tzaddik* who had absorbed the light of *Hassidut*, while living in Morocco, a great distance from where it began and blossomed.

This meeting, with the conversation that followed and the amazement of all those present, was only one of many similar episodes.

"TORAH FROM HEAVEN"

Just as his holy ancestors testified that they merited heavenly assistance in uncovering the meaning of some of the hidden parts of the Torah, Rabenu Meir revealed that he too was the recipient of such revelations, either while awake or in a dream, which helped him to clarify profound concepts. Scripture states: "עלמות אהבוך" "*Alamot* love you." (Shir HaShirim 1:3) *Chazal* teach us, "Do not read it as עלמות (meaning 'maidens', referring allegorically to the nations of the world), but rather as 'עלומות' (hidden things – referring to a Torah scholar who has hidden things revealed to him)" (Avoda Zara 35b). To his close confidant, R' Avraham

Biton, he once mentioned that when he studied the holy Zohar, R' Shimon bar Yochai himself came to join him in learning.

This should not cause his Torah to be dismissed as knowledge which simply came to him and was not studied with great toil and effort[46]. This is not even remotely true. He spent much time and effort intensely studying the Torah of the early commentaries. However, when he came across something he was unable to understand, it would cause him great pain. He would take upon himself many fasts and shed many tears, immersing himself often in the *mikveh* – until Heaven saw how much pain he felt in his desire "to understand and elucidate," at which point he would merit "to listen, to learn, and to teach ..." (see the second blessing before morning *Kriat Shma*.)

On a number of occasions he would gather all those close to him for a grand feast during which he would relate that in the course of the night the author himself appeared to him, and at times he would describe his appearance, "His face was luminous, shining with happiness and holiness".

Once he was visited by a descendant of the Vilna Gaon who was fluent in all his works, having devoted his life to the study of his books. Rabenu Meir discussed the Torah of his illustrious ancestor with this man, drawing from him many pearls of wisdom, until he suddenly became serious and told him that he had recently been having trouble understanding a particular passage in the Gr"a. He had spent many sleepless nights unceasingly pondering the difficult passage. "That night," he concluded, "I merited a revelation of the Gaon from Vilna himself, who appeared and explained everything to me."

---

46. The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:12) on the verse: אף חכמתי עמדה לי" ("**אף** – still – my wisdom remained with me) cites the Midrash that Shlomo HaMelech said, "The Torah I learned with אף – great toil – remained with me".) (Yalkut Shimoni Kohelet 2:968).

Already in the days of his youth, the following story was publicized by one of the great sages of Morocco, R' Eliyahu Sheetrit zt"l:

At that time, the first published works of Rav Yoseph Chaim from Baghdad arrived in Morocco. There were only three copies; two of them were brought to the Baba Sali and Rabenu Meir, while the third copy remained with R' Eliyahu Sheetrit himself.

Father and son devoted several days and nights to exhaustive learning of the three books, "*Ben Ish Hai*", "*Od Yoseph Hai*", and "*Ben Ish Hayil*" and soon mastered them. At that time the *Ben Ish Hai* revealed himself to R' Eliyahu Sheetrit in a dream, his face radiant as the brilliance of Heaven with all his splendor and glory, and these were his words: "I have come to tell you that it gives me tremendous pleasure in my Heavenly Abode when Rabenu Yisrael and his son Rabenu Meir toil over my Torah."

Morning came and R' Eliyahu Sheetrit's vision became the talk of the *batei midrash*. The news also reached the Abichazira family. Immediately a grand feast was served in honor of the "*Ben Ish Hai*" with the participation of all the sages of the city. Father and son felt immense joy as they sat discussing the profound insights of the lion of Babylon.

It is hard to describe the admiration and respect Rabenu Meir had for the *Ben Ish Hai*. He once told his close confidant, R' Avraham Biton, that had the Ben Ish Hai been alive, he would have gone on foot from Tafilalet in Morocco to Baghdad in Babylon in order to greet him. Furthermore, he would instruct those issuing *halachic* rulings that they should never oppose any rulings of the *Ben Ish Hai*.

"THE CHATAM SOFER"

Just as most of his conduct is beyond our understanding, just as it did not bother him that we are unable to comprehend even the tip of his thoughts, so too would it be impossible for us to strive to

understand his strong connection to the books of the Chatam Sofer, whose books seemed to be the most important to him of all. Make no mistake - he excelled in all disciplines of the Torah and was fluent in many areas such as all the works of the Gr"a and the responsa "*Shoel uMeshiv*". The difference was that when it came to the works of the Chatam Sofer, he made no attempt to conceal his expertise.

A certain Rav spoke to him about his community and his dealings with its constituents with special emphasis on their questions and his *halachic* rulings. In the course of conversation, Rabenu Meir questioned the Rav regarding a particular response of the Chatam Sofer, but the Rav was unable to recall the response. Rabenu Meir cried out loud in obvious amazement, "You are a Rabbi in Israel and you do not know the works of the Chatam Sofer by heart?"

Indeed we heard from his household as well as his visitors how they could not overlook the deep bond which Rabenu Meir found with the Chatam Sofer and his Torah. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, points out that his father knew all of the books of the Chatam Sofer verbatim.

His close confidant R' Zalman Groiz, related an incident regarding a guest who mentioned to him something written by the Chatam Sofer. Rabenu Meir cut him off in mid-sentence, stating that in all the books of the Chatam Sofer such a quotation was not to be found. "Perhaps I saw it quoted in his name." When the man pondered his memory further it became clear that his source too had not seen the words from inside, but in another book quoting the Chatam Sofer.

In another incident involving descendants of the Chatam Sofer who were visiting Rabenu Meir, the conversation turned to the customs in Pressburg established by the Chatam Sofer. When they mentioned a particular custom from their home, Rabenu Meir interrupted them, exclaiming, "You are mistaken! This was not the custom of your

ancestor. "They argued that this point had already been printed in the name of the Chatam Sofer. Rabenu Meir declared that it was a printer's mistake and that the whole widespread custom was an error. When they stuck to their claim, Rabenu Meir proved from three sources in the writings of the Chatam Sofer that he would never have approved of this custom.

The great respect that he showed to the grandchildren of the Chatam Sofer, the warmth with which he greeted them every time they came to see him, cannot be described. With love reserved for princes, he would inquire as to their well-being and would take an interest in their personal lives. Once when the name of one of the grandchildren of the Chatam Sofer was mentioned to him, he responded in distress "A grandson of the Chatam Sofer and he does not grow a beard! May Hashem help that he will grow one."[47]

The first time HaRav Zalman Groiz, a young descendant of the Chatam Sofer, entered Rabenu Meir's home and had the privilege of seeing the beauty and holiness of Rabenu Meir's countenance, he brought regards from another member of his family. Rabenu Meir was visibly moved and said, "If so, you too are a grandson of the Chatam Sofer!" From that moment until his last day, he would not allow him to help him, even in the lightest of tasks, despite the fact that R' Zalman was to become one of Rabenu Meir's close confidants. For a number of years he was in and out of his house almost daily; there were hundreds of opportunities when he could have helped him and he had offered his services many times. The reaction was always the

---

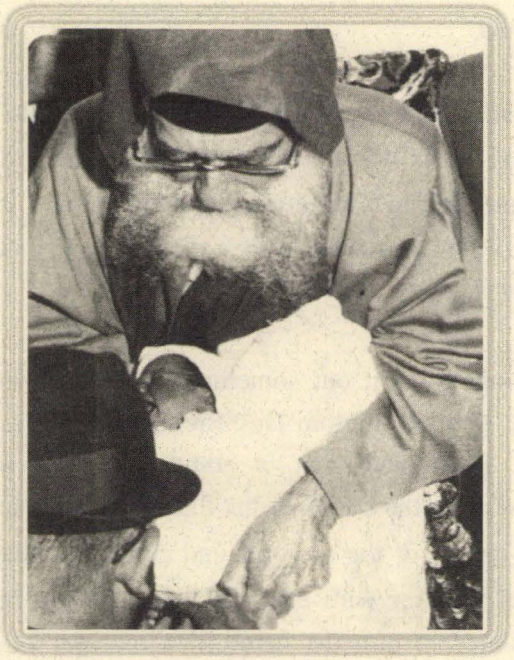
47. His attitude was similar to his father's (see chapter "Dikna Kadisha" ("Holy Beards"). He was very strict with those who cut off their beards. He related to his close friend R' Avraham Biton that he was once with his father when a particular Rabbi arrived asking for his support of his candidacy for a position in the Rabbinate. "Due to my father's honor, I refrained from commenting but I really wanted to ask how he was not embarrassed to wear the robe of the Rabbinate without a beard?"

same: "R' Zalman, I am not allowed to make use of a descendant of the Chatam Sofer."

Rav Groiz added that every day Rabenu Meir would treat him to a steaming cup of tea as was his wont with many of his callers. But in this case Rabenu Meir had an ulterior motive: "How I love to hear the *bracha* '*Borei Nefashot*' recited over a glass of tea by the grandson of the Chatam Sofer."[48]

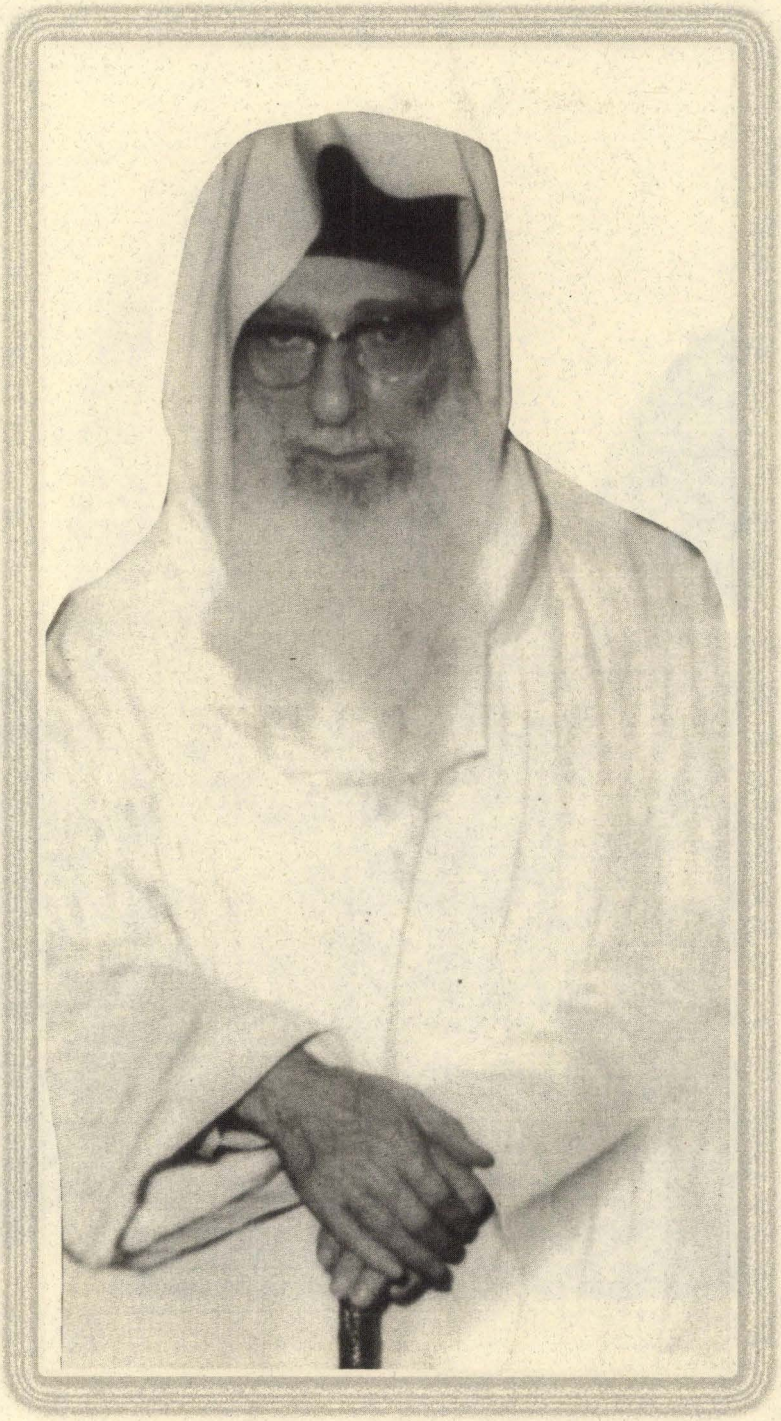
It is interesting to point out something that we heard from one of those closest to him, R' Sholom Dov Stern, another descendant of the Chatam Sofer. He related that in addition to Rabenu Meir's vast general knowledge of the books of his illustrious ancestor, he was very well-versed in details of the customs and conduct of the distinguished family. He was familiar with even its lesser known branches. When R' Stern mentioned to him the name of a member of his family, he was amazed that Rabenu Meir described him as if he knew him well. "I do not know how Rabenu Meir knew the entire family", concluded the Rav.

48. As is known, the Chatam Sofer ruled that one is obliged to make the *Borei Nefashot* after blessing on a cup of tea even though one does not drink the amount equivalent to a *reviit* in one mouthful because sipping it slowly is the regular manner of drinking tea.

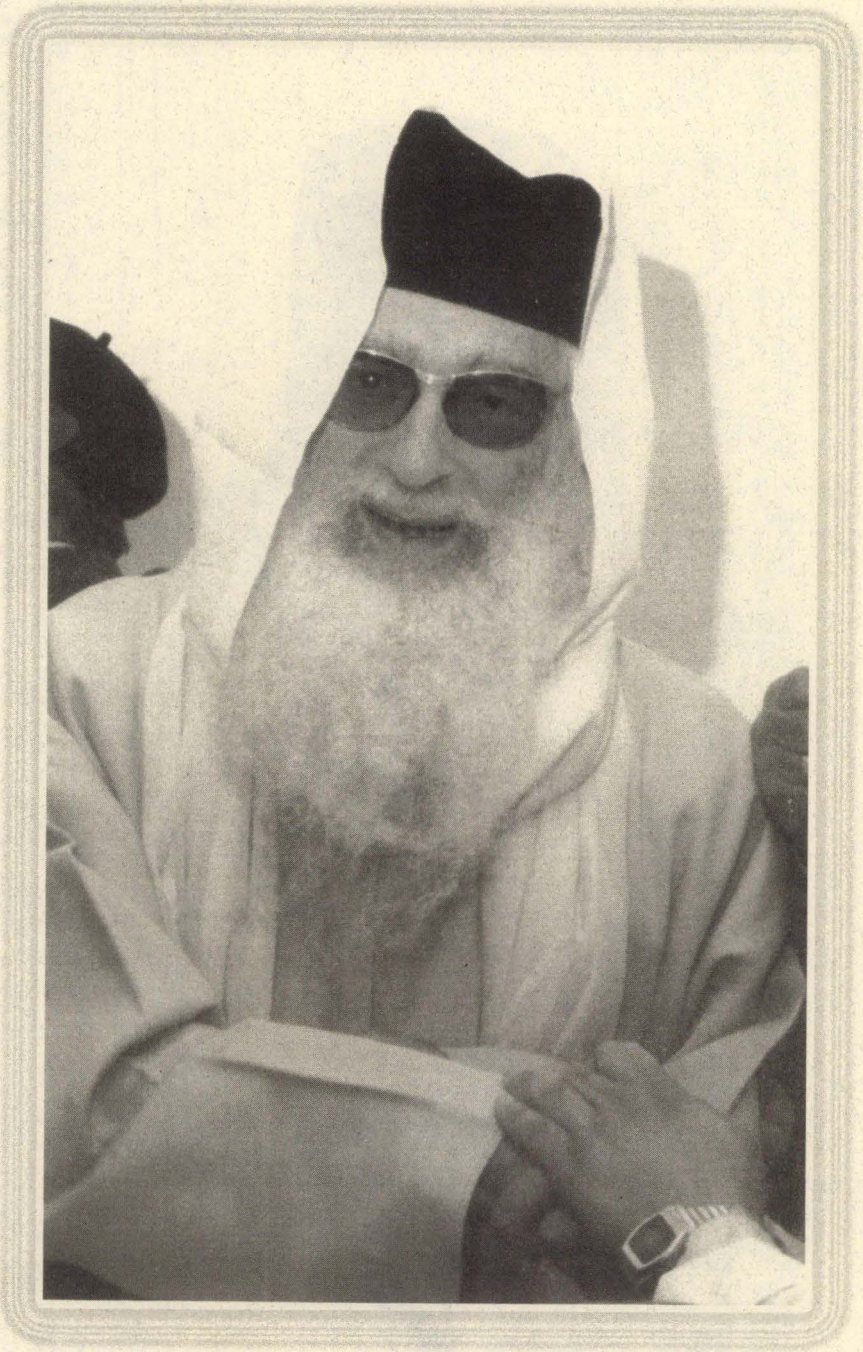


Rabenu Meir serving as sandak





MARAN
RABENU
MEIR
ABICHAZIRA
zy"a



ON THE SERVICE

MY HEART GREW HOT WITHIN ME" (Tehillim 39:4)

Some people were privileged to steal a glimpse into the sanctuary of Rabenu Meir's pure service of Hashem. What they saw amazed them. No words can truly express the awe of Hashem that enveloped him as he approached the performance of a *mitzvah*, prayer, or even a blessing over food.

In truth, one of his close confidants tells us, Rabenu Meir's performance of *mitzvot* could not be regarded as "servitude". Those seeing him donning his *tefillin*, lighting *Chanukah* candles, or shaking the *lulav* saw no "servitude", but rather a sense of joy at the opportunity presented to him. He would seize *mitzvot* with both hands, as if they were given only to him and someone threatened to snatch them from him.

He had the ability to keep his strong emotions in check under the guise of daily routine. The moment a *mitzvah* came his way, however, he would respond with fervor that left an incredible impression on all present. On one of the rare occasions when he spoke about himself, he related the following story to a few *Kollel* fellows who came to visit him one *Erev Yom Kippur*: "One *Yom Kippur* I was able to cry the entire day; from the onset of the Holy Day until its conclusion, tears did not cease streaming down my face. I simply wept the entire day." We can imagine the effect this had on the young men's *Yom Kippur* experience that year.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, related to us his father's insight into Ben Azzai's statement: "One *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*" (Avot 4:2). *Chazal* tell us "Wine whets the appetite" (Pesachim 107b). Wine served at the start of a meal creates an appetite for more food. Rabenu Meir explained that the same may be said regarding a *mitzvah*; – it gives a person an appetite to fulfill more and more *mitzvot*.

Anyone observing his zeal and excitement while performing *mitzvot* saw a man completely enveloped in his yearning and desire for them. When speaking of any *mitzvah* he would ask, "When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this *mitzvah*?" (Brachot 61b).

PREPARING FOR A *MITZVAH*

If we are recording testimonies of those who observed him performing *mitzvot* we must mention his preparation for each *mitzvah*. Rabenu Meir did not simply prepare to serve Hashem; the preparation was a service of its own.

The *Mishna* warns us that we must be as meticulous with a minor *mitzvah* as with a major one because "You do not know the reward given for the respective *mitzvot*." (Avot 2:1). When it comes to preparing for a *mitzvah*, however, the *Mishna* tells us "Run to perform a minor *mitzvah*" (Avot 4:2). We must be more industrious in our preparation for a minor *mitzvah*, lest we become negligent and end up either not doing the *mitzvah* at all or doing it in an offhanded manner, "Like rote learning of human commands" (Yeshayahu 29:13).

The warning against not performing *mitzvot* without proper preparation refers not only to *mitzvot* we observe less frequently, such as eating *matzah* or shaking the *lulav*. We all approach these *mitzvot* with care and thought. However, *mitzvot* which have become part of our daily routine, those that we consider minor, are often carried out without the requisite preparation. Rabenu Meir's excitement and subsequent preparation for *mitzvot* was felt with every approaching *mitzvah*.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, provides us with a vivid description of how his father would approach the *mitzvah* of laying *tefillin*. Dawn had not yet broken and the time for performing the *mitzvah* had not yet arrived, yet Rabenu Meir was already burning with desire and becoming restless. "Soon we will wrap ourselves in

our *tzitzit* and be able to lay *tefillin*", he would whisper yearningly time after time. When the prescribed moment to fulfill these *mitzvot* arrived, he would pounce on them with incredible excitement, as a child who has just received a new toy which neither he nor his friends had ever seen the likes of before.

This same spectacle was seen day after day; Rabenu Meir never displayed signs of weakness or indifference. One would have thought that with all the efforts he put into preparing for a *mitzvah*, he would have had no strength left for the *mitzvah* itself. Each day brought with it many *mitzvot* and to each one he applied the same exceptional preparation.

Discussing the idea of preparing for fulfilling a *mitzvah*, particularly that of prayer, Rabenu Meir once pointed out that the *Mishna*'s statement, "According to the exertion is the reward", refers to the preparation for a *mitzvah* as well. One cannot compare someone who has been awake since midnight, eagerly awaiting the first glow of sunrise, to one who wakes up just before the *vatikin* service. "Furthermore, "he stated, "if one is accustomed to putting great effort into his *mitzvot*, even if a *mitzvah* happens to come with minimal effort, he will be rewarded as if he had exerted his usual amount of effort."

"I AM PRAYER" (Tehillim 109:4)

His devotion in prayer was apparent from the days of his youth. As with other things, his prayer was characterized by his remarkable ability to conceal his soaring emotions, which were buried in an ear-piercing silence. He would pray in seclusion in a closed room and his prayers would break through the heavens, opening the gates to hidden chambers. In the words of the *Zohar*: "Hashem desires the prayers of *tzaddikim*, and He fashions them into a crown for Himself." To those close to him, his seclusion during prayer appeared as if he were passing through a "curtain" to plead and to affect salvation

and by his prayers to transform Hashem's Attribute of Harsh Judgment into the Attribute of Mercy (see Sukkah 14a).

In his eulogy for Rabenu Meir, the great *Gaon*, HaRav Ben Zion Abba Shaul elaborated on the greatness of his prayer, describing it as containing everything necessary for it to be totally accepted by the A-mighty. His absolute humility, in spite of his lofty level, guaranteed that his prayers would be accepted, as *Chazal* tell us, "One who feels lowly ... his prayer is not despised." (Sanhedrin 43b). In addition, from the days of his youth he accustomed himself to weep when he prayed, for "The gates of tears have not been locked." (Brachot 32b).

HaGaon Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul zt"l then related a story he had heard from a Moroccan Jew. One day the man entered a synagogue and from the women's section he heard the sounds of someone crying his heart out. On going up to see who it was, he discovered Rabenu Meir, then a young man, his heartrending prayers piercing the heavens.

HaRav Abba Shaul tried to find out whether Rabenu Meir's prayers were recited in accordance with the *kavanot* of the *Rasha"sh.* However, from many incidents Rabenu Meir had related to him, he realized that he followed a different path. "All of the Rav's prayers went beyond simply concentrating on the meaning of the words, but also included hidden *Kabbalistic* meanings and unifications of Hashem's Name."[49]

No-one who had the privilege of praying in the same *minyan* as Rabenu Meir could be immune to the effect of Rabenu Meir's prayer. With a quiet yet clear voice, he would cry out to his Creator. All

---

49. A disciple of HaRav Ben Zion Abba Shaul zt"l who was also very close to Rabenu Meir, HaRav HaGaon R' Yitzchak Morsiya, testified that from the age of sixteen, Rabenu Meir created unifications of Hashem and even when it appeared that he was waving his finger and perhaps writing something in the air, "this was the unification."

those around him would feel as if the words took on a life of their own. His intensity would blend with a thread of remorse in his imploring voice. No-one could ever presume Rabenu Meir's prayer to be mere lip service, for it was the song of angels, who "Proclaim with awe, together, loudly".

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, describes his father's moving prayer as follows: "He put every ounce of his strength into each one of his prayers, making it seem that it was the only prayer in the whole world." When he recited *Kriat Shma*, one could hear in his voice how he was crowning the A-mighty. His devotion was so strong that it seemed that his soul was about to leave his body. The congregation could have completed all three paragraphs of the *Shma* while he was reciting the first verse, assuming that anyone was still able to pray and was not totally overwhelmed.

During the parts of the *Amidah* requiring bowing, he did not simply move the upper part of his body the way we do, nor did he bow so deeply that all the vertebrae in his back protruded. In one swift motion he would bow and prostrate himself and kiss the ground, "in an action that even the most skilled acrobat could not repeat." Fortunate are the eyes which saw this magnificent sight, which were able to perceive something of the storm brewing in his heart. The lowliest servant in the palace of the king could not feel as humble as did Rabenu Meir when he stood "like a servant before his Master".

His close confidant, R' Yehuda Turgeman, who had the privilege of attending to him in Midelt where he served as Rav for seven years, describes the small and narrow room where Rabenu Meir would seclude himself while praying. The room had a small window through which Rabenu Meir would join the communal prayer. The congregants were well aware that their true messenger to *Hashem* was not the *shliach tzibbur* standing in front of them, but their Rav, concealed from view, praying for the needs of the entire nation along with his own.

His prayers were aimed at making *tikkunim* and at raising the Divine Presence from the earth bringing an end to the exile. At the conclusion of his *Amidah* he would knock on the window, signaling to the *shliach tzibbur* to begin the repetition. It was never proven, though, that his knock on the window meant that he had indeed concluded his prayer.

"ON THE SABBATH DAY IT SHALL BE OPENED"

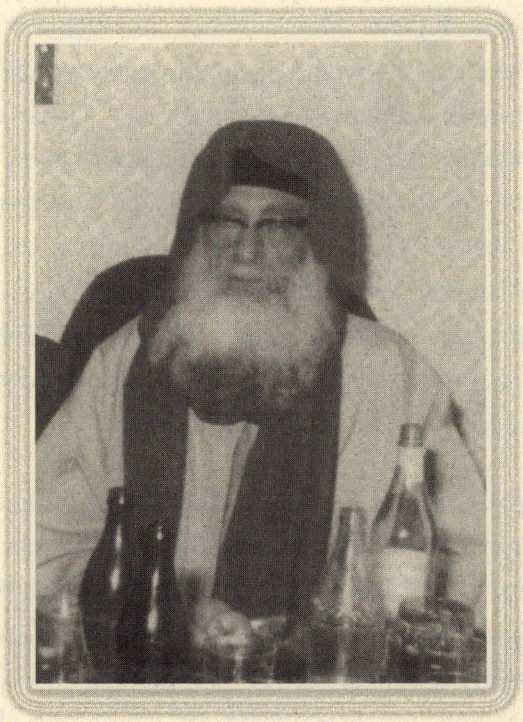
(Yechezkel 46:1)

If the *tzaddikim* teach us that their weekdays were as holy as *Shabbat*, what right then do we have to step with our mundane shoes on the glittering carpets spread over their holy *Shabbat* sanctuaries? Can the testimony we have documented from people who entered the holy sanctuary on an ordinary weekday give us any inkling of the atmosphere surrounding Rabenu Meir's *Shabbat*, which can be referred to as "*Shabbat Shabbaton*"? His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira describes for us his preparations for *Shabbat*. From daybreak on Friday morning, the entire house was already illuminated with the light of *Shabbat*, reflecting Rabenu Meir's anticipation of greeting the *Shabbat* queen. The preparations were not only of the spiritual variety, carried out in the depths of his soul, for those were concealed even from those who constantly surrounded him. With them he would speak of physical preparations – whom to invite for the *seudot*, the times for the prayer services and the meals, and other such matters. Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira adds that in spite of the odors of cooking and frying which permeated the house, Rabenu Meir "never felt the need to go to a window or to the porch for a breath of fresh air, on the contrary, he had a special love for any act carried out in honor of the *Shabbat*."

During the *Shabbat* meals themselves, when he was joined by guests whom he personally invited following the *Shabbat* services, he did his utmost to honor them and make their visit as pleasant as possible, personally serving them food and drink. Morenu Rabbi David

Abichazira describes how Rabenu Meir would warn those dining with him not to fill themselves up on all the delicacies being served, for "the bread is the most important part of the meal." Similarly, one of his close confidants who had the privilege of dining with him during one of the final *Shabbatot* of his life told us that Rabenu Meir ate mostly from the *challah* and little from the other delicacies served. He would say of himself: "on *Shabbat* I eat more than usual ... but the main food I eat is the *challah*." We can understand this in the light of the *Gemara*'s statement: "R' Zeira would break off a piece of bread large enough to last the entire meal. Since he does not do this every day and it is only today that he does so, it does not seem like gluttony." (*Shabbat* 117b).

The *Shabbat zemirot* were the ones traditionally sung by his ancestors in addition to the holy *piyutim* composed by his forebears. He led the singing himself in a melodious and joyous resonant voice.



"THESE ARE MY APPOINTED FESTIVALS" (Vayikra 23:2)

As a festival approached, his devotion became apparent in every step he took. Any observer could feel the great fire of excitement over the impending festival and its associated *mitzvot* about to burst forth. In addition, Rabenu Meir took upon himself special stringencies in association with each festival.

Heading the list was the extra care he took in safeguarding himself from *chametz* on *Pesach*. It was obvious from the great tension visible on his face on *Erev Pesach*, that he viewed the advent of the festival with much trepidation. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, testified that he and other family members at first thought that he was frightened by the severity of the prohibition of eating *chametz* on *Pesach* and the other *mitzvot* associated with the *chag*. However, it became clear after Rabenu Meir was taken from this world in the middle of *Pesach* that this is what he had always feared.

He writes about Rabenu Meir's search for *chametz*: "*Pesach* was always the focal point. He would check in places he had never entered and which had never seen any *chametz*. Every year he would ask that the cases containing his writings be brought to him. Nobody ever understood what *chametz* he could possibly be searching for in those cases. It seems that *the chametz* he was searching for was not physical, but spiritual. While he searched he would relate the manner in which the giants of the generations searched for *chametz*. The conversation would invariably turn to deep *halachic* discussions as well as stories of our saintly ancestors, may they rest in peace."

The same applied to all *halachot* associated with the festivals such as construction of the *Sukkah* and the taking of the four species. How beautiful it was to see him supervising the building of the *Sukkah*. While watching the workers he would review the *halachot* and regale them with Hassidic tales and stories of *tzaddikim*. Those close to him would gather around him listening to his words and absorbing them

in their hearts. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, writes: "His many followers would each bring him an *etrog* which would stimulate deep discussions regarding the laws of *etrog*, the development of the *halacha* over the generations, culminating in his picking out the choicest *etrog*."

To appreciate fully his observance of *Shavuot*, the day of the giving of the Torah, let us listen to the testimonies of those who remember the glorious days when he led the community in Morocco.

Which resident of Midelt or Erfoud can forget the dignified image of Rabenu Meir as he covers himself with his *tallit* and goes up to read the Ten Commandments. Twice yearly - on *Shabbat Parshat Yitro* and on *Shavuot*, all the synagogues in the town would schedule their services to end at the same time so that all townsfolk could go to Rabenu Meir's synagogue to hear him reading from the Torah.

When he read, they all felt that they were actually standing at the foot of *Har Sinai*. The people would tremble at the sound of his voice growing stronger and stronger and there was not a single one who did not shed a river of tears.

On *Purim*, following the tradition of his saintly ancestors, he would read the *Megilla* himself and fulfill this obligation for the entire community. The reading lasted three hours because he pronounced every word meticulously, not to mention the special *kavanot* which he had in mind for each word. He would then host a grand *Purim Seudah* in his home; the entire community crowded inside in order to fulfill the obligation to feast and rejoice on this day. However, despite the festivities, no boundaries were breached and nobody acted with undue levity. The main difference between *Purim* and other days was the nature of Rabenu Meir's *Divrei* Torah which took on a unique characteristic.

His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira explained why his ancestors refused to have others fulfill their obligation of *Megillah*

and *shofar*: "The deep intentions and lofty ideas that they had in mind with every *mitzvah* were so deeply hidden that no other person could possibly perform the *mitzvah* to their liking and thereby fulfill their obligation."

He then described for us the prayers on the holy day of *Yom Kippur* as they took place in Ashdod.

The local community center served as the venue for the service. It was the only structure large enough to contain the five hundred or so people who would gather with their Rabbi. He served as *chazan* himself for all the services of the day.

Prayers began at half past four in the morning with the traditional *Patach Eliyahu*. The introduction alone would last a half an hour. The melody was sung in a clear and pleasant voice with no words necessary to convey a sense of submissiveness to the Creator. Rabenu Meir would stand throughout the service, reciting the prayers in a loud voice making sure to fulfill each listener's obligation, for many of those who came knew little more than to answer "*Amen*" to the *Chazan's* blessings.

The service continued for fifteen hours. *Musaf* followed *Shacharit*; *Neila* followed *Mincha*, without a break until nightfall, when three small stars were finally visible in the sky. Throughout the service, Rabenu Meir's voice did not weaken and his intense emotion did not abate; he did not tire for the slightest moment. His voice would pierce the heavens and penetrate the hearts of man. We must remember that the community center was not equipped with modern acoustics, thus to pray so long and so loud required tremendous physical effort. Who can possibly measure the spiritual effort he put into this "service of the heart"?

If anyone thinks for a moment that at the conclusion of the day he would go home for a hard earned rest to compensate for the great efforts he placed during the day, then read on:

After the prayers he would hurry home, eat a small meal, and immediately open his doors to the public. Who came to see Rabenu Meir on *Motzaei Yom Kippur*? Pious individuals who came to hear his words of Torah that poured forth the entire night. From the conclusion of *Yom Kippur* until the time for reciting the morning *Shma*, words of Torah and *Hassidut* streamed from him like a constantly flowing spring, growing ever stronger, like an endless expanse of sea whose waters are all sweet.

His was a wonderful blend of a "complete service" together with "a service which still has another service that follows" (see Yoma 24a). There was no such thing as a conclusion to his service, the end and the beginning were interwoven; any end was simply the beginning of that which followed. His entire life was one continuous service of the King.

"HOW DOES ONE BLESS?" (Brachot 35a)

Not everyone had the privilege of praying with Rabenu Meir. He made sure that the majority of those around him during prayer were simple people, who had no idea of what they were seeing. In this manner he was able to conceal the holy flame burning inside him during his prayers. Watching him reciting a blessing over food and drink was in itself a tremendous lesson; blessed is he who was privileged to witness this.

On one occasion fruit was served at the conclusion of *a Shabbat* meal in which he had participated with some of his close confidants. He shared with them an insight into the obligation of reciting one hundred blessings daily. *Chazal* relate regarding this obligation, "Rav Chiya, the son of Rav Avya, on the Sabbath and festivals would exert himself and fill his quota of one hundred blessings with blessings that he recited over fragrant spices and delicacies." (Menachot 43b). We also find in the *Gemara*, "The one who slaughtered is the one who shall fulfill the *mitzvah* of covering the blood. There was an incident

where one slaughtered and his fellow preceded him and covered the blood and Rabban Gamliel obligated the coverer to give the slaughterer ten golden dinars. They asked, 'Are ten golden dinars imposed as compensation for seizing the performance of the *mitzvah* or for seizing the blessing that is recited over the *mitzvah*?'" (Chullin 87a). The *Gemara* concludes that it is compensation for seizing the blessing. Rabenu Meir explained that because each blessing is worth ten golden dinars, whoever completes his quota of one hundred blessings per day has earned one thousand golden dinars. On *Shabbat* when we are short of approximately twenty blessings, we make up the missing two hundred golden dinars by eating more fruits and other delicacies. This, explained Rabenu Meir, is what Shlomo HaMelech meant when he said: "The thousand silver pieces are Yours, and two hundred to the growers of the fruits." (Shir HaShirim 8:12).

An especially close follower related that more than once he had come away with the feeling that it was worth his while to journey to Ashdod just for the privilege of watching Rabenu Meir reciting the blessing "*...shehakol nihye bidvaro*" over a cup of tea. With total concentration, closing his eyes to shut out any distractions, with sublime devotion and with an emotion that was impossible to hide, he would begin his blessing, enunciating each word separately in such a way that a listener might think that he was trying to invent the words on his own.

R' Avraham Biton, who merited forming a strong bond with Rabenu Meir from the moment he arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*, describes the unique experience of Rabenu Meir reciting a blessing before drinking. Closing his eyes, he would enunciate each word with total concentration and with such a feeling of closeness to Hashem that "one watching would have thought that he was not reciting the *Shehakol* blessing over a cup of tea but rather the *Kiddush* of the *Pesach Seder*."

If we assumed that a blessing is merely a "cork" that must be removed from our mouths prior to consuming food and drink, anyone who watched Rabenu Meir make a *bracha* merited the opportunity to learn the true essence of blessings recited over food, - channeling all our worldly needs and pleasures to the One "through Whose word everything came to be" ("שהכל נהיה בדברו").

"SERVANT DURING THE DAY AND DURING THE NIGHT" (Kiddushin 15a)

Although it was possible to deduce Rabenu Meir's complete devotion to Hashem from his fulfillment of *mitzvot*, the major as well as minor, the pure of heart with a discerning eye perceived this devotion at all hours of the day and night. Any time they entered his room they could detect his purity of thought and his closeness to Hashem. Although *mitzvot* are described by the *Zohar* as practical suggestions, as six hundred and thirteen tools which facilitate man's cleaving to G-dliness and keeping the entire creation alive, true *tzaddikim* never cease cleaving to the Source of Life; their thoughts are always focused on attaining higher levels.

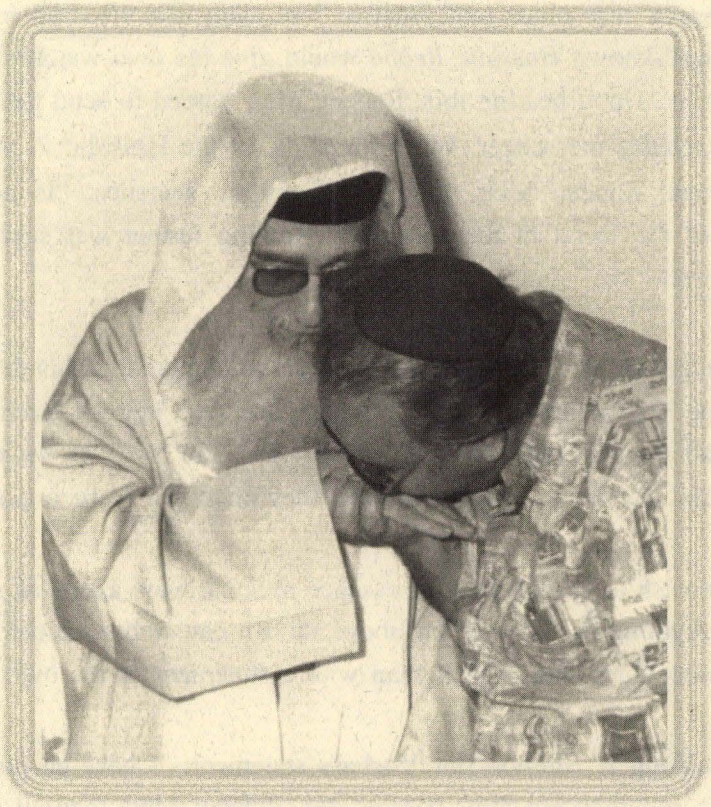
His secret contemplations so towered above the accepted avenues of thought that no one would even attempt to discover what hidden musings occupied his mind during those long periods when he sat lost in contemplation. At other times, his followers would hear an explanation of certain acts which had seemed insignificant, only to discover that this was not the case at all!

An example of this is related by R' Avraham Biton Shlit"a, who once suggested to Rabenu Meir that he sit on the opposite side of the room, pointing out that it was much more comfortable there. Rabenu Meir reacted in great surprise, "How do you expect me to sit with my back towards Jerusalem?" Only then did R' Avraham realize the many details that he took into account with each act.

In the name of the Kotzker *Rebbe*, there is a Hassidic saying that true *hitbodedut* (seclusion) does not entail hiding away in the thick of the forest, but is carried out when one is surrounded by people. Secluding oneself with one's Creator in a place distant from any other human being is very commendable, and certainly helps anyone wishing to pour his heart out to Hashem. True seclusion, however, is the ability to concentrate all of one's thoughts and senses on cleaving to the Creator, even while in the company of others. One could feel that Rabenu Meir was secluded with the A-mighty even in a room full of people. He would sit with his many callers, yet they realized that he was not really with them. His face would be radiant while his eyes were half-closed and his thoughts were soaring.

He once cited a passage from the Kotzker *Rebbe*'s "*Lahavat Kodesh*" which was a constant presence on his desk. He could not contain his excitement over this particular *vort* exclaiming, "Only one who has lived in seclusion and has detached himself from this world for nineteen years is capable of such a profound thought!" All those present would one day make the obvious comparison realizing that nineteen years would have elapsed from the day Rabenu Meir arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* until the day he left this world. Those nineteen years were spent secluded in his home. People would come and go, but this did not disturb his seclusion with his Creator – seclusion in the Kotzker style.

He was able to sit in silence for many long hours. This long silence was not a lack of action but rather signified absolute devotion to Hashem and was known at times to last for several days. He did not notice those entering and leaving his room. People would sit in front of him, feasting their eyes on the splendor of his bearing and he did not so much as glance at them. When their eyes were satiated by what they saw and their hearts started becoming ravenous for spiritual nourishment, they would rise to leave without having exchanged a single word with him. What they had observed was enough to elevate their experience even though Rabenu Meir was not really present.



"THE HOUR OF GOOD FORTUNE" (Brachot 7b)

One of his secrets that nobody was able to fathom was his preoccupation with clocks and their workings. In the drawer close to his chair were watches of all different types. From time to time he would take them out and wind the mechanisms. He never explained what he did with those watches, and nobody ever had the audacity to question him.

Only once was the window to the "sanctuary of the watches" opened and that glimpse showed that the preoccupation with watches was something profound that could not be understood by others. It happened that one of the watches stopped working. Someone offered to take the watch to a watchmaker to have it fixed. Rabenu Meir refused to part with the watch. One of those present pointed out that

there was a very pious individual in Jerusalem who repaired watches and a well-known *Hassidic Rebbe* would give his own watches to the man to fix. Upon hearing this, Rabenu Meir agreed to send the watch with a reliable messenger. When the name of the Hassidic *Rebbe* was mentioned, Rabenu Meir uttered one cryptic sentence, "Is he also aware of the secret of the watches?" Nothing further was said about the subject.

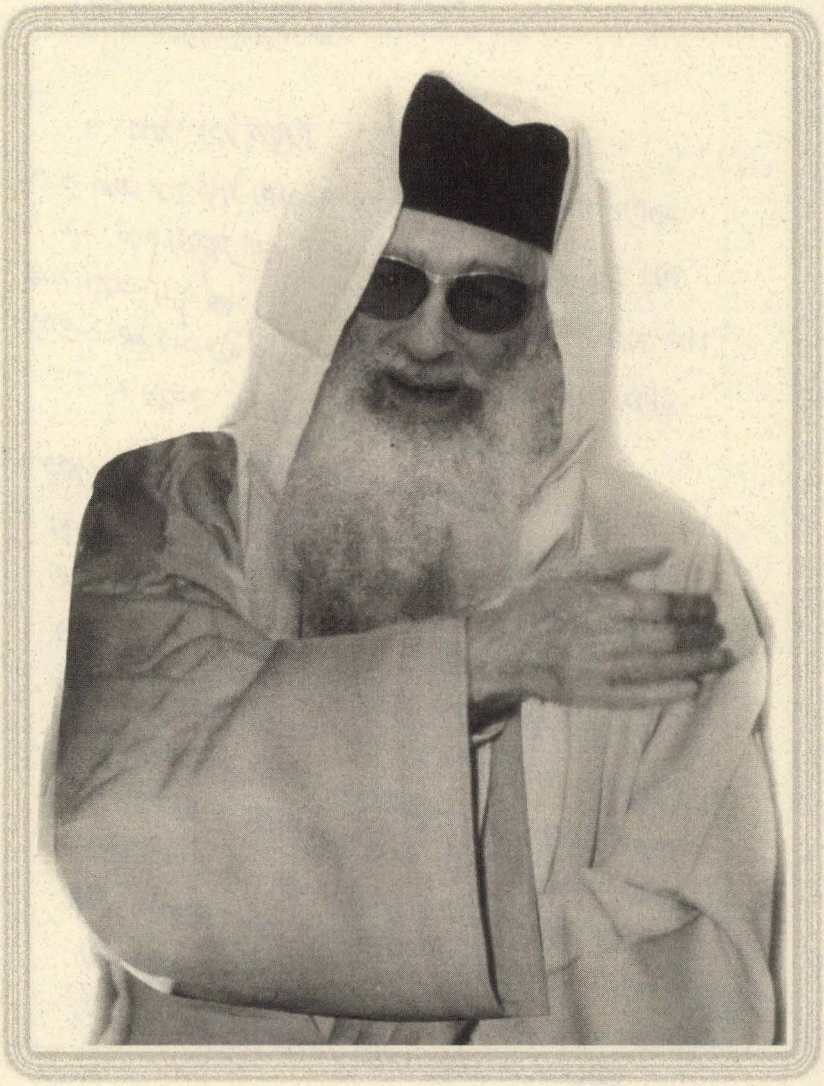
Who among us even possesses the tools to comprehend his devotion when he was in an ecstasy of holiness, his face aglow? Even those who had the privilege of being present and saw such G-dly visions would not attempt to understand what they knew would be impossible.

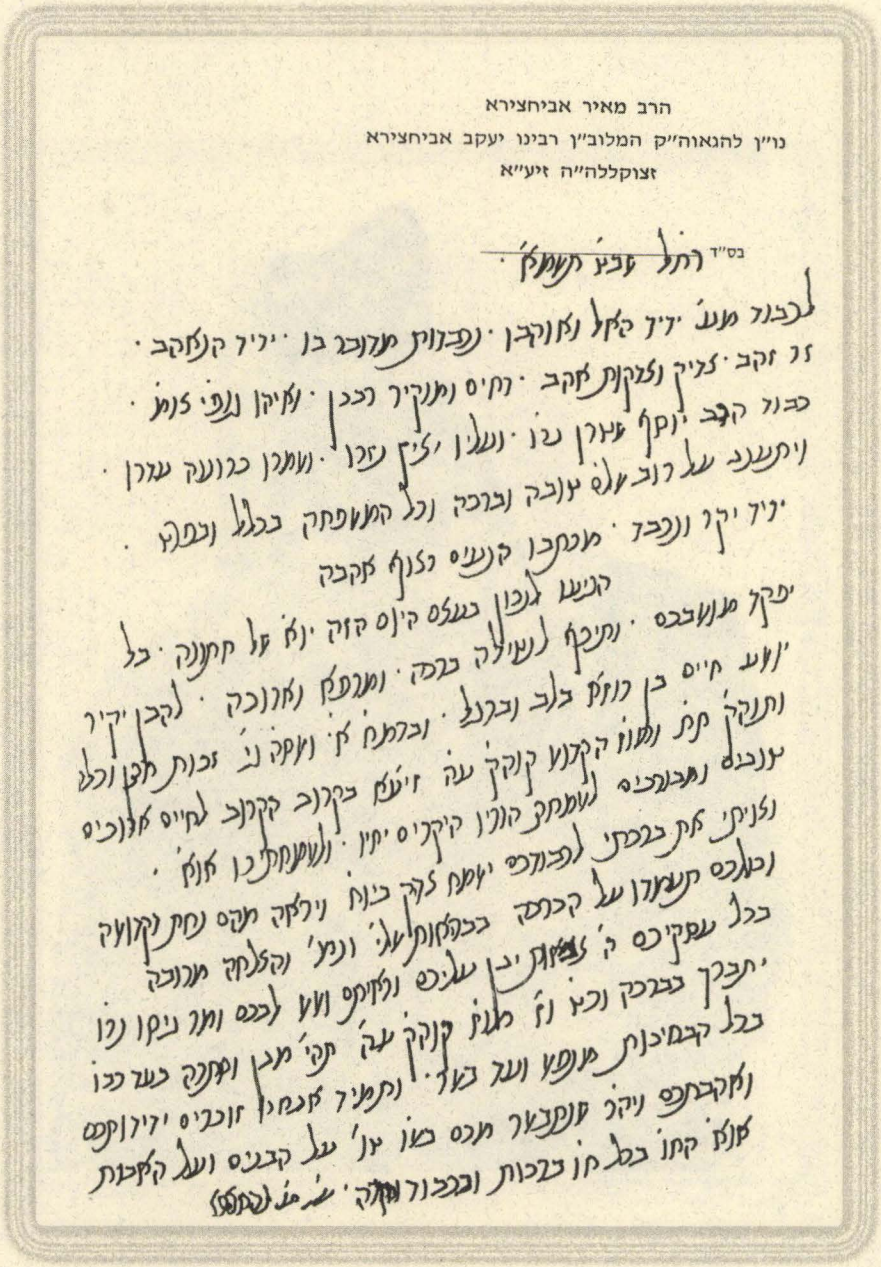
If we wish to encapsulate his essence in some way, aware as we are that everything he did was far above us, we can find no more fitting way to conclude this chapter than with a statement of his own.

Explaining R' Shimon Bar Yochai's statement: "I have encountered בני עליה and they are few" (Sukkah 45b). Rabenu Meir focused on the simple meaning of the concept of a בן עליה. He defined it as a total *tzaddik* whose entire life is one of constant ascent. He never finds himself on a downward path, never stopping along the way. This is Rabenu Meir's definition of a בן עליה as we heard from his son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, a description of the essence of a true *tzaddik* in this world.

There is no doubt that even though his conduct could not be understood, it was clear to all every day throughout his life that he was moving constantly upward.

MARAN
RABENU
MEIR
ABICHAZIRA
zy"a




הרב מאיר אביחצירא
נו"ן להגאוה"ק המלוב"ן רבינו יעקב אביחצירא
זצוקללה"ה זיע"א

Rabenu Meir sends his blessing to a follower on the occasion of the wedding of one of his children.

Rabenu Meir kept on him at all times this list of practices he wished to observe.

"HE WILL BE CALLED HOLY" (Yeshayahu 4:3)

"WHO CAN EXPRESS HIS AWESOME HOLINESS"

As we attempt to see into the awesome and holy sanctuary of Rabenu Meir, we are seized with trepidation! Anyone who has heard accounts by those who were privy to his many pious acts or even by those who saw him on an ordinary weekday, will realize that Rabenu Meir was on a level that people as lowly as ourselves cannot begin to grasp. As hard as we try, we will never be able to describe the aura of holiness that surrounded him. Even those who were privileged to enter his home felt like fledglings whose eyes were not yet open. Is there any way to describe the indescribable?

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, described his father as a "soul without a body." How can we sketch such a soul? Do we even know what the soul of an ordinary person inside his physical body looks like? From where will we gather the strength and the courage to do that which would certainly be considered brazen, perhaps even a profanation of the holy of holies?

Many were witness to his lofty acts of separation and remarkable purity, concepts which our earthly minds cannot hope to understand. Anyone who even caught a glimpse of his luminous face was left with no doubt regarding the holiness of this man, who walked among us in this lowly world, breathing the same murky air. His head, however, reached the heavens; all his thoughts were concentrated only on the A-mighty in total devotion and self-negation.

It was clear that even acts of nature which often interfere with our tranquility did not affect Rabenu Meir in the least. When the temperature in Ashdod soared and intense humidity penetrated the house from the wind blowing in from the sea, he would be sitting comfortably in his home. There were no air conditioners installed in his house and he refused to do anything that would detract from the

intense heat. When his close confidants once saw him holding the fan he had inherited from his uncle Rabbi David *Ateret Roshenu*, he apologized, explaining that he was not as strong as he used to be and was unable to refrain from using the fan.

Likewise, he would refuse to turn on a light while the sun, the great luminary Hashem provided us with, was shining brightly in the sky. Even as twilight descended, he would continue to sit in the darkness for "Hashem was his light" (see Micha 7:8 and Malbim there). He would explain that he refused to interfere with the way the Creator was guiding His world at that moment.

On the other hand, it appeared that the heat never entered his vicinity which was burning with spirituality. No bead of sweat was ever seen on him, nor did any odor associated with heat emanate from him or anything he sat on. It was as if an earthly *Gan Eden*, an orchard of holy apples was planted in his midst. A frequent visitor related that the Rabbanit had told him that there was no need to wash his clothes after he had worn them; they could simply be folded and placed in the closet as they were. Furthermore, we heard from HaRav Avraham Biton, who spent many years with him that in his later years, when someone would help bathe his holy body, the bathwater would remain as clean after use as it was before – so clean that the assistant would drink the water.

The cleanliness practiced by Rabenu Meir went beyond even the most fastidious of individuals. His clothes were always spotless and nothing ever spilled on his table. Even the tiniest amount of dirt would disturb him greatly. On one occasion he invited one of his closest acquaintances to dine with him. As the Rabbanit was serving her finest foods he detected a small stain on a fork. He immediately ordered that all the dishes be removed from the table. It was not enough to remove the one fork, nor did it suffice to remove all the silverware from the table; all the dishes had to be removed and rewashed.

One of his close devotees who merited serving him in his later years tells us that Rabenu Meir would not use a towel more than once. Let us not think for a moment that these were just high standards of cleanliness and hygiene, rather these were high levels of holiness and purity.

Now, tell me, how can we possibly hope to enter such a sanctuary?

The only way we can hesitantly come close to his sanctuary is to cite from the descriptions of household members and close confidants as they sat before him in trepidation. If we can at least succeed in recording the emotions that burned inside them as they described those days with longing and with awe, then we will know that we have done the maximum possible and that our pen has been utilized to the fullest.

DESCRIPTION OF A PURIFIER

Besides those who came to his home seeking his blessing for personal salvation were those who simply wanted to bask in his brightness that was constantly shining there. A wondrous light always shone on whoever entered the room, so long as he would not shield his eyes with "sunglasses". All one needed to do was to open his eyes as he entered and he would find himself in a *Gan Eden* on earth; one might almost believe that he was sitting in the shadow of the Divine Presence.

As you entered his home, reclining on the bed opposite the door was Rabenu Meir with a large white *kippa* covering his head and a long white robe and *tzitzit* covering his pure and holy body. Your presence would not add or detract, for he himself was not really present in the room ... his mind was focused on holy contemplations, his face glowing with a halo of splendor, in a scene that you could not possibly describe in any language. He would at times move his finger as if he were writing mysterious letters in the air. Someone once said that he

was able to detect Hashem's Name being written in the air, but can we really accept this testimony?

Suddenly he would raise his eyes and gaze at you, with a look that would pierce right through you - cutting you lengthwise and widthwise. That one glance would render you completely transparent, uncovering not only your inner being but even your hidden acts. Anyone entering Rabenu Meir's holy sanctuary realized that he was surrendering his privacy; it was the end of any secrets. The scrutiny did not end there, for his eyes would move on to the person sitting next to you. If you had the courage to remove your eyes from his and to turn your glance from his awesome countenance to catch a glimpse of the person next to you, you would get a picture of what you yourself looked like.

He rarely made eye contact with people who sat with him. Most of the time his eyes were turned downwards while he contemplated the upper worlds. For a fraction of a second he would lift his eyelids and give that penetrating stare to all those present. They would quickly concentrate on his gaze only to find that he had already withdrawn into himself.

The room would remain enveloped in silence - perhaps he would exchange a whispered word or two with one of his assistants or one of his callers. You would feel that the time had come to rise and flee – flee to anywhere the wind would carry you. The feeling of inadequacy, like someone who at any moment could cease to exist, made you wish to detach yourself from there and to return to the land of reality from whence you came, yet something inside you would shout out, "I want more". You would take a look inside yourself and discover that you had undergone a cleansing process - a feeling of purity would arise from your inner being and would overwhelm you. You would feel like crying, to purge all of your senses, you would want to elevate yourself, climb at least one rung, sure that you will

never be the same person. The desire for change would totally dominate you, and all the while Rabenu Meir has yet to utter a single word ...

On one occasion when a group of young Yeshiva students came to see him, he glanced at them saying, "Is it not a shame that you came here? The things that you have exposed your eyes to on the journey here and back do not justify anything that you will find here!" One of those present told us that at that point the first thing that entered his mind was: "Regarding the trip here I cannot say, but when it comes to the return trip, I had no desire to even look at what was happening on the street, for days after being in his holy sanctuary, your evil inclination ceases to exist."

These are not simply flowery words used by a writer searching for a way to describe events; this is a precise and accurate testimony heard in many different forms from many pious individuals who said regarding Rabenu Meir's room: "הר ה' יראה" "on this mountain Hashem will be seen" (Bereishit 22:14 – see *Rashi* who explains "on this mountain the Holy One Blessed is He appears to His people"). Anyone there could feel the Divine Presence and actually see the sparks of holy fire above his head. The physical shield would be removed, and your inner being would awaken and somehow feel that this was the core of absolute truth in the world. The innermost truth which would speak to anyone willing to listen – this feeling of having found truth could lead you to what you truly desired.

A close confidant who spent much time in his presence and who was also one of the first students of the *Maskil LeDavid Kollel* located next to Rabenu Meir's home, describes the atmosphere of fear and awe that was palpable in the room: "I recall the fear and trembling that engulfed me the first time I entered his room and saw him sitting before me. I became tongue-tied and was barely able to identify myself and state

what it was that I wished ... that same feeling of fear remained with me until my final visit to his home – and there were tens of visits in between." He described the time he brought *mishloach manot* to Rabenu Meir. No other person was present when he entered. A bare white tablecloth covered the table. Rabenu Meir was sitting on his bed staring at the opposite wall. "I sat next to him for three-quarters of an hour without my presence even being noticed. He was engrossed in his own thoughts and it was as if his eyes were nailed to the opposite wall ... I sat next to him trembling, as one gripped with cold ... for hours afterwards I could not stop trembling from the force of that feeling that enveloped me."

The one who best described the holy image of Rabenu Meir was the *Rishon LeZion* HaGaon HaRav Ovadia Yosef. Eulogizing Rabenu Meir at the conclusion of the seven day mourning period (*shiva*), he said: "I did not know him well, I saw him only once or twice and his entire being was one of dignity – the Divine Presence actually hovered over him (see Bereisht Rabba 20) – "In the book of R' Meir it is written כתנות אור (garments of light), rather than כתנות עור (garments of skin), describing Adam HaRishon's clothing. Similarly, "*Rebbi* said: 'The reason that I am sharper than my colleagues is that I saw R' Meir from behind him, and if I had seen him from his front, I would be even sharper, as it is written: 'and your eyes shall behold your teachers.'" (Eruvin 13b).

"LET THE RIGHTEOUS MAN HOLD FAST TO HIS PATH" (Iyov 17:9)

Those visiting his home were able to view the most subtle of holy acts. He would spend much time secluded in his home, hardly ever coming into contact with the light of day. Eulogizing him, HaGaon HaRav Ben Zion Abba Shaul zt"l described how Rabenu Meir would walk the streets of the town making his way to his customary immersion in the *mikveh* in honor of the *Shabbat*. Wrapped and covered, with people holding both his hands he was led to the *mikveh*

... his eyes were used only for holiness and he would never look beyond his own four *amot*[50]."

His close confidant, R' Avraham Biton, who was privileged to gain entry into Rabenu Meir's four *amot* and closely observe his acts tells us that even in the inner sanctum of his home Rabenu Meir guarded his eyes and would only walk with his eyes turned downwards. Even when he spoke to his own daughters he would turn his head in their direction yet would not lift his eyes. There were unusual circumstances in which he would permit women to enter his room. On one occasion he permitted one of his closest followers, who had sacrificed himself greatly for Rabenu Meir's benefit, to bring his wife with him during his regular visit. When he entered Rabenu Meir's room, his wife went to speak to the Rabbanit. Before taking his leave, he asked whether his wife could stand by the door and listen to his holy blessing. As a gesture of gratitude,[51] Rabenu Meir responded, "She can even enter the room." This unusual request was an opportunity for Rabenu Meir to repay the man for all he had done. A moment later he added in a whisper that could be heard quite clearly, "In any event I do not see." On another occasion, Rav Zalman Groiz, who was also very close to Rabenu Meir, tells us that one day he came to see him with his small daughter who was scheduled to be operated on the following day. He explained to Rabenu Meir that the child was very afraid of the surgery and requested whether she could stand by the door while Rabenu Meir

---

50. After he had concluded his eulogy and stepped down from the platform, HaRav Ben Zion Abba Shaul whispered to R' Yitzchak Morsiya who was very close to Rabenu Meir: "I hope that I have not omitted anything from the praises I gave Rabenu Meir."

51. It was well known that Rabenu Meir excelled in "*hakarat hatov*", gratitude. If anyone did him a favor or did any act to make him feel good, Rabenu Meir would develop a very close relationship with him and throughout his life he would repay him many times over. That same confidant who spent much time doing things for Rabenu Meir refused to receive any gifts, despite the fact that almost every *Erev Yom Tov* Rabenu Meir would insist on giving him something.

would wish her "רפואה שלמה." Upon hearing that the little girl was gripped with fear, Rabenu Meir instructed that she be brought to the room and placed next to his table to enable her to hear his words clearly and to feel better.

The following well-known story gives us a good idea of how strictly Rabenu Meir guarded his eyes.

In the year 5733 [1972/3], on a visit to France, the Baba Sali stayed at the home of his son-in-law in Paris. His return flight to *Eretz Yisrael* was scheduled via Zurich, arriving in Israel at four-thirty in the afternoon. Due to various delays, the Baba Sali left his son-in-law's home very late, leaving his passport and other important papers behind. The staff at Orly Airport in Paris permitted the entire group to board the plane even without all the necessary papers, but in Switzerland, he was not permitted to board the plane to *Eretz Yisrael*. His assistants made frantic telephone calls in an attempt to resolve the problem. A non-Jewish clerk who passed by saw the tumult that was taking place and asked what the Jewish Rabbi was doing in the airport offices. When he was informed of what was happening he began to shout: "You fools! You are preventing the great Jewish Rabbi from continuing his journey because of some piece of paper?" After he spoke, things began to move quickly and the Baba Sali was put on the next flight, with the papers to be settled in the Swiss Consulate in Israel. When they came to thank the clerk, he had disappeared before their eyes with no one having any idea who he was.

At 4:30 in the afternoon, the members of the family and his close followers arrived at the airport in Lod to greet the Baba Sali as he alighted from the plane. Among those waiting was Rabenu Meir, who, untypically had left his home, in order to honor his saintly father. When the plane landed exactly on time, the family members were informed that their leader had remained behind, but the next flight was scheduled to arrive only a few hours later. They would need to spend the next few hours waiting at the airport terminal.

Rabenu Meir spent that entire time greatly distressed by the improper dress and behavior at the airport. It was not enough for him to close his eyes, but he asked those in his company to surround him and thereby to guard his eyes from any sight while he sat on a bench in a corner. Although his eyes did not see anything, it was painful for him to remain in a place with no standards of modesty. His righteous brother-in-law *Chacham* Rav David Yehudayoff zt"l, who was with him at the time, heard him saying to himself, "Had it not been for the *mitzvah* of honoring my father, I would never have left my house. What am I doing here? Only in honor of my father am I willing to accept such suffering with love."

Several years later Rabenu Meir asked his brother-in-law, "Do you remember the time we traveled to Lod to greet my father? I have not yet completed all the necessary *tikkunim* to mend that incident."

As we leave the sanctuary, after hearing the feelings of holiness which overwhelmed the hearts of those who beheld Rabenu Meir's pure and holy visage and his outstanding conduct, let us end with a quotation from the words of *Chazal*: "He is sanctified in many ways, the Holy One Blessed is He's ways are holy, His speech is holy, His dwelling is holy, He shows His might in a holy manner, He walks in holiness, His seat is holiness." (Yerushalmi Brachot perek 9, halacha 1). Rabenu Meir, who was holy in many ways, was an embodiment of the words of *Chazal*: "ואנוהו – הוי דומה לו" "be like Him" (*Shabbat* 133b).

"HOLINESS BRINGS ONE TO DIVINE INSPIRATION" (Avoda Zara 20b)

"A JUDGE HAS ONLY WHAT HIS EYES SEE" (Baba Batra 131a)

Rabenu Meir was an angel walking on earth, for his heart was always sanctified and every holy step he took left imprints in the upper worlds. His eyes, being protected from infancy, only saw the celestial – following the Kotzker *Rebbe*'s comment on the verse, "At the image of Hashem does he gaze." (Bamidbar 12:8). Even one with human eyes, or one wearing glasses clouded by the filth of materialism, could easily discern that Rabenu Meir's outlook was not of this world.

In truth, man was created with uncanny abilities to see far beyond what the physical eyes see. A baby in his mother's womb, for example, can detect a candle lit upon his head and "With this light he peers out and sees from one end of the world to the other" (Niddah 30b). *Chazal* tell us that Adam HaRishon, prior to his sin, was able to see from one end of the world to the other (see Chagiga 12a). *Chazal* in fact liken man to the ministering angels in three ways and to an animal in three other ways. One of the ways he is compared to the ministering angels is in his ability to see (see Bereishit Rabba 8:11).

When Adam HaRishon sinned, the entire world was blemished and man's natural abilities descended to a lower level. Only one able to purify himself and live a life fitting for the upper worlds can restore the natural celestial powers bestowed on human beings. How appropriate is the following, attributed to one of the Hassidic *Rebbes*: The *Gemara* tells us: "A person does not see a liability in regard to himself." (*Shabbat* 119a): "A person does not see" – what a person actually sees is limited by what his physical eyes can see, "a liability in regard to himself" – this limitation alone can be viewed as a liability.

As we heard many times from his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira: "When you examine the root of things, you can know everything; nothing is forgotten." With this in mind, even given our own limitations, we can get some understanding of Rabenu Meir's celestial view of the world, similar to the *Amora* Shmuel having said: "I have as much expertise in the paths of the heavens as in the marketplaces of Nehardea" (Yerushalmi Brachot *perek* 9, *halacha* 3). How appropriate is the following, attributed to R' Yisrael of Ruzhin to describe Rabenu Meir. The verse states: "Who, with wisdom, can relate what is happening in the heavens?" (Iyov 38:37) – only a holy person possessing great Torah wisdom.

A quick glimpse of the person sitting opposite him was all it took Rabenu Meir to discern precisely who he was and his occupation. Not only did he know all there was to know about his visitor, but the visitor realized it very well. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, describes his weekly trips from Nahariya, where he was appointed Rav by the Baba Sali, to visit his saintly father in Ashdod: "As I entered the room, my father would take one look at me and lower his eyes. He was then able to inform me of all that had taken place in my life during that week. There was no need for me to tell him anything; all it took was a single glance."

Many frequent visitors wishing to draw from the holiness of his home in Ashdod, tell us that he was always able to pinpoint precisely what each person needed most. When prayers needed strengthening, he would speak about that. When emotion and fire ceased to burn, he would find just the right words to rekindle the flame at the exact point where it had been extinguished, – as a specialist doctor can diagnose a patient's illness without the need for any referral letters or lab test results.

On one occasion, a person had planned a visit and in the end decided to delay his trip by one day, feeling he was not yet ready to see the holy Rabenu Meir, being embarrassed by an improper act. The

following day, having repented from the depths of his heart, he felt ready to make the journey to Ashdod. Immediately upon entering, Rabenu Meir gave him a quick, seemingly insignificant, glance and said: "You could have come yesterday," meaning, "Not only do you have nothing to hide, but you have nothing to be embarrassed about."

One of those assisting him in his final years, unfortunately, had not been blessed with children. Several years had passed since his wedding and the joyful sounds of children were yet to be heard in his home. He and his wife went to several well-known doctors trying everything in their power to bring an end to their suffering. Sadly, all their attempts proved futile. One day, word arrived that a top doctor in Jerusalem had developed a new method which had already brought joy to many Jewish homes. They made an appointment to see this doctor but elected not to inform Rabenu Meir, for fear that he would not approve. They thought naively they would be able to see the doctor without his knowledge.

The day before their appointment, the assistant informed Rabenu Meir that he would not be available the following day due to personal reasons requiring him to travel to Jerusalem. He did not give the reason for his absence and those present assumed it was business-related. Rabenu Meir listened patiently and answered as if there had been no subterfuge, "You can go to Jerusalem, but not to the doctor. Rather visit the grave of the Ohr HaChaim at the top of the Mt. of Olives and pray there. With Hashem's help you will see salvation and hear good tidings."

The following day, the couple poured their hearts out by the grave of the Ohr HaChaim. A year later they celebrated the *Brit Milah* of their firstborn son.

Quite often he made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was aware of all that was happening – his celestial view did not even require him to look.

"I AM SPEAKING OF SOMEONE I KNOW"

There was an incident involving a resident of Jerusalem, who yearned to visit Rabenu Meir and one day hired a private taxi, driven by someone he had not previously known, to drive him to Ashdod. Upon arrival, the man entered the home while the driver remained in his cab resting from the journey. As he entered the house, before he even had a chance to open his mouth, Rabenu Meir turned to him saying: "Please call Yechezkel Refaeli to come in as well." The man, not knowing who Yechezkel Refaeli was, did not know to whom Rabenu Meir was referring. Rabenu Meir, however, continued: "Yechezkel Refael is the taxi driver who brought you from Jerusalem. Ask him to come into the house."

The man went out to tell the driver that Rabenu Meir was calling him. The driver, very far from the ways of the righteous, at first refused, claiming that he did not know the Rav and did not see any reason to respond to his invitation. However, when Rabenu Meir repeated his invitation, adding that the driver should be told that he had nothing to lose by coming inside, he accepted the invitation either out of discomfort or feeling left with no choice. He was handed a *kippa* and then went into the house. As he came in and sat down, it was clear that he was taken aback by the great light illuminating Rabenu Meir's holy countenance.

After a moment of silence, Rabenu Meir began conversing with the non-religious driver. Conversation is probably not the right word, for there was no need for the driver to utter even a single word. Without omitting a single detail, Rabenu Meir presented the driver with his entire family history, what his parents did for a living, his personal conduct including his less than positive habits. As if his clothing were being removed from his body, the driver actually felt the coverings being slowly removed from his secrets. While he was still under the impression of the shock that had overtaken him, Rabenu Meir began to rebuke him telling him he must open his eyes and see just where

he was. Rabenu Meir concluded by suggesting that he stop working as a taxi driver and rather assist his father who managed a butcher shop in Machane Yehuda. He promised him that if he heeded his suggestion, he would not regret it for the rest of his life.

The man erased all semblance of his past and began a new life. Today he serves as one of the more prominent *Rabbanim* in Jerusalem.

This should come as no surprise, for several times, Rabenu Meir sent people to trace people whom he had never met. He was able to describe them in such detail that a portrait could have been painted from their description alone.

The following incident was related by one of his closest confidants HaRav Yitzchak Morsiya.

Traveling to Ashdod accompanied by colleagues from Yeshivat *Porat Yoseph* in a taxi driven by a non-religious taxi driver from the Givat Shaul taxi company in Jerusalem, the driver struck up a conversation with them about the purpose of the journey and the fare. He listened intently as they described Rabenu Meir's greatness. The driver, being far from any belief in *tzaddikim*, had a hard time believing what they were saying. He declared, "If, when we arrive at our destination, the *tzaddik* will be able to repeat this entire conversation, I promise to become a total *baal tshuva*, I would also like to be served some homemade couscous," the driver added mockingly.

On arriving in Ashdod they went up to Rabenu Meir's home accompanied by the driver. The driver insisted on walking ahead of them for fear that they would inform Rabenu Meir of the condition he presented for becoming a *baal tshuva*. The moment he entered the room, Rabenu Meir turned to him saying, "I am aware of all you spoke about on the journey and I have already instructed the Rabbanit to prepare some couscous for you."

Not many days passed before the man totally repented and to this day he strictly observes all *mitzvot*, major as well as minor.

One winter day, with rain and hail pouring down outside, his confidant, R' Zalman Groiz, came to visit Rabenu Meir in his home. Rabenu Meir asked him about the stormy weather outside, adding "In London it is also hailing, as it is in Belgium" ... there was no need to verify this.

The fine details of the following well-known incident were related to us by R' Masud Malul, who was very close to the Abichazira family and who heard it from a witness who was near the scene where it took place.

The brother of one of the prominent *Rabbanim* of Jerusalem lived in London with his family which included a few small children. One day his son went missing and the search party was unable to locate him. The worried father called his brother the Rav and asked if he would be able to ask the Baba Sali to pray on his behalf. The Baba Sali was unavailable on that day, so the Rav traveled to Ashdod to see Rabenu Meir whose name was already very well-known.

Rabenu Meir listened intently, took out a piece of paper and sketched a map of a few streets. He marked the home of the Rav's brother and another location a few streets away. "His son is right there," he said, pointing to the spot he had marked on this rough map, "Tell him to go there and wait outside."

The Rav hurried to update his brother who was astounded at how clearly familiar Rabenu Meir was with the streets of London, despite his never having stepped foot in there. He hurried to the marked location and a very short while later found his son standing next to him. It became apparent that he had been kidnapped for a ransom. His son noticed that the door was unlocked and escaped.

If we think for a moment that it took great effort on Rabenu Meir's part to know what was happening in London and that he exerted the effort only when it involved saving a Jewish life, then the following story will prove otherwise. Rabenu Meir's total familiarity with places he had never entered was greater than that of local residents who had been living there for decades.

A frequent visitor arrived one day with his father-in-law seeking Rabenu Meir's blessing. The man had come from Montreal, Canada and did not speak any Hebrew. The conversation took place with the son-in-law acting as interpreter – Rabenu Meir speaking in Hebrew and the father-in-law speaking a mixture of English and Yiddish. When Rabenu Meir heard that the man lived in Montreal, Rabenu Meir reacted: "the Tosher *Rebbe* lives in Montreal ... not in the city itself but slightly outside, when you leave the city you travel down the street and pass by the cemetery on the left, turn right immediately and that street with take you to the Tosher community."

The man at first did not remember the location of the cemetery which was in fact on the street leading to the Tosher community. He began arguing with Rabenu Meir who repeated his description down to the minutest detail. Finally, as the man was leaving Rabenu Meir's home, he remembered that the cemetery indeed was on the left side of the street. He could not believe that Rabenu Meir had never visited Canada in his life.

The following incident involved an immigrant from Alexandria in Egypt, living in Ashdod, who came to visit Rabenu Meir. The conversation eventually turned to the cemetery in Alexandria and the many Torah luminaries buried there. Rabenu Meir was able to pinpoint the location of each and every grave. The man was shocked when he discovered that Rabenu Meir was more familiar with the area than he was, in spite of Rabenu Meir never having even visited Egypt.

A further incident was told to us by one of Rabenu Meir's closest confidants HaRav Avraham Biton, who resided in the Northern portion of *Eretz Yisrael* and had many acquaintances living around the entire region. A friend living in Maalot called him one day, distraught. His daughter met a young man from the area and they had become very close. Only recently was it discovered that the young man was from the nearby town of Tarshicha and was not even Jewish. The daughter refused to leave him and had already announced her intention to marry him.

Upon hearing the sad story, he suggested to the distressed father that he come with him to Rabenu Meir's home in Ashdod, for Rabenu Meir had the power to free lost souls from the clutches of the *sitra achra.* Rabenu Meir listened intently to the young woman's father and responded, "You may return home; do not worry. Already today your daughter will return and leave that non-Jew." The man returned to Maalot, arriving home to discover his daughter in floods of tears over the "spirit of foolishness" that overtook her. She realized the error of her ways and was now returning to the Jewish community. Remorseful from the depths of her heart, she gave her father her word that she would never return to those foolish ways again.

FORSEEING THE FUTURE

Among the many miracles which had become commonplace in his room was the Divinely inspired advice he was able to give. Rabenu Meir was able to see everything – not only the present but what the future had in store as well. One of his favorite confidants HaRav Yitzchak Morsiya, describes his purchase of an apartment. The builder insisted that all the money be paid by the following day or he would sell it to someone else. R' Yitzchak had yet to sell the apartment he was currently residing in. He immediately traveled to Ashdod to discuss the matter with Rabenu Meir who was like a father to him. Rabenu Meir listened intently and responded: "You will sell your

apartment tomorrow, and with the funds you will be able to purchase the new apartment." The apartment was yet to be put on the market.

The following day, arriving home in the early noon hours, he met his neighbor, the real estate agent, who told him that he was urgently searching for a two room apartment for someone in desperate need of a place to live. Before he even had a chance to elaborate, the entire sum was in R' Yitzchak's pocket. He then ran straight to pay the builder, who was shocked to hear how this man was the object of such a clear miracle.

He was once approached by a man with great difficulty earning a living. At the end of each month his debt only increased. Rabenu Meir served him a cup of tea and looked into the cup, saying: "I see here livelihood for the remainder of your life." Those present were astounded by what they heard, and some even contrived to look into the cup but they did not see anything unusual. A short while later the man was offered a position in the banking industry. Feeling the Heavens smiling down on him, he worked hard and managed to improve his situation. Today he is the manager of a major bank, with an abundance of income for himself and his family.

A young man once came to his home seeking his blessing for children. Rabenu Meir took a look at him and before the young man even had a chance to speak, he said, "Meritorious, meritorious". As the young man began speaking, mentioning his name along with his wife's, Rabenu Meir cut him off in mid-sentence saying, "I have already told you that you have merited." The young man now understood what Rabenu Meir meant at first and a short while later, good news was heard from his home.

His dear and close confidant, Rav Avraham Biton, was blessed with five daughters and no sons. His wife had asked him on several occasions to seek Rabenu Meir's blessing. On one occasion when he happened to be in Ashdod, he remembered his wife's request and went to see Rabenu

Meir and ask for his blessing. As he began speaking, Rabenu Meir cut him off saying, "You are a *talmid chacham*. Do you not realize that you are 'crying over that which is already past'? (See Brachot 54a – the *Mishna* there tells us that one who prays for something which has already taken place has uttered a prayer in vain.) Had you come at the right time I would have promised you a son." The man was bewildered, for he had no idea of the tidings awaiting him. A short while later his wife gave birth to a daughter and a year later that little girl became the sister of their first son.

To two young *Kollel* fellows who had come to see him, he related that a man came to him who had divorced his wife fifteen years earlier and was unable to find a suitable partner. "I told him," relates Rabenu Meir, "that his *tikkun* is to remarry the woman he had divorced. The man asked his first wife if she would remarry him and she refused. In the interim another woman, the daughter of a *talmid chacham*, was suggested to him. They married, divorced, and remarried. This was his *tikkun*," concluded Rabenu Meir.

His confidant HaRav Yoseph Pelavani, was reminded of a case of a noted *talmid chacham* with *shalom bayit* difficulties. The children knew that something was amiss in the home and if the marriage broke up, G-d forbid, it was they who would suffer the most. Rabenu Meir listened carefully without reacting. A moment later he instructed them to turn around the *mezuzah* which had been placed upside-down. This would restore peace and harmony to the home. It was discovered that the *mezuzah* in the parents' bedroom was indeed upside down, having presumably been put back the wrong way after the last check. They put the *mezuzah* back the right way around and life returned to normal.

One of those privileged with assisting him regularly made the journey to Rabenu Meir's home and back on his bicycle. One day, Rabenu Meir remarked: "Today you will go home on foot." The assistant was taken aback, saying that his bicycle was outside Rabenu

Meir's home, yet Rabenu Meir repeated his instructions. At the end of the day, he was uncertain whether to heed this very strange request. He had left Rabenu Meir's home without having made up his mind, only to discover that there was no air in the tires of his bicycle. The following day, when he arrived and related to Rabenu Meir the story of his bicycle which he had left at the entrance to the home, Rabenu Meir responded, "I activated salvation from Heaven for you. Had you ridden home on your bicycle, you would no longer be in this world. You have been saved from a very harsh decree."

His very dear confidant R' Yitzchak Morsiya once arrived with two students from Yeshivat *Porat Yoseph* to take leave of Rabenu Meir before their journey to Egypt to visit the grave of the holy Abir Yaakov. One of them informed Rabenu Meir that the army was making it very difficult for him to leave *Eretz Yisrael*, yet he had a great desire to visit the holy grave in Dimanhor. Rabenu Meir waved his hand dismissively. "You have nothing to fear, they will permit you to leave the country." Rabenu Meir then took a look at the others present and turned to the third young man in the group saying: "Do not bother going. They will not permit you to go in any event." When he attempted to convince Rabenu Meir by showing him the exit permit already approved by the army, Rabenu Meir insisted: "Do not go; they will not let you go. Do not waste your time for you will not be able to visit the grave."

The end of the story was that all three of them made the journey to Egypt. They all crossed the border safely. The one who did not have an army exit permit in his possession was not even asked to present it to the border police. However, as they traveled the streets of Cairo, they were stopped for a spot check at a police barricade where they discovered that the third young man had lost his passport. After great difficulty he was released from prison after the Israeli ambassador intervened and took him to the embassy in his custody. Needless to say, he never managed to make it to the grave in Dimanhor.

The following incredible story told to us by his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, involved words which at first appeared to make no sense, but in fact were a precise forecast of what was to take place over a period involving several decades.

For many years, before the great wave of immigration, several Moroccan Jews yearned to move to the Holy Land, some of them managing to fulfill their dreams.

Unlike *Aliyah* in later years which brought thousands of Jews to *Eretz Yisrael* at one time, only a few families at a time managed to leave their homeland for this long and arduous journey.

Before completing his travel arrangements, anyone wishing to move from Tafilalet to *Eretz Yisrael* would first go to seek Rabenu Meir's permission. On completing all the necessary preparations, he would arrive with his entire family at Rabenu Meir's home in order to bid him farewell. They would remain there for four or five hours with tears flowing like water and their sobs reverberating throughout the house. Rabenu Meir's children would wonder why Jews en route to Jerusalem were crying. When the children asked the emigrants why they were crying, their response would be that they were about to embark on a difficult and danger-filled journey. The family became accustomed to the fact that anyone about to move to Israel would spend half a day in their home crying.

Arriving in Rabenu Meir's home in Erfoud one day was a man he had known from his days in Midelt. The man was very innocent, his innocence being his greatest asset as well as his biggest shortcoming. He had no understanding of what was happening in the world around him, yet he had pure and sincere faith in the Creator and in the *tzaddikim* He planted in this world. He made up his mind one day to move to *Eretz Yisrael* and had come to part from Rabenu Meir. He recalled from his days in Midelt that the custom had been to arrive at

Rabenu Meir's home and cry prior to embarking on the journey. The man wished to do the same, for he certainly had something to cry about ...

A river of tears began to flow. He sobbed like someone who had just lost a close relative. Rabenu Meir, noticing that his cries went beyond those of the average person about to make this great move, asked him why he cried so much. The man answered: "Baba Meir, you have known me for a long time and I know you are aware that I am certainly not a man of wisdom. I cannot even recognize a letter of the alphabet and I have not read a single book in my entire life. I have managed until now to support myself through my business dealings with the gentiles. What does the future have in store for me ... the population of *Eretz Yisrael* is composed of teachers, who will not even take a look at a boor such as myself, I am so ignorant that I cannot even tell you whether the white page on the other side of a book's cover is the first or final page of the book ... how will I earn a living and what will I do all day?" He stopped speaking, yet the sobs continued.

Rabenu Meir turned to him saying: "Listen to me! Your ignorance is precisely what will help you manage in *Eretz Yisrael*. The fact that you cannot read and write will provide you with a livelihood for your entire life!"

The man listened and his eyes lit up. His tears dried up and gave way to a smile. He bowed as he took his leave of Rabenu Meir and was overjoyed with the blessing he had just received. From that moment until the time of his journey, he managed to convey his joy over the blessing he had received to all his neighbors. Even while traveling, the other passengers who were fearful of what the future had in store for them, detected his tranquility. He explained to them, smiling: "I have nothing to fear, for I have the *tzaddik*'s blessing in my knapsack. This will provide me with a living for the remainder of my life. It is precisely my being an ignorant fool that will provide me

with a living." The other travelers considered his words typical of one who was not ashamed to admit his ignorance and stupidity.

The man arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* and settled in Kfar Ata located between Haifa and Akko. His sons, who were great scholars, excelled in their studies and succeeded in whatever they did. One of his sons received a job at Institute 3 which was part of the "Weapons Development Network" and became well-liked by one of the leading missile engineers who appointed him as his personal assistant.

One day, the engineer mentioned to his assistant a problem they had been having for a very long time. Every day, many secret missile plans were sketched. At the end of the day, having no use for them, these plans had to be destroyed. The engineers' cupboards were overflowing and the engineers, who were already swamped with work, did not have the time to deal with this. The young man offered to destroy the documents himself, but the engineer made it quite clear that he was not permitted even to take the slightest glance at these secret papers. The young man heard and responded: "In my opinion you must appoint someone to this task who does not know how to read and write." The educated engineer answered incredulously, "Is there anyone in the entire land who does not know how to read and write?" The young man responded: "My father is such a person." The engineer could not believe his ears – how could such an ignoramus be the father of such a learned son. Despite his amazement, he passed the suggestion to the managers of the plant who were thrilled with it.

The security people were informed of his name and began investigating his background. When convinced that he was in no way connected with any enemies, they asked for his address so they might visit him in his home to assess the kind of man he was. As they arrived in his home in Kfar Ata, they found him wandering on the porch and simply staring. They spoke with him for a few moments and realized that he was as simple as could be. They gave him a newspaper which he held widthwise. They asked him how he managed to pray if he

could not read, and he responded that he had learned the prayers by heart in his youth and merely mumbled the words.

Realizing that he was the right man for the job, they offered him the position of "Destroyer of Secret Documents" of the entire institute. They gave him his own office where he would sit from morning until night, tearing and burning. At the end of each month he was compensated with a handsome salary.

After thirty years, he was forced to retire and was given a sizable pension and severance pay. He came to see Rabenu Meir's son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, saying sorrowfully, "Your father promised me a living for my entire life, and they have terminated my job." Only a few days passed before the managers of the institute asked him whether he would consider returning to work, "For they have not found anyone to take your place."

The man is still working there and all of his needs are taken care of. Everything Rabenu Meir said came true.

"*TZADDIKIM* DETERMINE THE FUTURE"

Before we conclude this chapter describing Rabenu Meir's ability to see into the distance, and before we begin the next chapter which will relate the many miracles which came about through his declarations, it would be appropriate to relate the following two stories which in a sense can be viewed as one. They shed some light on the fact that *tzaddikim* are not only able to see, but are able to cause things to happen. Both stories were related to us by his son Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira Shlit"a.

One day the Baba Sali was dining with some people who regularly came to greet him and receive his blessing. An important minister of the government entered, wishing to consult the venerable sage regarding "something of extreme importance to the entire nation." As he began to speak, one could hear the hesitation and confusion which

had almost completely overtaken him. "Honorable Rabbi," he said slowly, "the seer whom I consulted told me that she was able to see ..." The Baba Sali cut him off in mid-sentence, shouting: "it will come onto her, null and void, null and void, it will come onto her."

The confused minister who was not accustomed to such shouts and was still influenced by the black forecast told him by the seer, tried to present the situation again. "But honorable Rabbi, the seer said ..." The Baba Sali continued shouting, "It will come onto her, it is null and void."

As the minister attempted to speak once more, the Baba Sali saw that he was not satisfied and said to him: "My son R' Meir resides in Ashdod. He has expertise in such matters and he understands about forecasting the future. Go to him and tell him your story."

The minister did not wait even a moment. He parted from the Baba Sali and set out for Ashdod. There, he thought he would meet the true "expert" in matters of the future. Perhaps this R' Meir whom the Baba Sali recommended so highly would be able to deal with the difficult prophecy which the seer of the future had told him.

He made sure that this was indeed the home of the son of the Baba Sali from Netivot and went inside in obvious hesitation and confusion. He described his visit to the seer and what she had told him. Rabenu Meir did not permit him to even complete his sentence and interrupted him, shouting, "It will come onto her, null and void, null and void, it will come onto her."

The minister was shocked and began to wonder why he had even made the journey. He attempted to explain to Rabenu Meir that he did not go to just any seer who had no previous reputation. He began telling Rabenu Meir her entire "resume" and her vast experience. Many politicians and people of wealth came to her door and she prophesied with precision what is destined to happen. Rabenu Meir was not

convinced and he insisted that her terrifying prophecy would happen to her. "Null and void, it will come onto her."

The man now understood that it was not for nothing that the Baba Sali instructed him to travel to Ashdod. He asked Rabenu Meir, "Can the honorable Rav explain something to me. Today I went to see his father in Netivot and he responded with the same expression. I then came to see his honor, who repeated the same words verbatim. On the other hand, the seer is not just making things up. Her reputation and experience are certainly worth something. May the Rav tell me, who really knows the future – you *Rabbanim* or this seer who was never mistaken in her forecast?"

Rabenu Meir smiled at this innocent minister and said to him, "Let me explain something to you. This seer is aware of what will happen in the future. *Tzaddikim*, however, determine the future … now choose as you wish."

The following story goes along similar lines. One day, after Rabenu Meir had already passed away, a well-known builder came to see Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira in order to relate to him the following story and to have it explained.

"One day, I came to see your father, Rabenu Meir, in order to receive his blessing for a large project I had just been granted rights to build. I was holding the plans for the project in my hand and he asked me to show them to him. I did not bother unfolding them or to even place the pages in the correct order, after all what would a *tzaddik* such as he have to do with plans for a major construction project?

"Your father took the plans, looked them over with the speed of lightning and made a motion with his fingers signaling that he "understood". He then instructed me not to undertake the entire project, but to begin construction of only a small sector of it. He showed me on the plan precisely where I must begin building. As he finished

giving me his instructions, for which I could not understand the reason, he rolled up the plans and returned them to me.

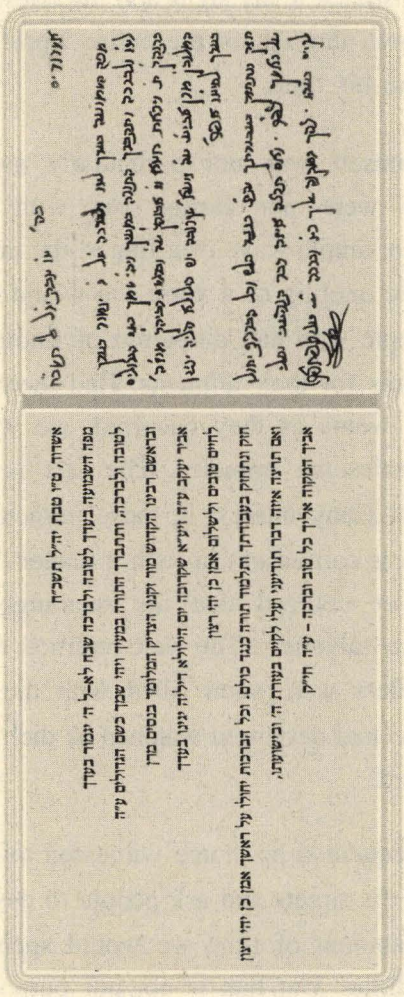
"**I** walked away with his blessing and with great excitement began the project. However, I did not heed his advice. After all he had never learned engineering and he did not have even the basic knowledge in this field. I felt that I knew better than he that building all at once would be more profitable than spreading it out over many stages. In the end it became clear that he knew better than me. I misjudged his ability and I paid very dearly for this.

"**After** completing the entire project, having invested hundreds of millions of dollars, I put in a request to the "Local Committee for Building and Planning", to receive permission to allow residents to move in. How upset I was to hear the committee's decision. Their members debated and came to the decision that I went beyond what I was allowed to build. They told me that the only way they would allow even part of the project to be occupied would be if I destroyed the other areas. Needless to say, the part I was asked to destroy was the area your father suggested that I postpone building until a later time."

As he concluded the amazing story with tears on his cheeks, the builder asked Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, "Honorable Rabbi, can you tell me how your father knew the laws of building? Did he understand the sketches? Was he an expert on the workings of the committee?"

The answer the builder received complements the previous story very well: "Absolutely not! My father had no understanding of building plans, nor did he have any idea what the committee was going to decide. The words he told you were placed in his mouth by the Heavens. The committee made their decision based on what he told them. *Tzaddikim* do not know what the future has in store, they determine what will happen."

Let us try to understand this, the answers given by *tzaddikim* do not come from any source of knowledge they have, but rather words placed in their mouths determine the future. When a person comes to a *tzaddik* seeking his blessing on any matter and hears words of encouragement, he must not think for a moment that the *tzaddik* knows the situation better and therefore offers him calming words. Rather, the words spoken by the *tzaddik* change the picture entirely.



A letter from Rabenu Meir to one of his close adherents

"ON THE MIRACLES"

"EVERY DAY A MIRACLE OCCURS"

The primary impression made on visitors to Rabenu Meir's home was not the miracles he performed for the tens of thousands who sought his blessing, clear miracles which proved beyond doubt that the Divine Presence resides among the nation of Israel. Instead, their memories generally focused on his distinguished appearance and the majestic aura that enveloped him. In private, Rabenu Meir demonstrated many signs and miracles which would have made him well-known throughout the entire world, had he not been taken from us before his time.

Rabenu Meir himself was not particularly awestruck by these miracles and they were not carried out with great pomp and circumstance. With a simple wave of a finger, the utterance of a single word, or perhaps the quoting of a verse, he would determine fates or provide life for people who had despaired of finding any relief from their troubles or cures for their ailments. Had there been someone at the time recording events as they occurred, we would have several thick volumes of awesome miracles. The fact is that none of his stalwart followers had any interest in these miracles, not to mention the fact that they were carried out in such a matter-of-fact manner that no one present ever realized that his seemingly ordinary words contained the key to salvation. The sick returned to normal life, the homes of the childless were soon filled with the joyful sounds of children, people who had despaired watched as their fate changed - all it took was one word.

Everyone who frequented his home witnessed miracles there. If we were to go out into the streets and ask people to describe the miracles he performed, the amount of time we would spend recording these events would be infinite. But that is not our purpose and that is not the task we have been asked to perform.

Let us offer this far from exhaustive compilation to serve as a modest reflection of Rabenu Meir's powers and his ability to bring about incredible salvation to the tens of thousands of Jewish souls who came seeking his blessing.

This collection of incidents combined with our description, albeit incomplete, of his holiness and lofty level, teaches us that one is contingent upon the other. It is a man's saintliness and his attainment of supremely high levels that imbue him with the power to perform miracles. "מצמיח ישועות" – making salvations flourish - cannot be viewed independently from "זורע צדקות" – sowing seeds of righteousness. The fact that one is able to perform miracles is testimony to his righteousness. It is imperative that we be fully aware of this point before we proceed.

"MANY CHILDLESS WERE REMEMBERED"

(Bereishit Rabba Parsha 53)

The number of children registered in the Ministry of Interior indicating each person's offspring is totally inaccurate when speaking of Rabenu Meir. Hundreds if not thousands of people can be registered as his offspring, those born as a result of the heartfelt blessings he bestowed upon parents who had waited many long years for children. Many of these couples had been declared infertile by doctors.

At times he would ask those seeking his blessing to undertake a positive action whose merit would stand by them in order for them to be blessed with children. One of his close confidants, Rav Yoseph Pelavani, relates that he once brought non-religious relatives who were then without children, to see Rabenu Meir. During the ride to Ashdod he spoke to them about the importance of *mitzvah* observance, in particular *Shabbat* and the laws of family purity. The relatives did not argue with him, but took little interest in what he was saying. When they told Rabenu Meir of their difficult situation, he responded

"Accept upon yourselves what he told you in the car, *Shabbat* and family purity, and I promise you that very soon you will have good news." Needless to say Rabenu Meir had never been informed of the details of their conversation during the journey.

An eyewitness described the following incident in which a young *Kollel* fellow came to him seeking his blessing for children. Rabenu Meir's response was a combination of a demand and a promise, "Grow a beard and you will have children!" A similar incident was told to us by his close confidant, R' Sholom Dov Stern, who was in his room when a young man entered seeking Rabenu Meir's blessing for children. Rabenu Meir replied as if stating the obvious, "A father without a beard! This cannot be, this cannot be, this cannot be!" The young man began to grow a beard and his children now have a father with a beard.

We heard the following chilling story from his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira.

A young scholar of the *beit midrash* of *Yeshivat Porat Yoseph* had never married because in his youth the doctors had declared that he would never be able to father children. Believing that he was not destined to do his part in fulfilling the *pasuk*, "He did not create it for emptiness, He fashioned it to be inhabited" (Yeshayahu 45:18), he spent his entire time immersed in his learning. *Shadchanim* who inquired about him backed off when informed of his problem. Even when *shidduchim* were suggested to him, he had no choice but to reject them by revealing the painful facts and medical opinions which had sentenced him to a life of loneliness.

The *Rosh Yeshiva*, HaGaon HaTzaddik HaRav Yehuda Tzadka zt"l, who held this student in great esteem and loved him even more for the great strides he took to strengthen himself, felt his pain, and would join him in prayer and try to encourage him to cast aside his sadness and the frustration which gnawed at him. HaGaon HaRav Tzadka was

a frequent visitor to Rabenu Meir's home, and he decided to send the young man to Ashdod. His hope was that Rabenu Meir would comfort him by offering him words of encouragement and trust in Hashem and strengthen his belief that "this emanated from Hashem", and therefore it must be "wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23), for none of us can understand the mysterious ways of the Creator.

Following his Rav's advice, the young man traveled to Ashdod and found his way to Rabenu Meir's home. He entered Rabenu Meir's room and sat by the small table. Rabenu Meir looked at him and the young man began telling his story. He related that he was an older bachelor learning in Yeshivat Porat Yoseph headed by Rav Tzadka ...

Rabenu Meir cut him off in mid-sentence with a blessing that could have sounded like a routine response to one who had not heard the whole story: "Do not worry! Soon you will find the appropriate partner and you will be blessed with sons and daughters." The warm blessing came like a sudden clap of thunder to the young man who was so shocked that he immediately got up and left the house. All the way home Rabenu Meir's words were ringing in his ears, like the sound of drums out of time with the melody. The drums beat out the rhythm of a joyous future while the regular tune in his heart was sad and mournful.

The young man made haste to Rav Tzadka's home to tell him what had happened – how he had gone to Ashdod on the *Rosh Yeshiva's* advice and before he had even gotten to the main point of his story, he was already promised the salvation that everyone else had given up on. Rav Tzadka was very surprised and the following day summoned his driver to take him to Ashdod.

Rabenu Meir was elated at the sight of such an important visitor and treated him with due deference. Rav Tzadka came straight to the point: "Yesterday the Rav promised a young man who learns in my Yeshiva that he would have children. He has never married because he is

unable to have children. The greatest of doctors have studied the case and come to this very sad conclusion. The young man is now in a state of eager anticipation, overcome with euphoria ... I suspect that he simply did not have the chance to tell the Rav the entire story."

Before Rav Tzadka himself was able to finish, Rabenu Meir stopped him. "He will have children," he said with great determination, leaving no room for doubt. Rabenu Meir had understood all the details and despite that, had drawn down salvation from the heavenly sanctuaries. Rav Tzadka, well aware of Rabenu Meir's abilities, instructed the young man to rely on this clear blessing and to consider *shidduchim* suggested to him. After a period of time he met his intended bride and married her.

A visitor to this man's home today will meet ten children. In the house there is also the medical file containing all the records of the definite diagnosis that he will never be able to father children.

We heard the following incident from his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira on the same day that it was related to him by the person involved:

The young man had seven daughters and was yet to be blessed with a son. His entire life he prayed for a son, yet he was granted only female blessings. He came to Rabenu Meir's house thankful to have been blessed with children, but really yearning for a son.

After he concluded his request, Rabenu Meir smiled, saying: "You will have sons." The father of seven daughters merited having seven corresponding sons.

There was a group of young *Kollel* fellows whom he blessed with children, yet the children had not yet arrived. Time after time they would come to his house and as they took their leave he would utter a *pasuk* or some words of encouragement, but they never heard from him the clear unequivocal statement that they knew he could have

given. One day five men in this situation met at an inn and decided to travel together to Rabenu Meir's house and ask him for a blessing for salvation. The five arrived at his house and one of them spoke for all. As it says, "Whoever prays for mercy on behalf of his fellow when he himself needs that very same thing, he is answered first." (Baba Kama 92a).

Rabenu Meir thought for a while and instructed them to visit the grave of the Ohr HaChaim, high up on the Mount of Olives, there to pray for children. Each man should go with his wife and pray in a different corner. He gave detailed instructions and blessed them with salvation in the merit of the great *tzaddik.*

The story was told to us by HaRav Yoseph Pelavani, who personally knew all the young men involved. He relates that four of them hurried to fulfill Rabenu Meir's word and a year later they each held a child in their arms. The fifth did not follow the instructions and is childless until today.

He was once told about a woman who had miscarried. Greatly pained by her misfortune, he said: "Why did they only turn to me after the fact?" All present concluded that had he been aware of her problem before it reached the state of requiring a "resurrection of the dead," he would have been able to help her.

In the same vein, his confidant R' Yitzchak Morsiya relates the story of a *Kollel* fellow who pleaded with Rabenu Meir for a promise that he would have children, for he saw no respite from his pain. Rabenu Meir responded: "I promise you that in a year you will have a son." The following year when the man came to inform Rabenu Meir of the birth of his son, he added that because of the mother's difficulty in giving birth, he had signed his consent for a Caesarian section. Rabenu Meir looked at him and said: "Too bad ... too bad you did not inform me of the problem when it arose, I would have ensured that you would have been able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon HaBen*, but it is now too late."

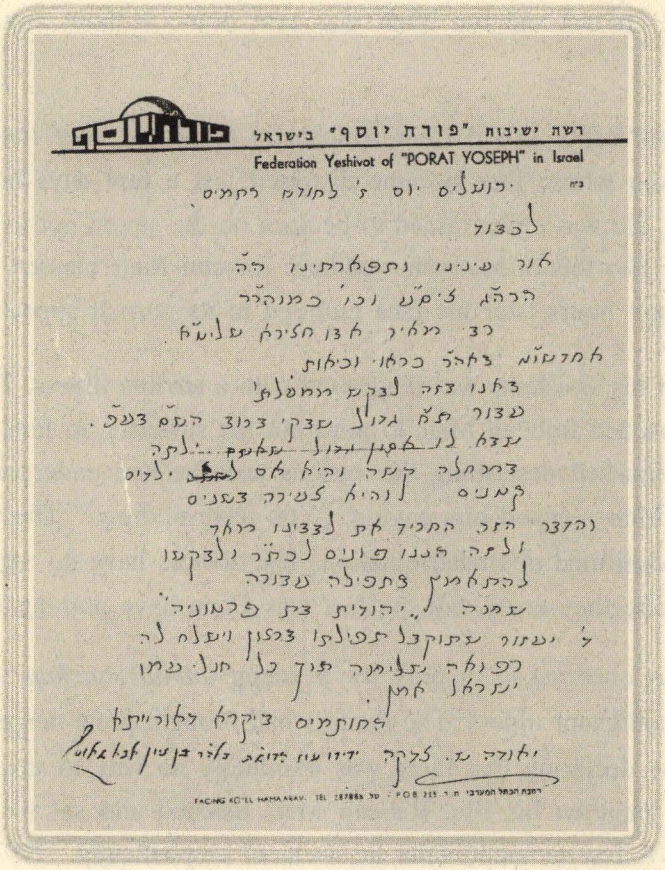
In the writings of his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, we find the following story regarding one of his attendants. The man had been married for three years without children and he came to seek his blessing. Rabenu Meir noted the despair accompanying this request and gave him a warm blessing that he would have children that year. The assistant mustered up the courage to ask: "Baba Meir! The two years I waited so anxiously, where is my reward for them?" This was an auspicious moment and Rabenu Meir therefore answered him, "The salvation will be total and will be in reward for the three years that you have waited (two years before plus one more year)." At the end of the year the young man received a threefold blessing – triplets.

Rabenu Meir himself once related to his close confidant R' Yitzchak Morsiya the story of a man from the United States who had been married for twenty-five years without children. "The man told me that this was the last stop, for his wife had threatened to take her own life. I responded: 'Why should she take her own life? Wait another year and you will merit salvation' ... in the merit of my holy ancestors they were blessed with a son."

These stories do not end here, for those who merited having children through the power of Rabenu Meir's blessing and salvation, have seen the birth of subsequent generations – the fruits of the fruits of Rabenu Meir's blessing.

HEALS ... AND ACTS WONDROUSLY

Rabenu Meir not only brought new life into the world, but he also extended the life of those upon whom it was clear that death had been decreed. The bedridden, some whom the doctors had deemed hopeless, were healed with his blessing and returned to normal life. People with incurable illnesses recovered instantly without any medical procedures. Hundreds of medical files in which the prognosis was that only a miracle could save them became just that due to Rabenu Meir's holy intervention.


רשת ישיבות "פורת יוסף" בישראל
Federation Yeshivot of "PORAT YOSEPH" in Israel

A letter from the *Roshei Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Porat Yoseph asking Rabenu Meir to pray on behalf of one of their supporters

In a eulogy marking thirty days from the time of Rabenu Meir's passing, Rav Yehuda Tzadka related an incident involving a bride who had lost consciousness immediately after her wedding. The doctors examining her threw up their hands in despair and declared that she only had a few hours left to live. The family whose joy had turned to mourning quickly made their way to Rabenu Meir's house and asked him to pray for her complete recovery. "When Rabenu Meir heard that the case involved a bride he immediately began to beseech Hashem in prayer. He promised them that with Hashem's help, by morning everything would pass and she would return home in complete health.

Morning arrived and the bride was sent home without any pain or illness."

Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira related a story involving a bridegroom whose face became distorted just a few days before his wedding. He was embarrassed to be seen on the street, not to mention to arrive like this at his own wedding. Rabenu Meir blessed him and a few short hours later his face returned to its normal appearance.

One of his assistants was diagnosed with a terrible illness. Tearfully, he approached Rabenu Meir to pour out his suffering to him. He had not yet finished describing the various tests he had undergone when Rabenu Meir stopped him saying: "You have nothing!" The next test in fact confirmed this determination. The doctors have no explanation as to where they erred, but the fact was "You have nothing!"

He was once asked to pray for a young *talmid chacham* suffering from a malignant illness. The doctors had brought great despair to his family by declaring that there was absolutely no way to save him or to even lengthen his life. Rabenu Meir listened and sat wrapped in thought. A few moments later he declared emphatically, "He will live and not die!" The man is still alive today. According to the doctors he should have died twenty-five years ago. What doctor's forecast can be stronger than a *tzaddik*'s decree which Hashem fulfills? What medical diagnosis was ever proven right when Rabenu Meir dismissed it with a simple word or wave of the hand?

On the day of his son's wedding, as family members gathered in his home, one of his close confidants, a *Hassid* and a great Torah scholar who wished to watch the preparations for the great day was at the house as well. As Rabenu Meir introduced him to various relatives he pointed to a young man. "Do you see that young man? A few years ago he was in a terrible accident and was lying in the hospital in critical condition. The doctors had given up. We went to visit him … we remained in his room for ten minutes … and there you see him."

In his younger days, while Rabenu Meir was Rav in Midelt, Morocco, a couple came to his home with their child who had suddenly become mute. They were unable to hold back their tears. Without wasting any time, Rabenu Meir gave the child a candy and instructed him, "Recite the *bracha* and eat!" The child opened his mouth, recited the *bracha* in a loud and clear voice, enunciating every word and letter. From that time on, he no longer had any problem talking.

Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates the story of a sixty year old well-known Torah sage of Moroccan descent who came to visit Rabenu Meir. The two discussed words of *Torah*. At one point a book was brought to them, whereupon the man took his reading glasses out of his pocket and placed them over his eyes. Rabenu Meir looked startled and asked, "Is it respectful to the Torah to place something between it and your eyes?" The sage apologized, explaining that his eyesight was not what it once was and that he now had to depend on reading glasses. "Take them off," said Rabenu Meir, "you do not need them!" Today, thirty years later, the man is ninety years old and he still has no need for reading glasses. He requires glasses to identify people in the street but not to study the holy books.

We received the following testimony from his close confidant HaRav Yitzchak Morsiya regarding a man who had come to Rabenu Meir's home for the first time. As usual, Rabenu Meir served his guest a cup of tea. The man took a sip from the cup and put it down, apologizing to Rabenu Meir that his diabetes forbade him to drink anything sweet. Rabenu Meir smiled and said: "You can eat and drink whatever you wish as long as you promise not to measure the sugar level in your blood. As long as you do not measure, the illness will not plague you in any way."

The following testimony we heard from one of his assistants.

The best of the doctors were unable to figure out the cause of suspicious black bumps which had appeared on the arm of the

assistant's elderly mother. Their black color raised the possibility that perhaps they were malignant tumors. The man, being a regular in Rabenu Meir's house, brought his mother to Ashdod. While the mother remained by the door, Rabenu Meir covered his eyes and the son approached and mentioned his mother's name. Rabenu Meir blessed the righteous woman and she took her leave of him. The following day with no explanation, all the swellings were gone. Medical research lost out on quite an unusual case.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, related to us the following story which he heard from a well-known Torah educator. In his youth he had broken out with severe acne that made his appearance very unsightly. The condition grew so bad that he would not leave his house, fearing the embarrassment it could cause him and the prospect of being shunned socially. His father z"l, a regular visitor to Rabenu Meir's home, suggested to his son that he join him on one of his excursions to Ashdod, where perhaps he would find a cure for his troubles. Rabenu Meir took one look at his inflamed face, placed his holy hand over the young man's face, and blessed him warmly. The following day all the pimples were gone, never to return.

His close confidant, Rav Yoseph Pelavani was an eyewitness to a case where a man came to see Rabenu Meir seeking a blessing for an end to terrible headaches that had plagued him for a long time and for which the doctors had no solution. Rabenu Meir gave him a glass of *araq* to drink and the headaches ceased instantly.

One of Rabenu Meir's close followers was ordered by the family doctor to take his daughter to the hospital. Her ears and the surrounding area were filled with pus and the doctor suspected meningitis. Before bringing her in for extensive tests, he stopped at Rabenu Meir's house to receive his blessing. Rabenu Meir gave a dismissive wave indicating that they should pay no attention to what the doctor had said and blessed the man that his daughter would be all right.

When the man arrived at the emergency room and showed the admitting nurse the urgent referral letter written by the family doctor, she immediately summoned the resident to examine the child. The doctor checked the girl's ears and immediately called another doctor. The father saw them conferring and sending an urgent message for the department head to come immediately. We can imagine what the father was thinking as he observed the doctors debating their diagnosis.

After the senior doctor had examined the child, the three doctors approached the father and asked him about the referral letter sent by the family doctor. "You must understand," the department head spoke while the other doctors nodded their heads in agreement, "she writes that she sees pus in the entire ear region and beyond, which certainly raises the suspicion of meningitis. We, however, do not see anything. I cannot tell you where she erred, but in any event the young girl is as healthy as can be ... perhaps she had a stiff neck or something ... in any event there is no suspicion of meningitis."

One close confidant told us about his daughter who had suffered from an illness since the day she was born. Her pain was great and the parents' distress at the sight of their baby's torment cannot be described. One day, when she suffered yet another attack, the father made the trip from Bnei Brak to Ashdod to meet Rabenu Meir and ask for his blessing. He had not even finished telling the story when Rabenu Meir responded, "Go in peace, she will no longer suffer from this illness!" When the man arrived home, he asked his wife to examine their little daughter. The examination revealed that the illness had completely disappeared without any medical intervention and without even a process of convalescence. Rabenu Meir did not need medical processes. "He spoke and it came to be" (Tehillim 33:9).

His confidant, Rav Yitzchak Morsiya relates the story of an acquaintance of his who traveled with a few young *Kollel* fellows to visit Rabenu Meir, wishing to behold his radiant countenance and to

receive his blessing. From the moment he sat down, the man noticed that Rabenu Meir was paying no attention to him at all. Suddenly Rabenu Meir asked one of the people from his group, "Why does this man not grow a beard?" The man responded that his friend was unable to grow a beard and his face had therefore remained as smooth as that of a child. Rabenu Meir then turned to the smooth-cheeked man and asked him, "If you were able to grow a beard would you be willing to promise me that you would not touch it?" When the man gave a positive response, Rabenu Meir said: "Beginning today you will have a beard." Half an hour later the man felt a sensation as if his face were being pricked with pins. That very day the hairs of his beard began to grow. A few days later he came to show his beard to Rabenu Meir, who took one look at him and said, "Enough, you do not need any more." Needless to say, until this day his beard has not grown any further.

A well-known incident involved a young girl from a respected family who got into dire straits due to a very serious psychological difficulty. HaRav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the *Steipler* had referred the parents to Rabenu Meir in Ashdod. When she was brought to Rabenu Meir's home he asked her to drink from a glass of water that he poured for her while he showered blessings on her and on her parents. The parents related: "That simple cup of water which Rabenu Meir poured accomplished more than the best doctors and their medicines." Does anyone really think that Rabenu Meir's cup of water is simply a cup of water?

The story does not end here. When Rabenu Meir passed away on 17 Nissan 5743 [31st March 1983], the girl's situation deteriorated. The tranquil life she had known was over and she began to suffer from delusions. Her parents, remembering what the girl had gone through, hurried that very same day to the home of the *Steipler* to tell him that the *tzaddik* had left this world and his blessing had gone with him. The *Steipler* responded, "Wait until the conclusion of this day of his

passing and then we will see what we can do." The following day, the *Steipler* assembled a *minyan* of *Kollel* fellows at his home and sent them to Rabenu Meir's grave on the Mount of Olives with clear instructions. That very same day the girl's illness passed, never to return. She eventually had the merit of building a Jewish home and raising a righteous family.

Rav Avraham Biton was a member of Rabenu Meir's inner circle. His father earned his living by working for the Jewish National Fund. One day he was seriously injured when the car he was in drove over an old mine in the Galil. The doctors looked at his shattered foot and informed the family that there was no choice but to amputate the lower half of the leg in order to save the rest of the body from the spread of gangrene. The son, who never made a move without first consulting Rabenu Meir, immediately sent one of his brothers to Ashdod to ask Rabenu Meir what they should do in light of the doctors' recommendation. Upon hearing of the tragedy Rabenu Meir took out a bottle of water from his closet and sent it with the son instructing him to rub some of the water on to the injury. As the brother was leaving, Rabenu Meir called out to him, "There is no need ... they should not do the surgery."

The son returned to the hospital in Nahariya and immediately rubbed the water on to the shattered leg. The following morning, when the doctors came to assess his condition, they were surprised to hear from the family members that they were vehemently opposed to the surgery. The doctors tried to convince them otherwise, explaining that they were placing their father in grave danger. The family, for their part, told the doctors about Rabenu Meir from Ashdod who with a simple word determines life and death, even for a patient lying two hundred kilometers away. The doctors quickly realized that just as they had never heard of *tzaddikim* such as these, who take upon themselves such decisions, there are disciples who will not deviate one iota from the instructions of the *tzaddik*, even if they appear illogical.

Accepting the family's wish, the doctors examined the injured leg in order to decide how to lessen the pain and exposure to infection. Shouts of astonishment were heard from the doctors when they saw that the leg was in much better condition than it had been the day before. A miracle had occurred right before their eyes and they were unable to contain their emotions. The leg eventually healed entirely and many years after the accident the man was still walking on it.

Rav Yitzchak Morsiya testifies about the following incident at which he was present.

Eight days prior to Rabenu Meir's passing – on the 9th of Nissan 5743 [23rd March 1983] – the son of a leading Torah luminary was sent by his father to Rabenu Meir's home to arouse mercy for a critically ill little girl for whom the doctors had given up all hope. The man persistently pleaded with Rabenu Meir for his blessing, having been instructed by his father not to leave Rabenu Meir's home without achieving salvation for her. Rabenu Meir tried to decline, apologizing that his powers were no longer what they had been and that he was no longer able to perform the acts of salvation he had been capable of in the past. He supported this with a play on words on the *pasuk*: "We had indeed come down originally to buy food" (Bereshit 43:20) and explained "It was our desire for food that made us come down from our level." The son, however, loyal to the wishes of his father, was determined to carry out his mission.

Seeing the man's insistence, Rabenu Meir asked him to write the girl's name, Devorah, on a piece of paper and hand it to him. Rabenu Meir took the piece of paper, and placed it on the table before him. He rested his head in the palms of his hands and studiously read the piece of paper for a few long moments. Suddenly he called out in a loud voice, "Awaken, awaken O Devorah! Awaken, awaken, utter a song" (Shoftim 5:12) citing from the song of the prophetess Devorah wife of Lapidot. Precisely at that moment the young girl opened her eyes and returned to the land of the living.

We recorded the following account from the testimony of the man to whom it happened. While a small infant he was diagnosed by the doctors as suffering from celiac disease. His parents were told that he should not be given any food containing wheat. For three years the child struggled with keeping to these limitations and his parents were worn out from searching for the appropriate food for him. When they had reached their breaking point, the father and son traveled one spring day to Ashdod seeking Rabenu Meir's blessing. Rabenu Meir heard the story and said: "*Pesach* is approaching ... the boy will eat from the Afikoman, with Hashem's help he will return to full health." The Seder night arrived, and the family spent little time on Maggid and greatly shortened their Shulchan Orech. With great emotion they handed the child the Afikoman. He ate it and was never bothered by wheat allergy again.

The following incredible story was told to us by the person involved in the case, Rav Sholom Dov Stern from London, who had the privilege of being one of those closest to Rabenu Meir.

He had just left Ashdod for Jerusalem after visiting Rabenu Meir, when a man arrived at Rabenu Meir's house. He had wanted to hitch a ride with Rav Sholom Dov to Jerusalem but had arrived too late. The man, whose Hebrew was not fluent, asked Rabenu Meir whether the man (Rav Sholom Dov) was "still with us" ... when he heard that he had made the trip alone, the man left the house and went on his way.

The following day, Rav Sholom Dov was driving on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway and was involved in a very serious accident. A heavy vehicle hit the car in which he was traveling with an impact that could easily have killed the passengers. The mobile Intensive Care Unit brought Rav Sholom Dov to the hospital in critical condition. The family who were well aware of his close connection with Rabenu Meir and the great love Rabenu Meir had for him, immediately dispatched one of their members to Ashdod to inform Rabenu Meir of what had happened.

The relative arrived in Ashdod unfamiliar with the route to Rabenu Meir's home. While searching for a familiar face to point out the way to him, he suddenly found himself standing in front of Rabenu Meir's house and there was Rabenu Meir sitting in a chair in the street, waiting together with one of his followers. The man approached Rabenu Meir and began to describe the injury. At this, Rabenu Meir's face lit up with joy and he exclaimed "Baruch Hashem, Baruch Hashem!" and invited the man up to his home.

They entered the house, signs of great emotion and joy clearly evident on Rabenu Meir's face. The guest tried to tone down the joyous reaction by explaining that his relative was still in need of great salvation. He was lying in a hospital bed in critical condition.

Rabenu Meir responded: "Yesterday he was here with me and he took his leave to travel to Jerusalem. After he had left, someone came to ask if he was "still with us" and I became terribly frightened at this ... I was so worried I could not sleep the whole night. I could see that there was a decree against him ... thank G-d it turned out to be this ... now, I am convinced that he will heal and return to full strength."

The following day, Rabenu Meir traveled to Shaarei Zedek hospital in Jerusalem to visit the injured man. He entered the ward and remained next to the patient's bed for few moments, in the words of *Chazal* "He entered the place that he had entered and stood on the place that he had stood." (Yoma 53b). A few days later the miracle became obvious, as R' Sholom Dov was released from the hospital. With the exception of a few bruises he had totally recovered.

Immediately following his release from the hospital he traveled to Ashdod to share his joy with Rabenu Meir, having first informed Rabenu Meir of his intended arrival. Luck was not with him and a flat tire delayed his arrival by two hours. Rabenu Meir, who impatiently awaited his confidant's arrival, appeared very anxious about the delay.

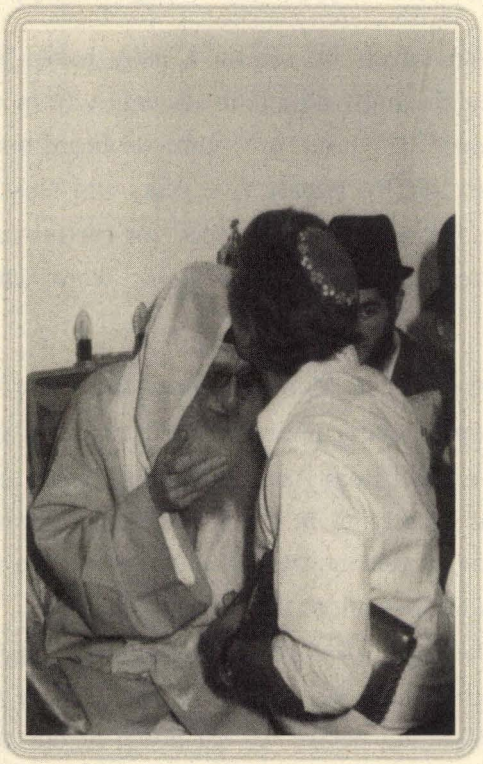
However, when he eventually arrived and related what had taken place, Rabenu Meir responded: "I waited for you, but I did not fear that you had been in an accident ... you will never again be in an accident."

Rav Stern, who travels by car on a daily basis, was never again involved in even the most minor of accidents, from the time of this incident in Tamuz 5738 [July 1978] until we heard his story in Kislev 5763 [November 2002] – twenty five years and tens of thousands of kilometers later. He never had any need for car insurance ... is there any greater insurance than Rabenu Meir's word which never goes unanswered?

At times, when Rabenu Meir felt especially close to those around him, he would speak about miracles that he himself performed. Such was the case of a child from Ashdod who had fallen from the window of her home and was lying in the hospital in a vegetative state. The girl's father came to Rabenu Meir's home with tears streaming down his cheeks, in utter despair at the doctor's diagnosis. "I gave him my word that on the night of *Rosh Hashana* the young girl would be seated with them at the table, and so it was, *Baruch Hashem.* On the night of *Rosh Hashana* before we sat down to our festive meal, the father came with his daughter to show me the great miracle that had taken place."

Rabenu Meir told the following incident to his close confidant Rav Yitzchak Morsiya. A child who had suddenly become mute was brought to him. "I called out into his mouth the verse: 'I create the speech of the lips: 'peace, peace, for the far and near' said Hashem, 'and I will heal him.'" (Yeshayahu 57:19). Three days later, his speaking ability was completely restored." When Rabenu Meir saw the great impression that his words had made, in his modesty he hastily played down the miracle. "The Kozhnitzer *Maggid* also healed a child who had lost his ability to speak by citing this *pasuk* with all the appropriate intentions and concentrations. We do not know how to concentrate properly at all. We only read the *pasuk* having in mind

that it should be with the intentions of the Kozhnitzer Maggid and thank G-d, he was healed."



"HE SPOKE AND IT CAME TO BE" (Tehillim 33:9)

Not a single word of his went unanswered. Anyone who received his blessing, even for something insignificant, could be certain that the blessing would bear fruit. Until his final years, his blessings were promises coming from someone completely certain of the forthcoming salvation. There was a period of time in which he stopped making promises. His confidant Rav Yitzchak Morsiya tells us that Rabenu Meir's brother-in-law *chacham* David Yehudayoff (son-in-law of the Baba Sali) told him that the Baba Sali made him stop promising salvation, for "in the heavens there is uproar over the fact that you intervene too much with what happens up above." A very short while later, R' Yitzchak saw this for himself when he pleaded with Rabenu Meir to promise

salvation for a young *Kollel* fellow whose wife was diagnosed with a malignant tumor. When R' Yitzchak refused to back down, Rabenu Meir sighed, "I cannot promise ... my esteemed father does not permit me to promise ..." His words implied that salvation had already been given.

Miracles were seen even by those who did not suffer from any particular problem or malady, but who simply wished to forestall potential catastrophe. Those able to discern the fine nuances of his words could understand when they did not imply an open and clear miracle, and realize that the decree had already been issued and the King's loyal servant was not able to go against the King's decree.

Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul zt"l stated at Rabenu Meir's funeral that being a frequent visitor to his home[52] afforded him the opportunity to analyze Rabenu Meir's prayers and blessings closely. "I would listen carefully to his words. When I heard him give a complete blessing then I knew that this person would merit a total salvation, but when he avoided praying for an individual or he prayed in an offhand manner, I knew that that person would not merit salvation."

Another testimony was cited during a eulogy delivered by HaGaon Rav Zvi Karelinstein, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Grodno in Ashdod who regularly visited Rabenu Meir and was present when this incident took place on Chanukah 5743 [1982]. Some petitioners had come to Rabenu Meir for a blessing in the name of their relative, a man who was not yet thirty years old who had become very ill. "In the middle of his blessing, Rabenu Meir turned to me with a mournful voice and said, "It happens sometimes that a young man leaves this world before

---

52. HaRav Yoseph Pelavani, who was very close to Rabenu Meir, told us that he was present when Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul arrived at the hospital to visit Rabenu Meir. After Rav Ben Zion took his leave, Rabenu Meir said, "One can detect from between his eyelashes that he is a great man." Rabenu Meir once told his dear and close confidant, Rav Yitzchak Morsiya the following about Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul: "Many great people have come to see me, but a man such as he has never stepped foot in my house ... a human being such as he? Incredible!"

his time." I was shocked for this was not his usual manner. He loved to comfort, encourage, and support. Could such words have come from his mouth? Less than thirty days later I heard of this man's passing."

Another story involved someone who was very close to him and was ultimately granted the privilege of joining his staff of attendants. A serious problem arose and he needed a *yeshua*. The man could think of no simpler way of dealing with the problem than to tell Rabenu Meir about it. Anyone regularly present at Rabenu Meir's home did not need to believe in miracles, for in Rabenu Meir's room belief was so real that it could be touched and felt. One could say that the word אמונה stood for נפתחו השמים וראיתי מראות אלקים – "The heavens opened and I saw visions of G-d." (Yechezkel 1:1). However, when he approached Rabenu Meir seeking his blessing, Rabenu Meir responded: "Is it not enough that you have the privilege of catering to my needs? You should know that this privilege alone is sufficient for you to enter the upper world." At these words the man realized that he would not merit salvation.

An acquaintance of his living in Ashdod told him that his son had studied to be a scribe and he was now ready to take a quill in hand and to begin writing *sifrei torah, tefillin,* and *mezuzot* for a living. Rabenu Meir responded: "Tell your son not to become a *sofer* – it is not for him". The "signed and sealed" decree was relayed to the son. After a period of time, however, the son felt that Rabenu Meir's words had "expired" and he decided to begin writing. The following day he organized his desk and chair, sharpened his quill, and dipped it in the inkwell. At that very moment his hand suddenly became paralyzed and he was unable to move it. Gripped with fear, embarrassment covering his face, the son immediately hastened to Rabenu Meir's home to beseech his help for the trouble that had befallen him. Rabenu Meir, as if fully aware of all the facts, responded: "Did I not tell you that writing is not for you?" Seeing the severity of his punishment for

having taken Rabenu Meir's words lightly, the man promised never again to violate his directives, and he was cured. The first thing he did with his hands once they were "released" was to gather all the writing utensils and throw them into the garbage.

To a very dear follower who complained of his difficulties earning a living, Rabenu Meir said, "Why do you not ask your wealthy aunt who lives in Teheran to help support you?" The young man responded that, knowing his aunt very well, he could say without a doubt that there was no chance of her agreeing to do so. Despite this, Rabenu Meir instructed him to write to her. Her answer was not long in coming, precisely as her nephew had predicted. "I have no money," wrote the aunt from distant Teheran, whose citizens at that time were living in peace and tranquility under the Shah Rezah Palawi. Upon hearing the aunt's response, Rabenu Meir was displeased and he answered, "It will be just as she said. Her words will travel up to the Holy Throne." The tranquil days in Iran soon came to an end. When the wicked Ayatollah Khomeini usurped the throne, Jewish assets were confiscated and very few managed to salvage something from the bitter enemy. The assets of the aunt and her family were among the first to be confiscated before they had a chance to hide it or to transfer it to a more secure country.

When Rabenu Meir first arrived in Ashdod the city was spiritually desolate. Additionally some residents were unable to tolerate the arrival of *bnei Torah* and Hassidim and other pious individuals to their neighborhood. There were even a few who attempted to disrupt their lives. Rabenu Meir's attendant testified that one *Shabbat* one such neighbor went out and started up his motorcycle and began riding back and forth noisily targeting the street beneath Rabenu Meir's window as he sat to eat *seudah shlishit* with a few of his disciples.

After the motorcycle had made a number of such meaningless clamorous circles beneath the window someone pointed out that the noise was no mere coincidence, but rather a deliberate act aimed at

causing a disturbance. Rabenu Meir responded, "He will no longer disturb!" Less than a minute later the sounds of the motor ceased. When they looked out of the window, they noticed the neighbor standing by his motorcycle desperately attempting to bring it back to life. His hands were red from the hard work and his legs were tired from stepping on the starter pedal so many times. Tears streamed down his cheeks for fear that he had lost his precious motorcycle. What the man was not aware of was that his belongings were being forced to cease working on *Shabbat.*

The following incident took place one *Shabbat* morning. As Rabenu Meir was returning from the *mikveh* accompanied by his young son, he noticed one of his neighbors, a man by the name of Aharon, trying to make himself inconspicuous behind a tree on the other side of the street. Rabenu Meir said to his son, "Aharon is waiting for me to pass by without noticing him so that he may drive his car to the beach. Go over and tell him in my name that today is *Shabbat.*" The young boy approached the neighbor and repeated Rabenu Meir's words to him. Once Rabenu Meir entered his house, the man heaved a sigh of relief for now he could do as he pleased without attracting the attention of his holy neighbor. What he did not realize was that he could not hide these thoughts from Rabenu Meir.

As soon as the sound of the engine was heard, Rabenu Meir raced down the steps of his home. Signaling with his hand for him to stop, he called out to the driver, "...and Aharon was silent" (Vayikra 10:3), and lo and behold Aharon's car came to a halt in the middle of the street. There, the car remained until the conclusion of *Shabbat* with its owner standing at its side, relating the story which the silent car was unable to tell.

The true meaning of his words was not fully understood when he issued negative decrees and even less when he used them for blessings bringing about salvation.

He once participated in the funeral of the son of an acquaintance –

a soldier who had been killed in battle. The *Chevra Kadisha* worker who took care of the burial carried out his work with great devotion. Rabenu Meir so approved of what he saw that after the funeral he approached him, telling him that in the merit of the special care he had demonstrated for the deceased, he would derive great *nachat* from his descendants. The man, who had never before seen Rabenu Meir nor even heard of him, paid no special attention to the blessing of the unknown distinguished-looking Jew. If you wish, however, you can ask all his friends and acquaintances about the special offspring he raised and the true *nachat* he derived from his children.

At the end of his days, when he was cared for by his personal physician, the doctor told Rabenu Meir about his wife who was expecting their sixteenth child, asking that he pray that she have an easy birth. Rabenu Meir warmly blessed him that everything should go well and easily. A while later, after Rabenu Meir had already left this world, the doctor met R' Sholom Dov Stern and he said to him with great excitement, "I am a doctor with many years of experience. My wife has given birth to sixteen children. Believe me never in my entire life have I witnessed a birth as easy and smooth as this one."

Whatever came forth from his mouth came to be! He decreed and the heavens carried out his words!

Even we, with our extremely limited ability to comprehend, can crown him with the title "Man of G-d", as we learn from the incredible description the Midrash gives us of Moshe Rabenu: "Why was he called the man of G-d? Just as when a man wishes to nullify his wife's vows they are nullified and when he wishes to uphold them they are upheld, in the same manner Moshe Rabenu tells the Holy One Blessed is He: 'Arise Hashem, return Hashem.'" (Midrash Shocher Tov 47).

SHARING IN THE SUFFERING OF THE JEWISH NATION

If we wish, despite our low level of understanding, to try to plumb the depths of Rabenu Meir's miraculous acts and to actually

comprehend what was at the root of the salvation which he provided for those seeking his help, we must understand that his ability to bring about salvation was not only due to his being able to effect heavenly processes, but he had an unbelievable and genuine empathy for the pain and suffering of his fellow Jew, and perhaps this too was an agent in his being able to bring about miracles.

It has been said by sages throughout the generations that when trouble visits a Jewish family, the pain and suffering extend to anyone with some connection to the afflicted ones. Family and friends from near and far find themselves pained by the suffering and sharing the burden of it as well. The Creator who acts with His creation in a very precise and meticulous manner takes into account not only the suffering brought upon the troubled individual himself but even upon those indirectly affected. He even gauges the precise level of pain and suffering of each of these people, as the *pasuk* states: "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous." (Tehillim 19:10) to teach that the truth of Divine Judgment is exact, taking into account the pain of each person concerned. "The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He. Corruption is not His." (Devarim 32:4-5). Even when He is meting out judgment He is righteous and fair and there is no corruption in His judgment.

We learn from here that when suffering is decreed upon a Jewish person, it is not unusual to find others tangentially affected by his suffering. Those who would call on Rabenu Meir, without realizing, dragged him into the "circle of sufferers" by relating their story to him. This actually was the beginning of the cure. Hashem, by teaching us to go to the *tzaddik* to beseech Hashem for mercy, has provided us with the cure before the ailment even strikes.

Anyone who witnessed Rabenu Meir's reaction when the name of a sick person was mentioned to him, who saw how he would feel the pain and suffering of the other, will never be able to erase that picture

from his mind. He would lend a listening ear and then place his head in his hands or down on the table. When he raised his head, the pain on his face was so visible that those in the vicinity were seized by suffering as well.

One of his confidants, who closely followed events that took place in his house, provides us with an illustration of this point as he describes the spectacle which took place time and again. Whenever people would come to see him to ask him to pray for a close one in need of salvation, they would not part from him without begging his forgiveness for the pain they might have caused him. His tangible pain could not be ignored.

He would greet warmly and bestow heartening blessings on brokenhearted and despairing souls who came to unburden themselves to him, until it became clear that their burden had lightened. It was only after they had left, their footsteps considerably lighter, that those remaining behind would detect a change. Rabenu Meir would be enveloped in sadness and concern, sharing in the pain and suffering of his fellow Jew to the extent that he was unable to eat. "How is it possible to eat when Jewish people are suffering?" he would say as his sighs filled the room.

He once told this story to one of his followers. A number of years earlier a young man had come to see him. He had been married for a while and he had not yet merited building a family and he requested that Rabenu Meir bless him with children. "I felt so badly for this young man that my prayers caused a storm in the upper worlds – however, he has never come to inform me of any good news and I have no way of knowing whether my prayers were answered. His suffering pains me so that I am unable to rest." His attendant however had no way of knowing the name of the man involved or his current situation.

A few days later a man came to call on Rabenu Meir, bringing with him a note containing the name of his son who had been born a few

years before. The child was suddenly taken ill and the doctors were unable to diagnose the source of his illness. Rabenu Meir picked up the note and read the name of the child. Suddenly his eyes lit up with joy and he proclaimed, "I see that you have merited salvation ... thank G-d Hashem has not withheld His kindness from you ... and here I was certain that you were still childless ... a great rock has been removed from my heart ... thank you for coming to tell me."

The bemused man was at a loss. He felt exceedingly uncomfortable at the anxiety he had caused Rabenu Meir, but his present worry about the condition of his child was more pressing. Hesitantly he stammered, "Let the esteemed Rav please read the note about the child He is in great need of heavenly mercy, he has taken ill and the doctors do not know what to do for him ... they fear that perhaps nothing can be done ..."

Rabenu Meir looked at the young man with shining eyes and waved his hand dismissively. "He has nothing wrong with him and he has no need for any blessing. The heavens had mercy on me, they realized my pain at not knowing that you had been blessed with a son and they simply searched for some way to inform me. What did they do? They brought an illness upon your son so that you would have to come and inform me that you indeed have a child and that I should stop worrying. Now that I know this, the reason for the illness no longer exists and there is no reason for him not to return to full health very soon."

We can learn from this incident how deeply Rabenu Meir felt the pain of the young man in need of Hashem's salvation – to the extent that even years later he still carried that man's pain in his heart. No less impressive is the effect that Rabenu Meir's pain had on the heavens, to the extent that an illness had to be inflicted upon a young child in order to assuage Rabenu Meir's worry. The Creator does not lack other means by which to inform Rabenu Meir. Apparently it was desired in Heaven that we take note and learn from this incident.



To the countless stories of miracles we have presented, we can add the following saying of the *tzaddikim* explaining the verse: "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything (בכל)." (Bereishit 24: 1): "Avraham Avinu, who was the pillar of kindness in the world, was so interested in the good of his fellow human beings that he even prayed on behalf of the wicked people of Sodom. What could he possibly be blessed with? בכל (which can also mean "with everyone"), when he sees everyone being blessed with heavenly mercy and salvation, this is the greatest blessing he can receive."

Rabenu Meir was satisfied with very little and was able to live with his own pain, suffering in silence. What he could not live with, however, was the suffering of others. He would forget about himself and pray to his Creator for the sake of others until he was able to bring about salvation – miraculous salvation on behalf of tens of thousands.

"AS IT IS WRITTEN"

Even Rabenu Meir's blessings were words of Torah requiring study and in-depth analysis. Often he would season his blessings with *psukim* or sayings of our Sages as if the *psukim* were written expressly for that purpose. These external layers surrounding his blessings were not simply expressions borrowed to make things sound more polished.

A father worried about his sick son approached Rabenu Meir with the name of the boy and his mother, mentioning his serious condition. One could see how much faith he placed in what Rabenu Meir would say. Rabenu Meir, with his ability to see far into the distance, surprised the father with his question, "Did he have a *Pidyon HaBen* thirty days after his birth?" The father answered that because the child had been born by Caesarian section the *halachic* authorities had ruled that he was not obligated in this *mitzvah*.

There was silence in the room as Rabenu Meir sat engrossed in his thoughts, finally saying: "You are in a desperate situation and are

in need of all the merits you can gather – 'R' Shimon is worthy enough to be relied upon in a time of pressing need.'" (Brachot 9a) – and R' Shimon is of the opinion that 'a child delivered by Caesarean is like a child that was born in the normal manner' (Nidda 40a). Now that you are in a situation of need, you must rely on R' Shimon's view and redeem your son."

That very same day the father redeemed his fifteen-year-old son and just a few days later the young man got up from his sickbed in full health.

A young man who had been married for a number of years and had not yet been blessed with children was brought to Rabenu Meir by one of the Rav's close acquaintances, who witnessed every detail of the following incident. It was *Erev Yom Kippur* and Rabenu Meir took time out to see them in spite of the great preparation the holy day requires. Listening very intently to the young man's pain he asked him: "How many years have passed since your wedding?"

"Three years," answered the young man.

"In the fourth year, all its fruit shall be sanctified to laud Hashem" (Vayikra 19:24), replied Rabenu Meir.

"How old are you?" continued Rabenu Meir.

"Twenty-four."

Rabenu Meir immediately answered "כה יהיה זרעך" "So shall your offspring be." (The numerical value of the word כה is 25, thus Rabenu Meir was promising that his offspring would arrive in his twenty-fifth year).

Towards the end of that very same year, the fourth year since the man's wedding and the twenty-fifth year of his life, he became the father of his firstborn son.

He asked one of those who regularly frequented his home how old he was. When the man told him he was 31 years old, Rabenu Meir responded with the verse:

"חסד א-ל כל היום" (the numerical value of א-ל is 31) "The kindness of Hashem is all day long." (Tehillim 52:3).

A person with a heart condition approached him asking to be blessed that his health be restored. Rabenu Meir advised him that he should take extra caution to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*. "The *halacha* may be that if one of the strings tore the *tzitzit* are still kosher, but it is advisable that you take extra care that the strings are whole. You must understand that the *tzitzit* have thirty-two strings corresponding to the numerical value of לב – heart ... when all the strings are as they should be, then the heart works as it should."

Many young *Kollel* fellows desiring to be blessed with children were told by Rabenu Meir to grow their beards. He would then cite the verse:

"כי בן זקנים הוא לו" "for he was the son of his old age" (Bereishit 37:3) (Translator's note: זקנים means old age but a play on words is being used here, for the word זקן also means a beard – thus the verse would read "the son of the person with the beard") (Bereishit 37:3).

One *Motzaei Shabbat* a young *Kollel* fellow from Ashdod, who had hosted one of the *gedolei hador* in his home, went together with that *tzaddik* to visit Rabenu Meir. Cups of tea were poured for those present and Rabenu Meir cited the verse:

"הרופא לשבורי לב ומחבש לעצבותם" "He is the healer of the brokenhearted and the One Who binds up their sorrows" (Tehillim 147:3), pointing out that the letters מחבש comprise the first letters of *Chazal*'s dictum: "חמין במוצאי שבת מלוגמא" "Hot food (translator's note: here - a hot beverage) on the night after *Shabbat* is a remedy" (*Shabbat* 119b).

Prior to taking his leave, the Torah sage asked Rabenu Meir to pray on behalf of his host who had been married for several years and was still childless. Rabenu Meir answered very simply, "Is it not true that the Shunamite woman had not borne any children until she hosted the prophet Elisha? (see Melachim II, perek 4)" That same year sounds of joy were heard from the home of the host.

Someone mentioned to him the name of a woman who was having repeated miscarriages and seemed unable to carry a pregnancy to term. His response was, "We follow the majority, and the majority of women conceive and give birth." (Yevamot 119a). A short while later the woman merited to hold her newborn son in her arms.

A young father of two children who had been told that he would be unable to father any more children was brought to see him. Rabenu Meir responded with a dismissive wave, yet the young man insisted, "But the doctors said ..." Rabenu Meir cut him off saying, "Let the third 'verse' come to reconcile them." (Introduction to Sifra) The man has many such "verses" in his home despite the words of the doctors.

From Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira we heard the following incident. A man who was scheduled for an operation the next day to remove a kidney stone had come to see Rabenu Meir. For the past two months he had been in great pain and the doctors had discovered the source of the pain in the stone that was scratching his kidney. He sought Rabenu Meir's blessing that the operation succeed. When Rabenu Meir heard the man's words he pointed out that the book "*Tehilla LeDavid*" written by the great sage Rav David Chasin from Mekhnes relates the story of someone suffering from kidney stones who had come to see him. He looked at him and cited the verse: "you shall not have in your pouch a stone (referring to a weight) and a stone – a large one and a small one" (Devarim 25:13). A few days later the stones were excreted from his kidneys. On concluding the story, Rabenu Meir held out his hand to his visitor and wished him a complete recovery.

The following day the man entered the hospital and preparations began for the surgery. Moments before he was to be brought down to the operating room, the man needed to relieve himself. Suddenly he heard a "ping" on the toilet, and lo and behold he noticed that two stones had emptied out from his kidneys – a large one and a small one!

We also heard from Rabenu David the story of a prominent disseminator of Torah and an eloquent orator who suddenly become very hoarse and then lost his voice. What upset this *talmid chacham* even more than losing his ability to speak was his inability to teach and discuss words of Torah. He took himself to Rabenu Meir's house and began to tell him his troubles. Rabenu Meir asked him how old he was. The *talmid chacham* questioned the relevance his age had to the hoarseness which had overcome him, being unaware that this was Rabenu Meir's way of finding him a cure. When he replied that he was forty-one years of age, Rabenu Meir smiled saying: "for only אם - if you call out to understanding and give forth your voice to discernment." (Mishle 2:3) – The numerical value of the word אם is forty-one and therefore you will now be able to call out to understanding and to give forth your voice to discernment with clarity. The *talmid chacham* left Rabenu Meir and his voice returned with as much clarity as ever.

These are but a fraction of the many cases compiled with little effort by simply sitting for a short time with people who frequented his home and witnessed these acts on a daily basis.

FORTUNATE IS THE EYE THAT SAW

"BETTER ONE HOUR ..."

Our unquestioning acceptance of the miracles performed by *tzaddikim* can at times lead us to believe that it comes naturally, with little effort on their part. It is as though the *tzaddik*'s intervention in the paths of Heaven is a simple bureaucratic procedure, as the *Gemara* states: "Who rules over me? The *tzaddik* – for I decree and he can nullify the decree." (Moed Katan 16b). This childlike approach which can at times be found even among more scholarly individuals results from the combination of our superficial outlook and the immense efforts on the part of true *tzaddikim* to conceal the difficulty of the task.

People who entered Rabenu Meir's gates could be divided into two groups – those who saw him as one who bestows blessings and solves problems, and those who saw how much holy effort went into his bringing about salvation.

There were also extremely pious and learned individuals who attempted to follow in his footsteps and observe the careful manner in which he listened to people's troubles and brought them deliverance. Such people came to him in order to be present in his sanctuary and to gather the pearls of wisdom which fell from the aura which enveloped him. As those who "collect after those who collect," (Taanit 6b) we have set out to gather and record the impressions of those who followed the happenings in Rabenu Meir's home.

Often, while deeply engrossed in thought, preparing a response for someone who had come to see him, his face would suddenly light up and his entire being would fill with excitement for no explicable reason. At times he would play with his watch or the chain he always wore, while a noticeable change was seen on his expression. Discerning people realized that the seemingly incidental fingering of his watch or necklace always occurred when he was mulling over a

particularly difficult case, when it was obvious that there was no stone in heaven which he would leave unturned.

Had an ordinary individual, barely able to assess spiritual giants, tried to understand what he had seen, he would have concluded that Rabenu Meir was dozing or perhaps that his head felt heavy. Which of his callers could look at the sun when it is standing in the midday sky? He would sit surrounded by those close to him with his head down, appearing to be catching a quick nap. However, if anyone so much as touched the fan lying on the table, which he had inherited from his uncle *Ateret Roshenu*, he would rise instantly.

His words were carefully chosen; and very perceptive people were able to detect the clarity and precision in his speech. Even when it appeared as if he were simply repeating himself, those close to him knew that with Rabenu Meir there were no superfluous words. Each utterance of his was clearly thought out.

At times he would use an expression which was way beyond the grasp of those present yet it made it clear that there was much hidden behind the words. In the winter of the year 5740 [1980/81], Rabenu Meir gave his approbation to a collection of writings published by one of the more influential Hassidic leaders on the subject of *Shmirat HaBrit*. A few days later, while the author was walking through the streets of Bnei Brak, briefcase in hand, a wild youth approached him from behind and grabbed his briefcase. As the victim gave chase and called for help, the thief threw down the briefcase and fled. The author retrieved the briefcase to find everything intact except Rabenu Meir's approbation. The approbations from other *Rabbanim* were still there. He therefore asked one of Rabenu Meir's acquaintances to obtain a new approbation for him.[53] Hearing about the fate of the letter he had written caused Rabenu Meir's face to turn white. He leaned his head back and whispered: "Why did he take it ... why did he take it?"

---

53. When Rabenu Meir set out to write the new approbation, he took a small piece of paper

Clearly this was more than a prank; it was an act with great ramifications rooted in the constant battle between the powers of holiness and the opposing forces of the *sitra achara.*

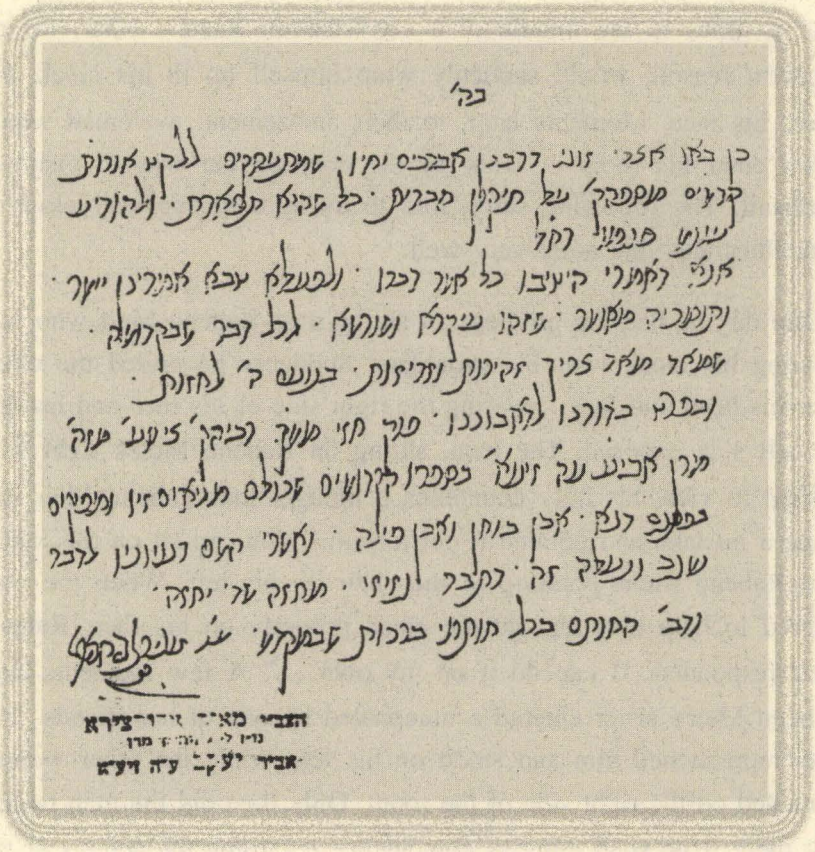
Those especially close to him tell of a phenomenon that reflects the nobility of his speech and the purity of his style, even though we cannot fully comprehend it. When he spoke to people or about them, he would employ the same description or title for them. If he considered someone "important" he would always refer to him thus, while if he referred to someone as "very important" that would be his title forever. He would never refer to him by a different name nor would he add other descriptions. Rabenu Meir was so consistent on this point that, although we cannot fully appreciate the weight and precision that went into each utterance, every word of his was the absolute truth without the slightest deviation or half-truth.

It was the most natural thing in the world to enter his room, for his house was open to all twenty-four hours a day. His door was never locked nor was there a guard vetting people at the front door. Anyone wishing to hear the word of Hashem or in need of salvation knew where to turn. Although there was no screening of his visitors, he knew immediately who each person was before he had even crossed the threshold.[54]

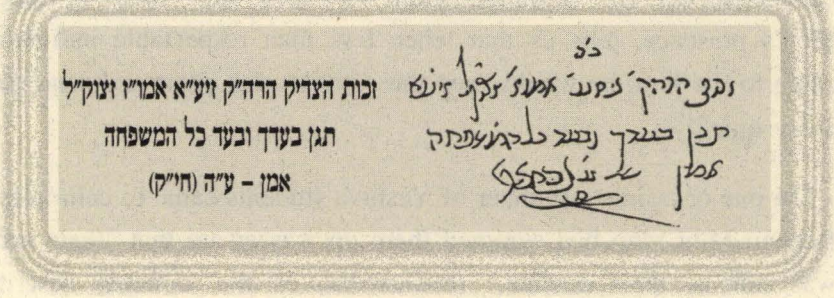
---

and began writing. He explained to the person who came for the approbation, "I intentionally took a small piece of paper, for taking a larger one would have obligated me to fill it up. Believe me, I do not even possess the strength to hold the pen, but this topic was something very important to my revered grandfather, the Abir Yaakov". When he saw that the small piece of paper did not suffice, he took out a larger piece and began writing the approbation again from the beginning.

54. Rav Yitzchak Morsiya tells us that he once came to visit Rabenu Meir who was hospitalized in the Sharett Institute of the Hadassah Medical Center in Ein Kerem, Jerusalem. Rabenu Meir, supported by his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, had come out to greet him. Afterwards Rabbi David told us that Rabenu Meir suddenly got up and asked to leave the ward because "somebody is coming to visit me."



Rabenu Meir's letter of approbation for the booklet on the subject of *Shmirat HaBrit*



Some of his followers who followed his conduct closely, testified that at times in the middle of a conversation Rabenu Meir, for no apparent reason, would suddenly wrap himself up in his cloak and cover his face. Moments later, to their amazement, a woman would either enter his room or walk by the door on her way to visit the Rabbanit. The following story, told to us by someone very close to him, illustrates this point very well.

One day he had the privilege of sitting near Rabenu Meir who was wearing his cloak over his shoulders. Suddenly he pulled the cloak over his head and face, covering the right side of his face and leaving the left side exposed. The man, sitting on Rabenu Meir's right who wished to view his holy countenance thought that Rabenu Meir had made a mistake and pointed it out to him. "You can sit on this side," said Rabenu Meir, pointing to the chair on his left. When the man offered to help him arrange the cloak properly on his face, Rabenu Meir responded, "I can do it on my own ..." A few moments later Rabenu Meir's sister entered accompanied by one of her friends. The sister approached him and stood on his left, while the other woman remained on the right side of the room. Only then did the man realize that there is no such thing as coincidence regarding the actions of the *tzaddik*; his every move is carefully and precisely calculated.

Sometimes a change in his demeanor could be sensed even prior to the arrival of certain people ... he would put his head down on the table and pretend to be asleep, at times not lifting his head until the callers had left. Rav Avraham Biton, who spent many hours in Rabenu Meir's presence, tells us that when less than respectable individuals came to see him, he would keep the conversation short and send them away quickly.

On one occasion, a number of Yeshiva students came to call on him. Rabenu Meir who had summed them up was aware that "their inside was not as their outside," (Brachot 28a) as the *Gemara* describes so-called scholars whose outward appearance belies their real character.

R' Zalman Groiz, who had been sitting with him, relates that before they had even entered the house he had noticed Rabenu Meir withdrawing more into himself. After they had left, he lifted his head and let out a great sigh. To his close friend sitting with him he commented: "It is unfortunate that their parents are not hurrying to marry them off."

On the other hand, at the approach of his faithful followers or of others who were clearly seeking the word of Hashem, he would greet them warmly and offer them a hot cup of tea or juicy dates. Sometimes he would serve them a glass of *araq* with his own hands as a token of his esteem. Even when suffering made him too weak to sit up on his bed, if such visitors came, he would find the strength to rise quickly and greet them with a smile.

His son Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that one day Rabenu Meir suddenly requested that he be brought the book "*Imrei Yoseph*" on the Torah insights of R' Yoseph Meir of Spinka. Shortly afterwards, the Admor Rav Yaakov Yoseph Weiss of Spinka, grandson of the author, entered the house and there was the book by his saintly grandfather, lying on the table. There was no question that Rabenu Meir was able to foresee everything.

It should not surprise us to hear that even people who truly understood the value of time would devote entire days to traveling to Ashdod and sitting with Rabenu Meir. They were not necessarily seeking salvation. They simply wished to see him at work, to be close to him, and to "experience what you will never understand."

"FOR YOU ANTICIPATE HIM WITH BLESSINGS OF GOOD" (Tehillim 21:4)

People would come to see him for many reasons - some simply wanted to behold his holy and pure countenance, to view from close up the light emanating from the small house; others wished to discuss deep Torah concepts, while still others sought guidance in forging for

themselves a clear Torah outlook. All these people would sit side by side, no-one revealing the purpose of his visit to the other. A quick glance was all Rabenu Meir needed in order to uncover the reason for each person's visit. He knew not only what each person wanted from him, but what he needed.

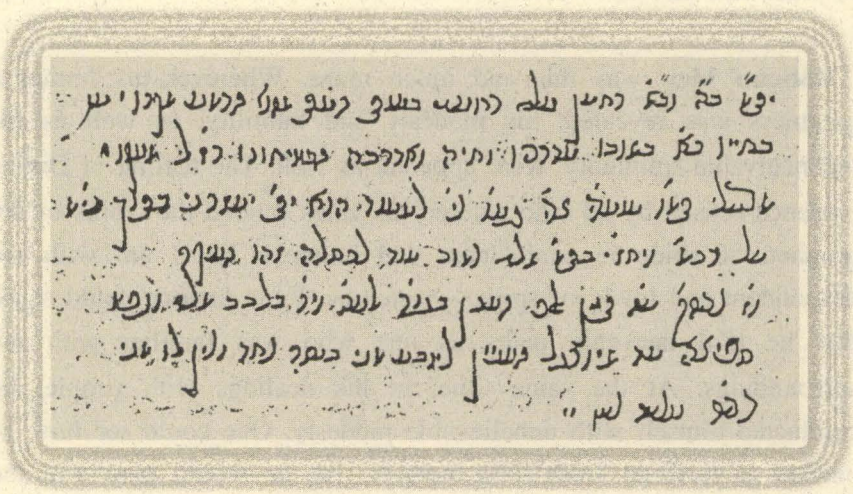
A person may have come for one reason while deep down, another issue troubled him. Rabenu Meir was fully aware of every detail of both issues and he would speak to the person on both levels. Never did anyone burdened with a problem from which he had found no respite leave Rabenu Meir without words of encouragement and blessing. Even when one did not mention all his troubles - and who can enumerate everything troubling him – he would soon discover that the blessings were directed towards all of his needs.

Unless a visitor spelled out clearly what he sought Rabenu Meir's blessing for, the meaning of his blessings was hidden in such a way that only someone paying close attention was able to understand the content and deep intent of each word. Rav Avraham Biton who had the privilege of spending many years close to Rabenu Meir, analyzed his words and concluded that in fact everything Rabenu Meir said was a blessing. To one person he would serve a cup of tea and wish him "health and life", while to another friend he would hand an almond or a date and wish him "blessing and success." He would greet a third person entering his home with the *pasuk*: "May there be peace in your midst," and he would take leave of another person with the blessing "May you find your livelihood without too much trouble." One who did not pay close attention to his words would perhaps conclude that Rabenu Meir was someone who loved blessing his fellow Jews. A closer look, however, would reveal that his words were precisely geared to the needs of the person addressed.

He used certain expressions very often for blessing people in need of salvation. These blessings appeared to be simple words without any thought behind them. This was far from the truth, for each blessing

was aimed directly at the salvation the person needed. To many people who poured out their troubled hearts, he would say, "From now on everything will be for the best." His blessings would include words of comfort, as he always tried to bring a smile to sad faces. HaRav Yoseph Pelavani, a frequent visitor to Rabenu Meir's home, tells us that there was not a single instance in which he was in Rabenu Meir's home and did not hear the words "Do not worry," offering encouragement to someone in need of it.

The blessings he bestowed were never in vain. Whatever he decreed would take place, in keeping with our Sages' comment on the *pasuk*: "My honor will always renew itself and my bow will refresh itself in my hand." (Iyov 29:20, see Midrash there) "The righteous decree and Hashem fulfills." Rabenu Meir once told Rav Avraham Biton, "Hashem carries out our blessings." One who followed Rabenu Meir's actions closely knew very well that there is a mutual relationship here – the *tzaddik* fulfills all that Hashem decrees and Hashem therefore fulfills that which the *tzaddik* decrees.



Rabenu Meir's handwriting

"HOW PIOUS! HOW HUMBLE!" (Brachot 6b)

"I AM BUT DUST AND ASH" (Bereishit 18:27)

Tzaddikim of earlier generations elucidate the passage in our daily prayers: "Let my soul be like the ground to everyone." They explain that the metaphor of the earth to describe man's humility teaches us that a Jew should be like the earth which does not complain when stepped on and trampled by the soles of people's feet. A person who controls his anger and restrains himself from responding to those who curse him is certainly considered a forgiving and praiseworthy individual. This, however, is not true humility.

The *tzaddikim* add in their inimitable manner that not only does it not complain when trampled on, but being walked on and plowed actually benefits the ground, because it causes fruit to grow and brings life to the world. Walking on the ground also strengthens the foundations of a house built on it (see Baba Batra 22b). We can learn from here that only one who is genuinely humble, who truly views himself as the dust of the earth, has the ability to effect salvation and to bring life into the world.

Rabenu Meir was this and much more. Wherever his immense greatness was revealed, his modesty and humility, as well as his inconceivable simplicity, were apparent as well. The feeling of Divine presence sensed by all who entered his gates echoed the words of the prophet: "I abide in exaltedness and holiness, but I am with the despondent and lowly of spirit." (Yeshayahu 57:16) Anyone could sense that he trod heavenly paths as one who was familiar with the surroundings. At the same time, in his dealings with people, he conducted himself with unbelievable modesty. One could see how he needed to descend from lofty heights, yet he would give you the feeling that he looked up to you.

As *Chazal* tell us, "Holiness brings one to humility." (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:19) His holiness and humility complemented each other to glorify his Torah. In the words of the *Midrash* (Tanhuma, beginning of Bereishit) – "Torah - its sole is humility and its crown is fear." Anyone who understood the immensity of his holiness, his greatness in Torah, and his utter negation of himself, realized that the three were interwoven, just as his ability to bring about salvation for many of our Jewish brethren was strongly connected to his humility.

Had he wished, he could easily have sat in a position of honor by the "eastern wall", for many Rabbinical positions were offered to him. Every action of his, even the most minor, would have brought him great public fame, but he despised praise and glory. Was it the exposure which disturbed him or perhaps it was being in the spotlight which he despised? Neither! His humility extended to the privacy of his own room. Despite his being "modest and humble, entering bowing and leaving bowing and learning Torah constantly … he took no credit for himself" (Sanhedrin 88b). Modesty and humility were his nature.

Even his Torah discussions were conducted with incredible humility. He would lower himself to the level of anyone wishing to discuss words of Torah, according even the most junior of scholars great honor and respect. Until he was too weak to do so, he would embrace Torah scholars who came to visit him, even if they were ordinary Yeshiva students or *Kollel* fellows, wishing nothing more than to view a Torah giant with their own eyes. He would never allow a visiting Torah scholar to leave without accompanying him to the front door.

Referring in his eulogy to the way he related to other people, as a student standing before his teacher, HaGaon HaRav ben Zion Abba Shaul was unable to contain his amazement, saying, "His conduct in this manner was unbelievably extreme." At the conclusion of the *shiva*, the *Rishon LeZion* HaGaon HaRav Ovadiah Yoseph cited from *Chazal*, "'Who honors those who fear Hashem' (Tehillim 15:4) this refers to Yehoshafat king of Yehuda who, whenever he saw a Torah scholar,

would rise from his throne and embrace him and kiss him, and he would call him 'My teacher, my teacher, my master, my master'" (Makkot 24a).

It should therefore come as no surprise that when Rabenu Meir left this world, despite his greatness in Torah, his lofty level of holiness, and the great miracles and salvation he brought about which proved beyond a doubt that an angel of G-d had lived amongst us, one eulogizer after another said about him "What a pious person, what a humble person! He is from the students of Avraham Avinu!" (Brachot 6b).

"IN THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK IN THE CONCEALMENT OF THE TERRACE" (Shir HaShirim 2:14)

With the exception of the brilliance he revealed in his discussions on Torah and *Hassidut*, he revealed almost nothing of his secret and hidden actions. In his eulogy, HaGaon HaRav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner, head of the *Zichron Meir Beit Din* and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat *Chachmei Lublin* and a frequent visitor to Rabenu Meir's home, lamented, "Rabenu Meir revealed just a hairsbreadth of his acts but concealed thousands more. We have no idea of the level of holiness he practiced when he isolated himself in seclusion and fled from honor." Those who tried to discover some of his secrets never managed to find the right moment to do so. Many tried to follow his trail only to discover that Rabenu Meir had covered any tracks he may have left behind.

In private, while speaking at length about his ancestor the Abir Yaakov, Rabenu Meir once discussed some of his great-grandfather's holy customs. To his listeners he commented, "I do not go that far." What he actually practiced himself, he never allowed to be discovered.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira, points out that some of his interpretations of the words of *Chazal* were very fitting for the one who had produced the insight, reflecting his own holy conduct. He gave two complementary interpretations to the statement by Rav

Shimon bar Yochai: "I have seen בני עליה - people on the highest level and they are מועטין – few" (Sukkah 45b). The word מועט also implies low (in height), Rabenu Meir explained: "Those on the highest level cannot climb so high without lowering themselves," and "The higher they rise, the more they lower themselves." These two interpretations aptly describe Rabenu Meir himself.

One of his confidants, a daily visitor to his home, tells us that he was in Rabenu Meir's home one Friday when the attendant on duty was late. The Rabbanit wished to go out but was unable to because Rabenu Meir was very adamant about not remaining in the house alone. The visitor, realizing what was happening, offered to substitute for the assistant and remain in the house until the Rabbanit returned.

As soon as the Rabbanit closed the door behind her, the thought passed through his mind that here was the golden opportunity he had always longed for – to remain in Rabenu Meir's room and observe everything. He was certain that he would be privy to acts never before revealed. The moment the Rabbanit left the house, Rabenu Meir took a glass of *araq* that had been on the table with just a few drops left, and offered it to his guest, saying: "Take this, these are leftover blessings."

That very moment a sort of slumber came over the guest, leaving him dozing – not completely asleep yet not really awake. His eyelids became heavy and as hard as he tried, he was unable to rouse himself. An hour and a half passed before the Rabbanit finally returned home. The moment he heard her turn the key in the lock, the man's tiredness dissipated entirely and he instantly became wide awake. The fact is that the first thing he heard from the moment he was given the "leftover blessings" was the sound of the key in the door.

Rabenu Meir parted from him with a warm smile and thanked him for staying with him in the house. However, whatever the guest had hoped to see, he never did because Rabenu Meir did not want him to see it ...

"HUMBLEST OF ALL MEN" - LITERALLY

The miracles and salvation witnessed in his tiny room quickly spread by word of mouth, giving Rabenu Meir a name as a "miracle worker." He, however, was not particularly impressed by the miracles and credited them to the power he had inherited from his holy ancestors. When he blessed those who came to see him he always stressed "In the merit of our holy ancestors and the Abir Yaakov". When someone would inform him that his blessings had borne fruit he would once again credit the merit of his holy ancestors.

One of his close confidants recorded in his notes that Rabenu Meir once told of a Hassidic *Rebbe* who when he heard that his disciples were in awe of his miracles responded that it was all in merit of his holy ancestors. "The only thing that I do," said the *Rebbe*, "is to try to not interfere." Rabenu Meir concluded by saying "In our case everything is in the merit of our holy ancestor the Abir Yaakov."

The words said and the manner in which they were spoken clearly showed that he meant every word. He did not see himself in the picture at all.

When he first arrived in Ashdod he had hoped that this would be a place where he could finally remain in seclusion and "walk humbly with Hashem, his G-d" (Micha 6:8). When people began to come to see him, he had no choice but to open the gates to his sanctuary. The very reason he wished to flee from the public, that he felt unworthy of honor, forced him to allow them entry into his home. Who was he to refuse a Jew who wished to speak words of Torah with him?

Rav Avraham Biton, who enjoyed a very close relationship with Rabenu Meir for eighteen years, from the moment he arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*, describes how difficult all the publicity was for Rabenu Meir and how hard he tried to put a stop to the flow of people coming to see him. Rabenu Meir's apartment had two entrances, one leading to the family living area and the other to his room. There was no sign

on the door to his room indicating who the occupant was, while on the second door there hung a sign "Rav Meir Abichazira." People would knock on the door that they thought led to his room and a family member would open the door and announce, "The Rav is not here."

As time went on, the public learned that Rabenu Meir hardly left his home and that his apartment had two entrances; and they soon found out on which door to knock. He could not bring himself to close the door to visitors, though in his great humility he could not understand why they came to see him.

The light in front of his house in Ashdod once burned out. Rabenu Meir overheard someone mentioning that they had to replace the light bulb, so that people could find the house. He interjected: "Do not change the light bulb ... why should they need to find the house ... why would they want to come and see me? ..." He would never turn anyone away, for in his eyes everyone was better than he, but to go out of his way to attract multitudes of people? Would anyone be discouraged by the darkness outside, when inside the house was brightly lit by lights from another world? Rabenu Meir thought so. Even one less caller who would speak to him in the third person made it easier for him.

All sorts of people came, from varying backgrounds and on different levels. Whoever entered his home was greeted as if he were an important guest. Before the visitor even had the chance to cross the threshold, Rabenu Meir's eyes would shine like crystal, warmly following him until he sat down. If he did not know where to sit, Rabenu Meir himself would immediately lead him to a seat by the table. He gave everyone the feeling that he had been waiting for him as if he had nothing better to do.

One of those who enjoyed a very close relationship with him, Rav Sholom Dov Stern, born in Hungary and now living in London, was given royal treatment. He was fluent in Yiddish, English, and

Hungarian, but his spoken Hebrew was full of mistakes. Rabenu Meir understood him perfectly, even with his broken Hebrew, but he was concerned that perhaps his guest did not understand what he was saying. He spoke to him very slowly and deliberately, and when he felt that he was not completely understood, he would repeat himself, using simpler words. Rav Sholom Dov was not the only one to merit such treatment.

Unlike his ancestors who were enveloped in an atmosphere of royalty, Rabenu Meir related to other people with great simplicity and humility – totally negating himself in the presence of others, no matter who they were. He did not wear the rabbinic garb which would have given him a more majestic appearance – his clothing was white and simple. He donned festive garments for his son's wedding in the presence of others and did not see this as an affront to his honor. One of his followers who desired to witness Rabenu Meir's conduct was present in the house at the time, wishing to observe the wedding preparations. He was not asked to leave the room while Rabenu Meir was changing.

A guest from overseas once asked if he could photograph him so that he could bring the picture home for his children. Glad to respond to the request of any Jew, he agreed. In honor of the picture he put on his cloak, hat, and kerchief and looked straight into the camera. We all know how he hated being photographed and how rare these pictures of him are.



Rabenu Meir with his close friend Rav Sholom Dov Stern

Rabenu Meir never addressed anyone in the second person, it was always: "Will my master please sit."

"**May** his honor forgive me."

"**How** is he and how is the Rabbanit?" – whether speaking to a *talmid chacham* or a simple person, to the young or the old. He would lower himself before literally everyone and treat them with the utmost respect, as if unworthy of their visit.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira, describes his youth when the children were the only ones who were aware of the holy acts he practiced within the home. One could see the great love he had for every Jew no matter who he was. He did not promote an atmosphere of fear in the home, nor did he raise his voice, but he related to the children as if he were talking to the most important of dignitaries. He would speak to a young child in a noble and delicate manner, "Sir, please listen to what I am saying," in the diplomatic language of government ministers. To him everyone was important and worthy of respect.

"DO NOT CRITICIZE"

Not only was the word "you" not part of his everyday lexicon, but he would not utter it even when he needed to criticize someone. When he wished to draw someone's attention to an area in which he could improve himself, he would not address the issue directly but rather speak with allusions barely understood by the person himself. He was willing to risk his words not being understood if there was even the slightest possibility that another person present would understand what he was alluding to. Despite his concealing his message in seemingly innocuous words, they had tremendous effect and brought many back to the proper path. HaGaon HaRav Sholom Mashash, head of the Jerusalem Rabbinical court, described Rabenu Meir using the words of *Chazal,* "Anyone who fears Heaven, his words are heard." (Brachot 6b).

In his wise and clever manner, he perfected the adage, "The left hand should push away, but the right hand should draw close" (Sotah 47a). His allusions were far more effective than any *mussar* discourse, as the *Gemara* teaches, "the humble manner of Hillel brought us under the wings of the Divine presence" (*Shabbat* 31a).

Eulogizing Rabenu Meir, a well-known *Rosh Yeshiva* said that for many young men, simply being in Rabenu Meir's presence and hearing his encouraging words set them on the proper path, just at the point when returning to Torah seemed too difficult. His shining countenance and the warmth with which he greeted all who came to see him were just what they needed to keep them within the fold.

Growing a beard was a very important issue to him, and following in the footsteps of his saintly father he would tell *bnei Torah* not to tamper with their beards. This was probably the only point Rabenu Meir criticized in a clear and open manner, often making his blessings conditional on the person's growing a beard. Rav Yitzchak Morsiya tells us that he was very harsh with clean-shaven young men who came to see him saying: "The hairs of the beard are the conduits of abundance. How can a person possibly cut them?!"

Rav Avraham Biton tells us of an incident in which a *baal tshuva* came to him complaining that his wife was not willing to cover her hair. They had come a long way together in their return to Torah Judaism, but she could not be persuaded to take this next step. Rabenu Meir, noticing that the man did not have a beard, responded, "When you grow your beard, she will cover her hair." Although the husband could not understand the connection between the two, he followed Rabenu Meir's advice and from that day he stopped shaving. To his amazement, only a few days after the hairs of his beard began to sprout, his wife covered her hair in the most modest way possible. Only afterwards did those who helped bring this couple back to Torah understand what Rabenu in his brilliance had picked up

immediately. For the wife, covering her hair was too great a sacrifice to demand when her husband was not asked to take such a drastic step. When he began to grow his beard, despite his reluctance to do so, she agreed to make the extra effort as well.

Another of his followers, a very pious individual, who had the privilege of being a frequent visitor at Rabenu Meir's, tells us about a similar incident in which Rabenu Meir made a comment to a clean-shaven man who had entered his room. The man responded that his wife would not permit him to grow a beard. "Your other wife wants you to grow a beard, why do you prefer this one?" Seeing that the young man did not understand what he was referring to, Rabenu Meir smiled and cited the *Gemara*: "'See the life with the woman whom you love.' (Kohelet 9:9) 'Woman' can be understood literally .... (or) 'woman' can be understood allegorically to mean the Torah ..." (Kiddushin 30b).

Although he avoided explicit criticism, in his own pleasant and sweet manner he would subtly encourage those who came to see him to increase their service of Hashem. He would ask an ignorant person whether he donned *tefillin* and whether he had kosher *mezuzot* on the doorposts of his home. When it came to Yeshiva students, he would check the level of their *Yirat Shamayim*. During the course of his conversation with *Roshei Yeshiva* he would encourage them to guide their students to guard their eyes and their tongues. This was the manner in which he influenced many people without having to raise his voice or to criticize.

The *pasuk* states: "The teaching of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and with fairness, and turned many away from iniquity." (Malachi 2:6). This was Rabenu Meir's manner; injustice perpetrated by others was never found on his lips and all of his dealings with others were with peace and fairness. It was this conduct of his which led many to abandon iniquitous lives and to return to a life of *mitzvot*.

A young *Kollel* fellow, once came to see him after a long break. When he entered the room, he realized that Rabenu Meir was immersed in his learning and he waited by the door until he might be noticed. When Rabenu Meir raised his eyes and saw the man standing at the threshold of the door, he cited the *pasuk*: "Come, O blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house, and place for the camels?" (Bereishit 24:31). As he entered the room, Rabenu Meir added in his own sweet manner: "What is the difference between a camel and a human being? Prior to embarking on a journey, the camel eats and drinks and then travels for forty days, in the same manner as we find with the prophet Eliyahu: 'So he arose, and ate and drank; he then walked on the strength of that meal for forty days and forty nights.' (Melachim I 19:8). Man, however, needs to eat daily if he wishes to be strong. The same applies to keeping *mitzvot*; a person rises in the morning and dons his *tefillin*. Ideally he should wear his *tefillin* the entire day, but he must work to earn a living. In the evening he rests his body for a few hours. ... Once again he rises in the morning and puts on his *tefillin*, because he needs a new dose of merit from this *mitzvah*. His honor does not come here too often; like the camel ... for him forty days between visits is sufficient."

An individual with whom he felt very close was once invited to his house for a *Shabbat* meal. The guest, who prayed in a different *beit midrash*, arrived half an hour after the family had already sat down to eat. The *Kiddush* cup had already been filled and they were all awaiting his arrival. The indescribable embarrassment he felt upon entering the room quickly dissipated as Rabenu Meir made him feel very comfortable without even alluding to his late arrival. At the conclusion of the meal, the guest apologized for his tardiness and tried to ask Rabenu Meir to forgive him. He did not manage to complete his sentence before Rabenu Meir smiled at him saying: "In the end you came," thus removing any remnants of discomfort.

People would sit in his room for an hour or two without ever being asked to leave. Even when it was clear that their presence was

difficult for him, he would not allow any of his assistants to clear the room. The idea of specific hours in which he would receive people did not sit well with him. He would say: "Jews wish to come. I have no right to refuse them!" He would sometimes motion with his hand that he had nothing more to say, or he would ask very innocently, "Does his honor have anything more to say?" If he did not understand the hint, he would remain sitting there!

"SEE THE GOOD"

Among the visitors were simple people whose manner of speaking grated on most people's nerves – most but not Rabenu Meir's. As wise as he was, he always had room for simple and even boorish individuals. Rabenu Meir, like a loyal shepherd who understood the sounds of his sheep, even though they did not speak like human beings, served even the simplest of people who did not speak in a refined fashion and who were not always selective in their choice of words. They spoke in the manner they were accustomed to and Rabenu Meir would listen intently.

He was once approached by a simple person who had no concept of proper manners, or if he did, he did not put them into practice. He rambled on inanely with no meaning to his words. One of Rabenu Meir's sons who was present in the room tried to hint to the man that he would be doing everyone a great favor if he put a muzzle to his mouth, but the man did not take the hint. It would be superfluous to add that Rabenu Meir listened intently and nodded his head in response to all the nonsense that was coming out of the man's mouth.

When the man finally tired and left, Rabenu Meir turned to his son and in his typical manner of trying to see the good in everyone said, "You see my son, the later generations are not like the earlier ones. Years ago, proper Jews were a mix of all the good character traits. Innocence and honesty, greatness and wisdom, genius and holiness, all were embodied in one great person. In our days we see the decline of

the generations. One person may take for himself so much genius that he leaves no room for innocence to play any role. His friend may sanctify himself by building all sorts of fences around his actions, yet he cannot follow the straight path. These many virtues are not all found in one person but are spread among many Jews. The person who sat here until a few moments ago took for himself the crown of innocence and simplicity upon which he improved so much that he left no room for anything else – his speech is simple, his manner is simple, he views everything in the simplest of terms, and his thoughts are on a very simple level. Should we not give him the respect and honor that he deserves?

These were not simply "smart" remarks but a genuine ability to see the good in everyone and everything. He would interpret Rav Yehoshua ben Korcha's comment about himself: "In all my days, I never gazed at the face of a wicked person" (Megilla 28a) to mean that Rav Yehoshua ben Korcha never saw the evil in a person – his blemishes or inadequacies. When he looked at anyone, even the most wicked of people, he would see only the good, that which should be respected. Rabenu Meir, just as he "expounded well, he fulfilled well." (Chagiga 14b).

These were values he would transmit to his household. At every opportunity, he would emphasize the importance of speaking in a pleasant manner. To an individual who would come to him for a *Din Torah* against someone who had wronged him, he would suggest that he find other ways to solve the dispute even if it meant compromising. He would say: "When there is a judgment below, there is judgment above." Rabenu Meir, who spent his entire life sweetening judgments, tried to prevent them from ever happening.

During one period, a boorish, ill-mannered young man would come to his home on a nightly basis. For some unknown reason, the young man was chosen to give Rabenu Meir a massage on the soles of his feet in order to increase the blood circulation of the holy body which

knew very little movement. While working on Rabenu Meir, he would speak to him in the manner befitting his intellectual level – that of a child.

On one occasion, one of his followers who had often been present at the same time as this uncouth fellow, could not hold back his smile as he heard the young man speaking. The young man did not notice the smile, but Rabenu Meir did. After the youth had left, Rabenu Meir turned to him and said: "He is also a fellow Jew and the *mitzvah* of 'Love your fellow as yourself,' applies to such people as well."

When an awkward and clumsy person left his presence, he said to those around him: "I am aware of every person and know who he is, but we must honor every Jew." The respect Rabenu Meir accorded other people was not simply a case of social graces. He went far beyond the norm in order to make people comfortable in his presence and to give everyone a good feeling.

To the same extent that he had no harsh words or criticism for anyone, he had tremendous gratitude to people from whom he had benefited even in the slightest manner.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, relates that the *Lev Simcha* of Gur once gave an orange to one of his *Hassidim* who lived in Ashdod to deliver to Rabenu Meir. Rabenu Meir was elated and spent several hours speaking words of Torah, quoting from many Hassidic works regarding the eating of the *shirayim* (leftovers) from the *tzaddik* of the generation. In addition to the great joy he felt at receiving this gift, he praised the *Hassid* who served as courier between the two *tzaddikim*, citing the words of the *Gemara*: "Whoever brings a gift to a Torah scholar is regarded as if he is offering *bikkurim*." The *Hasid*, embarrassed by this, commented that it was not his gift, but he was simply a messenger sent to Ashdod by his *Rebbe* in Jerusalem. Rabenu Meir in a flash of inspiration responded, "That

is why the *Gemara* stresses: 'Whoever *brings*' and not 'Whoever *gives*', for even one who simply delivers a gift is praiseworthy."

Similarly, a young *Kollel* fellow from Bnei Brak used to call on Rabenu Meir three times a week. He was once asked to deliver a special lounge chair that had been purchased for Rabenu Meir. It was no trouble for him, for he was traveling by car in any event. When he brought the chair into the room and informed Rabenu Meir who had sent it, Rabenu Meir thanked and blessed him so profusely that the man became embarrassed and wished he could stop him. Rabenu Meir noticed his embarrassment and said, "The *Gemara* tells us 'whoever *brings* a gift', it does not say 'whoever *purchases* a gift'. In addition to the great virtue of a person who gives from his own money to purchase a gift for a *talmid chacham*, there is a special place reserved for the one who delivers it.

His ability to respect every Jew was due not only to the dignified manner in which he dealt with people, but principally to his genuine feeling of humility.

WITH THE GEDOLIM OF ISRAEL

"THE BELOVED EXALT YOU" (*zemirot* for a *Brit Milah*)

True *tzaddikim* are able to accomplish that which the sun and the moon were unable to – illuminating the world while sharing the same crown and at the same time paying tribute to each other. This trait was exemplified by Rabenu Meir. "As water reflects a face to a face, so the heart of a man to a man." (Mishle 27:19) – in the same manner in which he exalted all the *Gedolim*, they humbled themselves towards him and accorded him great honor.

He harbored great love and friendship for all Torah giants, including those he had never met. The great admiration with which he spoke of them was reciprocated as they described him in terms reserved for the holiest of individuals.

Not only did he exalt their name, but he was very well-versed in the deeds and customs of all *tzaddikim*. When speaking to *Hassidim* he would discuss their *Rebbe*, whom he had never met, describing him concisely yet accurately. The idea of a young scholar totally negating himself and emulating the actions of a *tzaddik* was something Rabenu Meir held in high esteem. When *Hassidim* came to see him, he would engage them in conversation regarding their sect of *Hassidut* – their manner of *Avodat Hashem* and the customs of the dynasty, all in order to strengthen the bond between the *Hassidim* and their *Rebbe*.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira, tells us that when he praised a particular *tzaddik*, it was as if for that moment, he was in possession of the soul of that *gadol* and was acting in the way the *tzaddik* would have acted. This applied to "pillars of the earth," (see Shmuel I 12:8), Torah giants who were long gone from this world, as well as contemporary *tzaddikim*.

"What drew so many Ashkenazi giants to him?" wondered his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, during our conversation with

him. "HaGaon HaRav Shmuel Wosner *shlit"a* would come often, the Pnei Menachem zt"l, the Rimnitzer *Rebbe* zt"l, the Toldot Aharon *Rebbe* zt"l, HaGaon HaRav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt"l, and many other *Rebbes*, Torah giants, and *Roshei Yeshiva*. HaGaon HaRav Chaim Kreiswirth zt"l would go straight to Ashdod from the airport whenever he came to *Eretz Yisrael*. Rabenu David answered, "They knew his great strength; they knew that my father and grandfather were angels placed in this world and they wished to take advantage of their power. Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul zt"l, would say when he came that my father was the *Moshiach*, that he was the *Gadol HaDor*. A year after my father's passing, Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul became paralyzed. I went to visit him and his first words upon seeing me were, 'had Baba Meir been alive, would he have left me in such a state? He would have pointed his finger and gestured to me to stand up!'"

"When Rabenu Meir visited the Sanz-Klausenburger *Rebbe* in Netanya, they engaged in animated and lengthy discussions of Torah and *Hassidut*. After my father left, the *Rebbe* stood by the door and watched the car disappear into the distance. Going back into his house, he made a comment that was very rare for him: "It has been a long time since I have come across a Jew of such stature and so perfect in every way."[55]

---

55. It should be noted that this visit had not been planned beforehand. Rabenu Meir was on his way home to Ashdod from the Galil and as they passed near Netanya he lifted his head from his book asking "Where are we?" as if he felt "the fragrance of the field which *Hashem* had blessed." (Bereishit 27:28). When told that they were in the vicinity of Netanya he asked that they go in the direction of Kiryat Sanz. The driver did not know the way, but Rabenu Meir told him that he would direct him. The moment they entered the city, Rabenu Meir became the guide. As one familiar with the territory as if it were his own backyard, Rabenu Meir guided the driver to Kiryat Sanz and to the Rebbe's home.

They arrived in the small hours of the morning before the time for Shacharit, at a time when people were not permitted entry into the house – no matter what. This rule which had never been broken, finally rated an exception. When the *Rebbe* heard that a member of the Abichazira family was waiting to see him, he put down everything he was doing and went to greet him with great joy.



Rabenu Meir in conversation with HaGaon HaGadol Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner

A prominent Hassidic *Rebbe* pauses by the door before entering to see Rabenu Meir. While holding the door handle he whispers, "One who seeks out the presence of a Torah sage is like one who is before the Divine Presence" (Tanhuma Ki Tisah 27).

He would treat them with such great respect that they begged him to stop. When he was informed of a Torah giant's planned visit, he would anticipate his arrival from the early hours of the morning. In those days, the *Rebbes* did not have cellular phones in their cars and the best anyone could do was to give an estimate of when he was planning to arrive. From the moment Rabenu Meir heard that a *Rebbe* or prominent Rav was on his way to see him, he would go outside and sit on the public bench and eagerly await the arrival of his guest. When he desired to accord honor to a *tzaddik* nothing could stand in his way – not even the difficulties involved in sitting outside in inclement weather.

WITH THE *REBBES* OF GER

An unfathomable mystical connection existed between Rabenu Meir and the *Lev Simcha* of Ger. They had never met, not even when the *Rebbe* visited the city of Ashdod to establish the Gerrer Hassidic quarter in 5738 [1977/78]. Even so, Rabenu Meir would constantly inquire about his welfare. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, tells us that even before the Gerrer Hassidim in Ashdod had the opportunity to mention their *Rebbe*'s name to Rabenu Meir, he would laud the *Lev Simcha*'s greatness.

He adds that in the early days of the *Lev Simcha*'s leadership, not long after the passing of his esteemed brother the *Beit Yisrael*, Rabenu Meir proclaimed with obvious satisfaction: "Ger has a new *Rebbe*, he will save the young people with his decrees." And indeed before long the *Rebbe*, whose heart was full of compassion for the burden of the many families breaking under the exorbitant costs of marrying off their children, issued a list of decrees greatly curtailing the expenditures of a wedding and of finding a home for the young couple. This revolutionary innovation was foreseen by Rabenu Meir, but when he alluded to it, no one understood what he was talking about.

Discussing the *Rebbe*'s greatness with one of his close confidants, he said, "Young Gerrer Hassidic *Kollel* fellows come to ask me questions. I answer them but they go to ask the *Rebbe* as well. What answers do you think the *Rebbe* gives them? Precisely the ones I give!" A young Gerrer *Hassid* who came to see him heard him describing his close connection with the *Rebbe*: "We are from the same Talmud Torah schooling."

The following story serves as a fascinating example.

A young Gerrer *Hassid*, prior to the birth of his oldest daughter, was debating whether to travel overseas so his wife could give birth near the home of her parents. He went to ask the *Lev Simcha* who answered: "If it is not difficult ... but why travel ... better ask

someone else." Although the *Rebbe*'s answer was not clear, it appeared that he was not in favor of the young couple's traveling. He did not understand the statement "Ask someone else." either. The *Rebbe* did not refer them to any doctor; how were they supposed to know the identity of that "someone" whose advice they should seek?

Not knowing how to decide, the young man and his father-in-law went to the home of the *Rebbe*'s brother the *Pnei Menachem* to ask him what he thought. He answered that he would go and ask the *Rebbe* himself. The same day the *Pnei Menachem* went to see his brother the *Lev Simcha* with the story of the young man who had come to see the *Rebbe* and did not understand what the *Rebbe* had advised him. The *Rebbe* responded, "Did I say anything? ... If they really want to, they can go in health and peace." ... As the *Pnei Menachem* was leaving the room, the *Rebbe* called out to him "Better ask someone else."

Confused after hearing the same unclear answer a second time, they went to see Rabenu Meir, for the young man lived in Ashdod. They presented the entire story to him and asked him what he thought they should do. Rabenu Meir bent his head forward and mumbled as if to himself, "Difficult, difficult, it is very difficult." He then lifted his eyes and said: "She can go in peace and safety and with Hashem's help, everything will go smoothly."

"What can I say?" the protagonist of the story relates with great emotion. "What happened during that birth – a hairsbreadth separated ... how difficult it was ... you could clearly see that the Gerrer *Rebbe* was doing his utmost, Rabenu Meir was exerting much effort ... but they both brought salvation."

In his later years a fierce battle, known as "Operation Peace for Galilee"[56] raged on the Northern border of *Eretz Yisrael*. Speaking

---

56. This is the place to cite a conversation that took place at the height of the war in which Rabenu Meir spoke of the essence of the war taking place on the Syrian-Lebanese border. When told that the army had reported success in the battles with the Syrians, he responded, "But at a

with one of his close followers who merited being taken into his confidence, he said: "Why do they bother the Gerrer *Rebbe*, I meet him every day in Heaven and I see that he is very busy ... you should know that it is he who is conducting this war."

He would spend much time discussing the *Rebbe*'s heroic acts with Gerrer *Hassidim*. He would inquire after his health and well-being and want to hear of the conversations he held with his disciples. One *Shabbat*, a young man came to see him and Rabenu Meir told him "The *Rebbe* is not conducting his *tisch* this week. He is fine but is not conducting the *tisch*." On another occasion, Rabenu Meir turned to a young Gerrer *Hassid* he had invited to his home for *Seudah Shlishit* and said, "What do you think? Do you understand the actions of the *tzaddikim* when they conduct their holy meal? They take the word נחש

---

great price. In ancient times, the Jewish people fought wars with no losses, with Moshe Rabenu, with Yehoshua bin Nun, with David HaMelech." One of his followers responded that that phenomenon was all in the merit of the tzaddikim. Rabenu Meir strengthened what he was saying: "Certainly! Moshe Rabenu had 'the staff of G-d in his hand' (Shmot 17:9) with *Hashem*'s Name engraved on it and he would use it as he saw fit. Yehoshua had the merit of Moshe Rabenu ... the *pasuk* states: "*Hashem* shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent" (Shmot 14:14) ... However, there are times when there is a decree from heaven and it is impossible to work against it."

In a conversation which took place a week later, Rabenu Meir once again brought up the subject of the war, saying: "I feel great pain for all the Jewish souls killed in this war, even though they do not observe *Torah* and *mitzvot,* they are still our people. As the *Gemara* says, "The ministering angels wanted to recite a song of praise. The Holy One, Blessed is He, exclaimed: 'My handiwork is drowning in the sea and you recite a song? (Megillah 10b) How much more so does this apply to Jewish souls whose sorrow we must share. One of those present quoted Rashi's commentary on the *pasuk*: "They have given the corpse of Your servants as food for the birds of the sky, the flesh of Your devout ones to the beasts of the earth." (Tehillim 79:2) "Were they not wicked, but they suffered so they are now considered pious." Rabenu Meir responded, "Certainly, death atones for everything." The conversation continued on to the subject of a "*Mitzvah* war." Rabenu Meir stated that this war was not a "*mitzvah* war" nor was it an "optional war" but in the category of the Gemara's statement: "If someone comes to kill you, anticipate him and kill him first." (Brachot 58b) He then mentioned what took place in the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. "Yehoshua tore his garments and fell on his face to the ground." (Yehoshua 7:6) but once they mended their ways, they fought again and not a single soldier fell.

(snake) and drown it and all its implications in the lofty ideal of the שלחן (table). He then began speaking about the idea of a *tisch* and how the Gerrer *Rebbe* conducts his, down to the most minor detail – who sits next to him, where the *Hassidim* stand, and to whom he distributes his *shirayim*. At the very moment this conversation was taking place, the *Rebbe* was conducting a public *tisch*, something he had not done for a very long time.

The *Rebbe*'s brother, the *Pnei Menachem* who served as *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat *Sefat Emet* and eventually became *Rebbe* himself, once came to see Rabenu Meir. Many days later the *Rebbe* told one of his close confidants: "Rabenu Meir was one in a generation in Torah, holiness, and piety. He was one of those in whose merit the world stands."

The *Pnei Menachem* first visited Rabenu Meir when he was in Ashdod for a family simcha. On *Motzaei Shabbat* he and a few of his confidants went to visit Rabenu Meir. After they parted, a serious look came over the *Pnei Menachem*'s face. He remained silent and did not exchange a single word with his escorts. When asked by one of those accompanying him what he saw in Rabenu Meir, he answered very tersely, "I was much more impressed than I thought I would be!" After his esteemed guest left, Rabenu Meir turned to a young Gerrer *Hassid* who was a frequent visitor to his home, and said, "I do not possess the ability to honor such a great man properly."

The next time the *Pnei Menachem* came to visit Rabenu Meir was on *Chol HaMoed Pesach* of the year 5743 [1983]. The special trip he made from Jerusalem surprised everyone and he would not explain the urgency of his trip. The very next day 17 *Nissan* 5743 [31st March, 1983], Rabenu Meir departed this world.

WITH RAV YOSEF WALTUCH

Hidden *tzaddikim* – those whose greatness is unknown even today – were among those who came to see Rabenu Meir to discuss secret

mystical ideas. Some would discuss *kabbalah* with him, while some conversations involved long periods of silence and were not understood by others present. A man who had been in the house during one of those meetings, relates that Rabenu Meir instructed him to seek, in addition to his own, the blessing of the unknown *tzaddik* who was his guest.

One of the most outstanding of these hidden *tzaddikim* was Rav Yosef Waltuch, who became known only after his passing. He and Rabenu Meir enjoyed a very deep kinship and would meet often. Rav Yosef, known as the one who sustained the thirty-six *tzaddikim* of the generation[57], would visit the homes of all the hidden *tzaddikim*. He was like a family member in Rabenu Meir's home and described Rabenu Meir as being "an expert in the roots of souls." HaRav Zalman Groiz tells us that when Rav Yosef was present, Rabenu Meir would tell those who came to see him to seek Rav Yosef's blessing as well. "Rav Yosef is here; Rav Yosef will bless you," was an expression frequently heard from him.

Rav Yosef once arrived bringing with him a father and his sick son. The doctors had discovered a malignant tumor and their despair made the parents feel hopeless as well. In his customary manner, Rabenu Meir blessed the child in the merit of his holy ancestors, but Rav Yosef insisted that Rabenu Meir promise that the young boy would be healed. Rabenu Meir, who had long stopped promising, continued to bless him but would not agree to promise. Rav Yosef asked Rabenu Meir to step out with him to the adjoining room where they remained in seclusion for a few minutes. On emerging from the room after having spoken, their faces were shining. Rabenu Meir approached the child, placed his holy hands upon his head and said, "I promise that the child will return to full health" – and he did.

---

57. It is known, that in each generation there is one tzaddik who is appointed to sustain the thirty-six hidden tzaddikim who are responsible for upholding the entire creation. That same tzaddik serves as the "liaison" passing information from one to the other.



One of his closest confidants R' Yitzchak Morsiya, who had the privilege of knowing Rabenu Meir through Rav Yosef, came to see Rabenu Meir at the conclusion of the *shloshim* mourning period for his father, since Rabenu Meir had requested that he should not come during this thirty-day mourning period. When he described his father's short illness to Rabenu Meir, how he had suddenly collapsed and was already on the verge of death, Rabenu Meir asked him: "Why did you not come to inform me of the seriousness of his situation?" Rav Yitzchak answered that at that time he too was bedridden and in any case he had felt there was not much that could be done for his father who could not even breathe without a respirator. Rabenu Meir however repeated his question asking why he had not been informed of the situation. As they left the house, Rav Yosef commented: "What do you think? That Rav Meir has difficulty with a seemingly insurmountable situation? Rabenu Meir can revive the dead like the prophet Elisha!" he called out with great emotion.

One day Rav Yosef Waltuch asked an acquaintance of his who visited Rabenu Meir often, for a ride to Ashdod. Rav Yosef entered the room and after the two *tzaddikim* inquired about each other's welfare, they engaged in a conversation that could not possibly be understood by anyone. The conversation went as follows:

"Has his honor seen the bird on the window?" asked Rav Yosef.

"The bird, certainly ... even the cow was on the ladder," Rabenu Meir answered matter of factly.

"That I know, but the elephant was on the roof", Rav Yosef continued the mysterious conversation.

"The elephant on the roof ... the raven was by Mr. X", answered Rabenu Meir mentioning a name.

"What? The raven was by that person? Good night!" With those words Rav Yosef concluded the conversation.

This conversation, if you could call it that, did not last more than a minute and when it was over, the two *tzaddikim* parted with deep feelings of friendship. Rav Yosef had traveled especially to Ashdod just for this conversation!

At the conclusion of the *shloshim* for Rabenu Meir, an assembly in his memory was held at the *beit midrash* of the Pittsburgher *Rebbe*. Afterwards, Rav Yosef went to the family home to speak with Rabenu Meir's sons. Rav Zalman Groiz who saw and heard the conversation tells us that the moment he arrived, Rav Yosef began to tell them a terrible dream he had that night. "I had an awful dream," he began, "I was being chased by an enormous beam ... they wanted to place it on my head ... I ran and ran ... in the end I could no longer flee ... in the end ... in the end ..."

Upon hearing these words, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira became frightened and said, "Rav Yosef, do not talk like that". Rav Yosef, however, said: "This is it, this is the end ... there is nothing that can be done."

A week later, en route to Miron with some of his disciples, they passed by the Idra cave. Rav Yosef entered the cave alone. After a long period of time had passed and he had not yet emerged, his disciples went inside, there they found him lying on the floor. His heart had stopped beating. That hidden *tzaddik*, Rav Yosef Waltuch, that close friend of Rabenu Meir's, left this world suddenly in a death that can be described as a kiss of G-d.

HIS CONNECTION WITH THE BABA SALI

"GENERATION FOLLOWS GENERATION"

Ordinary words and expressions cannot capture the incredible bond that existed between Rabenu Meir and his esteemed father, the Baba Sali. Theirs was no ordinary love between father and son. Just as one cannot compare the Baba Sali and Rabenu Meir to other fathers and sons, one cannot draw any comparisons regarding the bond between them.

They had mutual admiration as only they were able to truly appreciate each other's greatness. The bond between them embodied the lofty connection that existed between two *tzaddikim* whose heads reached the Heavens. If the love between any father and son is an expression of their inner feelings that cannot be described in words, how can we hope to express the feelings of *gedolim* such as these when it is beyond our understanding?

This rapport of heart and soul grew stronger with time. The love between them that existed during Rabenu Meir's youth cannot compare to the close connection they enjoyed in later years when they both traversed the upper sanctuaries bringing salvation to the Jewish nation and raising up the Divine Presence from the earth. Rabenu Meir always remembered the immense effort his father had invested in him during his childhood and youth, and he constantly related stories of those days.

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that Rabenu Meir spent many hours teaching his children about their saintly grandfather, sharing his amazement at the incredible energy he channeled towards serving Hashem. He would vividly describe all that he had observed during his childhood. He would tell them of the many long hours his father spent learning, standing on his feet, his books in his hands, without the aid of a shtender or a support. He would

describe the breadth and depth of his Torah knowledge which was like that of the *rishonim*. He would speak of the hours upon hours spent in glowing prayer with sobs that arose from the depth of his soul, trying to bring remedy and healing, deliverance and redemption to the Jewish nation. The Baba Sali's fear of Heaven was so strong that there was no other fear in the world that could prevent him from doing whatever it took to raise the honor of Heaven. He was willing to enter the most dangerous of places in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*. Rabenu Meir would describe the many miracles his father was able to perform, showing that even when there was a barrier separating the Jewish people from their Father in Heaven (see Pesachim 85b), the *tzaddik* possessed the key to unlock the doors and remove the separation, to roll back the darkness and allow the light to penetrate.

Rabenu Meir would glow with excitement as he would recount his father's praise. Not a single detail was omitted in his description of the Baba Sali to his children, for he wished them to understand the origin of their roots and the source of their greatness. He would especially emphasize the greatness of their holy grandfather, that greatness which had already been foreseen in his early youth, so that they would learn from this and try to emulate it. He would build the links to previous generations by comparing his father's acts to those of his father's brother Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*.

Beyond the stories themselves which left an indelible impression upon all who listened, there was much to be learned from the manner in which he related the stories, for this was an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the beautiful inner bond that existed between these two holy *tzaddikim*, father and son.

"A FATHER BENEFITS A SON" (Eduyot perek 2, *Mishna* 9)

The Baba Sali for his part openly showed his love for his son. Countless eyewitness accounts exist testifying to the extraordinary demonstrations of his affection. Already in his youth, when Rabenu

Meir had not yet reached the age of eighteen, the Baba Sali appointed him as assistant Rav of the community. From then on he zealously protected his son's position to such an extent that even upon returning to Erfoud when he was living in the same house as his son, he refused to take back his position, preferring to be under the leadership of his "replacement."

When the Baba Sali settled in *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5724 [1963/64] and the *gedolim* became aware of his greatness, he would proudly tell them of his son, the Rabbi of the community of Erfoud. He would describe his son with much adoration and praise saying: "In Morocco I have a son who is a great *tzaddik*, a great genius."

When it became known that Rabenu Meir himself was planning to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, his father began to publicize his forthcoming arrival among his many disciples, encouraging them to go to meet him at the airport. Indeed, many flocked to the airport to greet Rabenu Meir when he arrived. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a vividly remembers that day in the year 5725 [1964/65] when they first stepped off the plane in *Eretz Yisrael* to be greeted by the thousands cramming the terminal, waiting to meet Rabenu Meir and receive his blessing. The Baba Sali had spoken so highly of his son that thousands of people who had never before met Rabenu Meir made their way to the airport and squeezed through the crowds to receive his blessing.

The Baba Sali also publicized his son's greatness among the *gedolim* of *Eretz Yisrael* and encouraged them to go and see him. It was the encouragement of the Baba Sali that was responsible for many *gedolim* coming to call on Rabenu Meir establishing special relationships with him before he even had the opportunity to settle properly in *Eretz Yisrael* and before the Land was able to fully benefit from his greatness.

Some of those who came to the Baba Sali's home in Netivot, seeking salvation were directed to Ashdod to seek Rabenu Meir's blessing.

When his dear friend Rav Moshe Deitch once told the Baba Sali that he was on his way to Ashdod to visit Rabenu Meir, the Baba Sali responded "My son R' Meir like me, like him, holy! (Melachim I 22:4)".

Following Rabenu Meir's passing, a young man came to Netivot to speak to the Baba Sali. He explained that he had gotten into legal complications and was facing very severe charges in court. He related that he had been to see Rabenu Meir in Ashdod and received his blessing, but had yet to notice any change in his legal standing. The Baba Sali answered, "All that my holy son, R' Meir Shalom, may his merit protect us, has said, will be fulfilled to the utmost in the best way possible," Not a word uttered by either of them went unanswered.

The father's admiration for his son grew from day to day and expressed itself in many ways. It comes as no surprise to discover what the Baba Sali had said to his dear friend Rav Moshe Deitch: "Thank G-d I had the privilege of seeing my son Rabenu Meir take my place during my lifetime."

"A FATHER AND HIS SON STUDYING TORAH IN ONE GATE" (Kiddushim 30b)

If during their period of separation it was possible to sense how highly they esteemed each other and the great love for each other that was etched in their hearts, where are the words that can provide even the slightest impression of the sight of father and son when they met? Rabenu Meir would regularly travel to Netivot to visit his saintly father. There was a period when he would visit him every *Erev Shabbat*, at times remaining with his children in their holy grandfather's home for *Shabbat*.

We find the following description in Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira's memoirs: "Anyone who did not witness the meeting between them cannot imagine the spectacle, which made one shiver and tremble." Perhaps only one who had never seen this could have

the daring to take pen in hand and record some sort of impression, however slight. Only one with a proven history of success in vividly depicting the most incredible emotions has the right to undertake such a mission of describing the indescribable ...

Given that we lack even the most basic of tools, we can only cite from the writings of Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira as he describes the scene of the meeting of father and son: "One gives the other a great hug, kissing his head, shoulder and hand – totally negating himself as a student before his Rav, his head bent in 'dread, awe, trembling, and fear' (Brachot 22a), and with great emotion ..." Rav Moshe Deitch, who was one of the closest confidants of the Baba Sali, movingly describes the beautiful spectacle of Rabenu Meir arriving in his father's home in Netivot: "The moment he crossed the threshold, Rabenu Meir would bow to the ground. The entire way from the door to the couch where the Baba Sali sat, Rabenu Meir would bow with every step he took. When he reached his father, he would shower him with kisses – on the back of his hand and on his forehead, on his shoulder and on the hem of his cloak. Only afterwards would he take his seat, his eyes turned towards to the ground. Who can describe this total self-negation like that of a servant before his master ...? It would have been worth coming from the other end of the world just to behold this sight."

One of his close followers who lived in London once came to visit Rabenu Meir in his home. The man entered and found Rabenu Meir seated on one of those simple chairs that the Jewish Agency provided for new immigrants. He decided to buy Rabenu Meir a comfortable armchair. He asked Rabenu Meir, "Perhaps the honorable Rav knows where there is a furniture store in the area"? Rabenu Meir although fully aware of the man's intentions feigned innocence. "How am I supposed to know? I cloister myself in my house and never venture out shopping."

The man took his leave of Rabenu Meir, returning a while later accompanied by a porter who carried a very elegant easy-chair. The

man instructed the porter to put down the chair, paid him for his trouble and sent him on his way. In fulfillment of *Chazal*'s dictum: "One who conveys a gift to his friend must inform him" (Shabbat 10b), the guest invited Rabenu Meir to sit on the chair. Rabenu Meir thought for a moment and then sat down.

Shortly afterwards, the Baba Sali came to Ashdod to visit Rabenu Meir in his home and was given the honor of sitting in the new lounge chair. From that moment on Rabenu Meir refused to sit in the chair which had been purchased on his behalf. Once his saintly father had sat in the chair, it had become sanctified and he was unable to sit in it.

One of the last meetings between them took place in Ashdod. Rabenu Meir was informed that his father had arrived by car on his way from Netivot to Yerushalayim. Rabenu Meir hurried down to the car and instructed the driver to move over so that he could take his place. Two eyewitnesses who did not know each other but who happened to be staying at the same inn testified that the two *tzaddikim* sat side by side, gazed intently at each other, yet did not exchange a single word. Months later Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira explained that "They were exchanging thoughts."

It is well-known that during the Baba Sali's final years he had become hard of hearing and those speaking to him to raised their voices so that they could be heard. Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that incredible as it may seem, Rabenu Meir spoke to his father in an ordinary tone, yet they were able to engage in lively conversation. "This incredible wonder would always make my heart rejoice."

A wondrous phenomenon would take place when they lived in the same house in Erfoud. The house was spacious enough to accommodate six or seven large families comfortably. One day, Rabenu Meir was sitting with his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai

Abichazira in a room which was a great distance from where his saintly grandfather was sitting. Suddenly the sound of his grandfather's voice was heard, but the content of what he was saying could not be understood at all. Rabenu Meir turned to his son and told him that his saintly grandfather was asking to be brought a particular object. "It amazed all those present how he was able to hear and understand his father's words while engaged in speaking to the public."

When they met, their conversation would begin with Torah remarks, continue with Torah topics, and end with words of *Torah.* "In between my venerable grandfather would express concern about his health and well-being." The main purpose of their meeting, however, was Torah – speedily negotiating endless waters as they shared hidden secrets that were unintelligible to anyone else.

On one occasion his close confidant Rav Zalman Groiz made up his mind to travel with a friend to see the Baba Sali in Netivot. Their trip began with a stop in Ashdod to see Rabenu Meir. At the end of their visit, they told Rabenu Meir that they were on their way to Netivot. Arriving there, they immediately entered the room of the Baba Sali, who was elated at their arrival. One of the household members informed them that the Baba Sali had actually set out for Ashdod. In mid-journey he instructed the driver to turn around and return to Netivot. Incredibly, the time of that turnaround was precisely the moment the two parted from Rabenu Meir.

On the other hand we heard of a group of *Kollel* fellows who had just been to Netivot and decided to extend their travels with a stop in Ashdod to visit Rabenu Meir. One of the members of this group was Rav Chaim Eliezer Herstik who relates that he had made the trip because he was scheduled to undergo an operation and he wished to receive the Baba Sali's blessing prior to the surgery. As he left, the Baba Sali handed him a bottle of water as a blessing. They had no more than entered Rabenu Meir's home, when Rabenu Meir said: "Why have you come? Were you not just in Netivot to receive my

father's blessing?" When Rav Chaim Eliezer requested that Rabenu Meir bless him with a speedy recovery, in addition to his father's blessing, Rabenu Meir looked at him with smile and said, "Go to the car and bring me the water, I too will bless it."

It is no wonder that when Rabenu Meir was plagued with suffering in his later years, afflicted with a very difficult illness, his father suffered along with him and he moved entire worlds with his prayers to bring relief to his son. Rabenu Meir, for his part, had wished to hide his illness from his father. Was it possible to hide anything from him?

HIS FINAL DAYS

IT WAS OUR ILLS THAT HE BORE" (Yeshayahu 53:4)

As early as 5737 [1976/77], when Rabenu Meir reached the age of sixty, he summoned one of his sons and expressed the sorrowful thought that perhaps his time had come. When his son begged him to not speak that way, Rabenu Meir answered: "you are after all aware, that my entire life is one big miracle on the strength of the blessing of my saintly uncle, Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*. The blessing of a *tzaddik*, however, has its limits ... I have reached the age of *zikna* and the time has come to plan my move to the 'world which is only good.'"

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira asked him whether there was anything he could do that could serve as a *segula* to extend the length of his days. Rabenu Meir answered that there was one thing that would have the power to prolong the blessing of the *tzaddik* – to work towards republishing the writings of *Ateret Roshenu* which had not been printed since their initial publication in the year 5683[58] [1922/23].

Rabenu Meir's generation was privileged to have him remain with them for a few more years.

Rabenu Meir had certainly aged, but he was not blessed with having reached the contentment of old age. Every part of his body constantly ached and there was no respite from his suffering. A dreadful disease had lodged itself in his body and weakened him greatly, sucking up whatever remaining strength he had. The words of the prophet

---

58. His close friend, Rav Avraham Biton relates that he visited Rabenu Meir on the final *Erev Pesach* of his life, the last time he would see him. With his little remaining strength, Rabenu Meir removed the oxygen mask from his face and requested of Rav Avraham to help his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, publish the writings of "Baba Du" – *Ateret Roshenu*. Rav Avraham Biton thus became a loyal partner in the publication of the book in the year 5762 [2001/02].

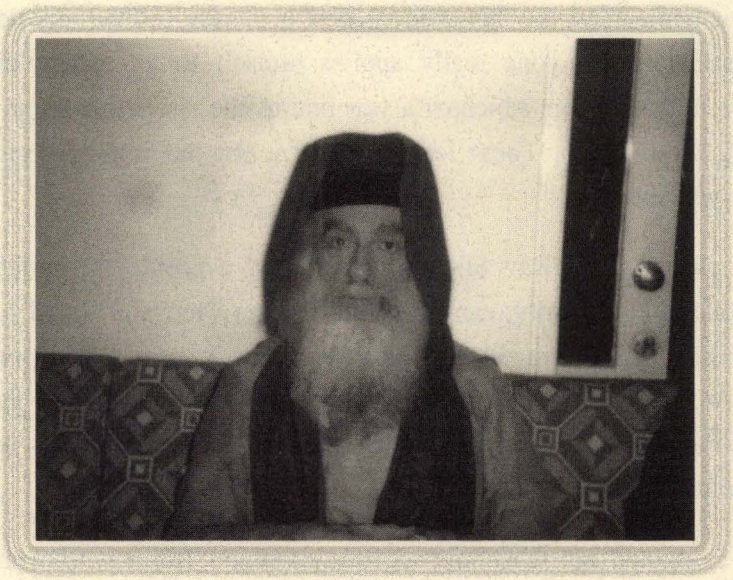
Yeshayahu properly express the suffering of the *tzaddik* bearing our illness and suffering our pain. "He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities; the chastisement upon him was for our benefit and through his wounds we were healed. We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning in his own way, and Hashem inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all" (Yeshayahu 53:5-6). It would be appropriate here to cite the commentary of the "*Metzudat David*": "All the pain and illness which he suffered, came about through our sins. We have brought suffering upon him by following the evil path. It is we who should be suffering for our sins. The wounds he has been afflicted with have brought us healing and atonement."

Rabenu Meir never complained about his suffering, except that it prevented him from learning Torah with the great diligence he had been accustomed to his entire life. He had tried to lessen his pain with the *Gemara*'s medicine: "One who feels pain in his head ... in his throat ... in his stomach ... in his bones ... in his entire body, should study Torah." (Eruvin 54a).

Some of his close confidants, who visited him almost daily during his final year, heard him say on several occasions, "I no longer possess the strength to learn in the manner I have been accustomed to." They tried to console him with the words of Rav Yochanan who came to visit R' Eliezer when he was ill: "If it is because you did not accumulate as much Torah knowledge as you wanted, we learned: 'Both the offering of one who gives much and the offering of one who gives little are equally pleasing to Hashem, provided he directs his heart to heaven.' (Menachot 110a)" (Brachot 5b). His response was: "It is Torah and I must study it." (Brachot 62a).

One day, while sitting with those close to him, the conversation revolved around the *Gemara*: "Whoever said David has sinned is simply mistaken." (Shabbat 56a). As the conversation deepened, Rabenu Meir pointed out, "The Zohar, the Arizal, and my ancestor, the Abir

Yaakov had lofty explanations of this passage based on hidden parts of the Torah." The followers bent forward to hear better that which was about to be revealed, but a nasty cough overtook him. He apologized, "My throat is very weak and I do not have the strength to cite their words."



The last picture

A *Kollel* fellow, who came regularly to see Rabenu Meir, was sent to ask him to attach his signature to the call of the *gedolim* to excommunicate El Al Airlines for flying on *Shabbat*. Rabenu Meir took the piece of paper, gave it a glance that was far too quick for the average person to be able to read it[59], and responded: "Tell them in my name that I agree ... I cannot sign, I have no strength."

When the great *Gaon* HaRav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner, head of the Rabbinical Court in Zichron Meir and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat

59. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, tells us that Rabenu Meir refused to read any newspaper, even those published under the guidance of Gedolei Yisrael, saying, "I will not look at the holy letters if not for a holy purpose."

Chachmei Lublin, came to visit him, he was very distressed by his anguish and left the room visibly shaken. "Torah with suffering protects the generation," he said to the close confidants standing by the door, alluding to the words of *Chazal*: "The great sage of the generation suffers the sins of the generation" (Tana Debei Eliyahu Rabbah 37). Following Rabenu Meir's passing, HaRav Wosner eulogized him: "In our generation, the Torah is studied in a very refined and delicate manner. Hardly anyone really applies himself to the extent that he suffers. Rabenu Meir Abichazira was one of the last remnants of those willing to suffer for Torah learning, and it was he who protected the entire generation."

His close friend, Rav Sholom Dov Stern, a prominent member of the London community, came to visit Rabenu Meir and found him on his sickbed. He immediately suggested that Rabenu Meir come to London to see Dr. Adler, a well-known physician who could perhaps help him. Rabenu Meir however rejected this suggestion saying, "Sholom, I have no strength".

He explained his reasoning to Rav Avraham Biton with whom he was especially close. "Is there any better doctor than Hashem? What can the doctors accomplish when He does not heal?" When Rav Avraham pleaded with him to reconsider, Rabenu Meir responded, "The doctors only help those who lead their lives according to the laws of nature." He was alluding to the opinion of the Ramban, which precludes any and all visits to doctors[60].

When the pain became so great that his family could no longer bear to see him suffer, he finally relented, agreeing to be examined by a doctor - for their sake, not for his! The doctors examined him and left behind them a list of prescriptions for various pills. Family members immediately ran out to purchase the drugs which Rabenu Meir agreed

---

60. For the Ramban's view regarding seeking the help of doctors, see his commentary to Parshat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:11)

to take. It was only after his passing that the pills were found neatly organized in his private cupboard. Because the family was so distressed he wished to calm them. He, for his part had no need for medicine. Nineteen years earlier when the doctors had warned him about the serious condition of his lungs, he replied: "Let them say as they please, but the One Above will do as He pleases."

The suffering continued to wear away at his holy body, yet he continued serving Hashem as always, with supreme effort. When he was no longer able to learn Torah on a deep level, he would immerse himself in books of *mussar*, refusing to succumb to his suffering or allow it to get in the way of his serving Hashem.

In his eulogy for his father, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira writes:

"During his final years it was a great *chesed* from Hashem that most nights he would not close his eyes the entire night. He would worry about what morning would bring and he would sanctify himself and purify his body and thoughts in preparation for praying *Shacharit* with the sunrise. He would recite every word with great enthusiasm. Even though this extra effort would weaken him greatly, his pain and suffering were forgotten while he was performing a *mitzvah*."

He was ill for almost two years and from time to time it was necessary for him to be hospitalized. However, even in the hospital he would not cease his holy work but increased his efforts, to the amazement of the medical staff. They could not understand how someone in his condition could garner such strength. What impressed them still more was the calm and serene manner which characterized everything he did, even as his condition deteriorated daily.

One of his close confidants, who was present when a doctor came to see Rabenu Meir in his home, tells us that the doctor concluded his examination and instructed that he be taken to the hospital immediately. The dismayed family hurriedly summoned medical

experts to decide on the most appropriate hospital to send him to. While the atmosphere in the home grew tenser by the minute, Rabenu Meir sat calmly talking to his friend as if it was someone else's condition that was causing such alarm.

Another close confidant adds that he had been invited to Rabenu Meir's house on the 9th of Shevat 5743 [23rd January 1983] to observe the anniversary of the passing of the *Rashash*, Rav Shalom Sharabi. He found Rabenu Meir seated at the head of the table surrounded by his family. At first he thought the family had all arrived for the festivities, yet only then did he take note of Rabenu Meir's cloak, turban, and stick which were lying at his side ready for a trip. They were planning to travel to Jerusalem as the doctor had determined that he must be hospitalized immediately. Rabenu Meir, however, having decided that the time had not yet come for the trip, persuaded his family who had come to accompany him to the hospital, to sit down and to join him for the anniversary celebration. The atmosphere was spiritually uplifting with no signs of stress visible.

Even at times when every organ in his body felt crushing pain, Rabenu Meir had total control over his senses, not only disregarding the medical issues affecting his life which hung in the balance, but also to elevate everyone else to his own lofty levels of purity.

"FOR THE WISE AN ALLUSION IS SUFFICIENT, FOR THE FOOLS A FIST" (Mishle Rabba 22)

Despite Rabenu Meir's illness, it never entered anyone's mind that the generation was about to be orphaned and enter into a period of darkness. They understood that the *tzaddik* was suffering for the sake of the Jewish nation. Apparently they did not realize that the "debt" in the account of the Jewish nation was so great that it would soon have to "mortgage" the soul of the holy saint by his death. His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, discussing the fact that no family member ever recorded anything about Rabenu Meir during his

lifetime, tells us, "We never thought he would leave us. We thought we would live under his protection forever."

No one was aware of the imminence of his passing. On *Erev Rosh Hashana* 5743 [1982], when many of his followers came to seek his blessing, he began by telling them the story of the holy Rav Naftali of Ropshitz, who recited a special prayer daily asking Hashem to fill the needs of the people so they would not need to depend on his blessings. Rabenu Meir then added his own blessings for the new year: "May the coming year be a year of redemption and salvation highlighted by the arrival of the Moshiach. May the world undergo a complete *tikkun* so that people no longer need to come to me for blessings." Nobody realized that it was this latter part of the blessing that was about to be fulfilled, not even his adherent who recorded his words.

On another occasion he mentioned an insight of his from his days in Morocco: The *pasuk* says: "And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, bestowed upon the Children of Israel before his death." (Devarim 33:1). Rabenu Meir explained that Moshe Rabenu strengthened his blessing in two ways – by being a man of G-d: we know that "The *tzaddik* decrees and Hashem fulfills", and in that the blessing was given "before his death." We learn that "the words of someone on his deathbed are considered to be as effective as if they were written and handed over to the intended recipient" (Gittin 13a).[61]

Rav Avraham Biton came to visit him between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* and they discussed the High Holy Days and the prayers and feelings they aroused. Rabenu Meir was happy with his shofar blowing, saying that the blasts sounded "as if they had come out on their own". When he came on *Erev Pesach* to visit Rabenu Meir, who

---

61. Here Rabenu Meir explained, using the methods of elucidation known as *Pardes,* that Moshe Rabenu enveloped the Jewish people at that point so that they too reached the level of "man of G-d." As the Torah states: "Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets." (Bamidbar 11:29).

was then connected to an oxygen tank, his whole being telling of suffering, Rabenu Meir again mentioned the beautiful sounds of the shofar from *Rosh Hashana*. These simple words apparently contained a deeper message.

On *Taanit Esther* his saintly father the Baba Sali came to visit him. Father and son sat, each immersed in holy thoughts and to the outsider it appeared as if each was wrapped up in himself. Perceptive people, however, could sense in the silence a palpable connection between them. This was a conversation between hearts. The mouths did not speak and the ears did not listen; it was an abstract inner communication. The visit did not last long and soon the Baba Sali parted from Rabenu Meir and went on his way.

After he had left the house, Rabenu Meir's followers noted his soaring spirits. When they asked him to explain his father's sudden visit, he responded: "we do not know". However, as the day progressed, Rabenu Meir was heard saying, "My father said that his life is dependent on mine."

A Hassidic *Kollel* fellow who lived in Ashdod would visit Rabenu Meir every *Rosh Chodesh* and bless him with the words found in the Sephardic *Musaf Shmone Esrei*, "May this month see the end of all our troubles, and the beginning of our redemption." Rabenu Meir would respond "Amen" out loud. On *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* when the man came, he was ushered into his room so that Rabenu Meir could hear the customary blessing. This time, however, Rabenu Meir did not respond. Later in the day, when the candles he customarily lit on *Rosh Chodesh* were brought to him, he refused to light them. Even when they pleaded with him, he continued in his steadfast refusal, to everyone's dismay. Who would have dreamt that the Western Candle, "the testimony to all mankind that the Divine Presence dwells with Israel," (Shabbat 22b), was about to be extinguished?

Pesach was coming. This was a *Yom Tov* that Rabenu Meir customarily honored with extreme zeal. His medical condition did not

impede his supervision of the preparations for the festival. It appeared that this year he was putting still greater efforts into his preparation for the festival than in past years. To one of his followers who came to bid him farewell before traveling overseas to spend *Pesach* with his parents, he expressed his inability to understand: "You are traveling for *Pesach*?" He repeated his surprise a second and then a third time. He then instructed him to go to a particular store in Yerushalayim and purchase for him thirty six glasses in honor of *Pesach*.

When his confidant Rav Avraham Biton came to see him on *Erev Pesach* and expressed the hope that he would have the opportunity to visit him during the course of the *Yom Tov*, Rabenu Meir responded "There is no need for his honor to trouble himself in order to visit me on *Pesach*. On *Chol HaMoed* you will not come to visit me."

His son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that on *Erev Pesach* Rabenu Meir instructed family members to purchase large quantities of food to feed the many guests who would visit them over *Pesach*. After they had purchased enormous quantities, Rabenu Meir asked them to double and triple the amount. When a family member wondered where all these people would come from, he responded "there will be many guests this *Pesach*, very many."

The ear may hear the words but it does not listen, the heart is open but does not understand ... those accustomed to his allusions, those who could always decipher the hidden meaning behind his words, seemed to have suddenly lost their wisdom ...

"THE SUN SUDDENLY SET, NOT IN ITS NORMAL TIME" (*Rashi* Bereishit 28:11)

The festival of *Pesach* arrived. Rabenu Meir always greeted this festival with great sanctity and joy. The night of *Yom Tov* was a time when the intense spiritual atmosphere which always permeated Rabenu Meir's home would become even stronger. One who has no

understanding of Rabenu Meir's holy life – and who among us really understands – cannot begin to even attempt to comprehend the supreme level of sanctity which existed on this holy night. All the family members came to celebrate the Festival of Freedom in the presence of their distinguished father, well aware of his severe condition and desperately awaiting salvation.

Following the *Maariv* prayers, throngs of Jews swarmed to his home, seeking Rabenu Meir's blessing during this auspicious time. Rabenu Meir, in his own inimitable manner bestowed blessings upon them, his face shining. Only when the long line which had formed by the entrance to his house had dissipated, when the last of the visitors had turned to go home, did Rabenu Meir begin conducting the *Seder*.

He needed no help in conducting the *Seder*. The light which had illuminated his face his entire life, now glittered with the "light of the seven days" which is reserved for the *tzaddikim* in the Next World. When it came to Rabenu Meir, however, the Next World was already present in this world, following *Chazal*'s words: "You shall see your world in your life" (Brachot 17a)[62].

Even during the next few days, no great change could be detected in Rabenu Meir's behavior. Besides the great weakness that had overtaken him, his daily routine did not change and many disciples and others who were close to him came to fulfill the *mitzvah* of "visiting their teacher during the festival." (*Rosh Hashana* 16b).

On the eve of 17 Nissan, to the great surprise of the family, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat *Sefat Emet* (who was to become leader of the Gerrer *Hassidim* – the *Pnei Menachem*) came to visit Rabenu Meir without

---

62. Although Rashi interpreted the words of the *Gemara* according to their simple meaning: "All your needs will be fulfilled," the Malbim states in his commentary on the *pasuk*: "Then your light will burst out like the dawn and your healing will speedily sprout, your righteous deed will precede you and the glory of *Hashem* will gather you in." (Yeshayahu 58:8) that "Even in your lifetime, a great light and personal salvation will come, and you will attain eternal delight even in this world, in the manner of the words of our Sages, 'You shall see your world in your life.'"

any prior notification. The two *tzaddikim* who had met only a few months earlier, rejoiced in each other's company and held lengthy Torah discussions, with Rabenu Meir serving his distinguished guest fruits and other refreshments[63].

That night, his disciple and dear friend Rav Eliyahu Sheetrit of Kiryat Yam came to visit him. Rabenu Meir held Rav Eliyahu in high esteem and a great feeling of love existed between them. Rav Eliyahu was a giant in Torah and an expert in its hidden areas. His visit too, surprised the family, and they observed the joyous atmosphere that prevailed between them. When Rav Eliyahu wished to leave and make his way home, Rabenu Meir asked that he remain overnight and even set aside a place for him in his private room. The family members were amazed, for no one ever slept with him in his room. This was the only time they had ever heard Rabenu Meir make such a request.

During the course of the night, many followers came to see him and Rabenu Meir, gracious host that he was, extended them all a warm greeting. He continued speaking words of *Torah* and *Hassidut*, directing many of his words to his esteemed guest Rav Eliyahu Sheetrit.

Towards daybreak, Rav Eliyahu realized that Rabenu Meir's condition had taken a turn for the worse and he was about to die. He called Rabenu Meir's children to his bedside. To this day no one knows what took place between these two *tzaddikim* during the final

---

63. During that same meeting Rabenu Meir served his guest with dates and araq – items that *Hassidim* generally refrained from eating during *Pesach*. Those close to the *Rosh Yeshiva* who had accompanied him on this visit, who were surprised to see him eating the dates, were even more surprised when they heard him saying as he was leaving: "I should have drunk the araq as well, for "In Rabenu Meir's home one should eat anything which is served."

A Hassid who was a frequent visitor to Rabenu Meir's home once came to visit on *Chol HaMoed Pesach*. Rabenu Meir served him a glass of araq and the guest tried to avoid drinking it claiming that on *Pesach* each person firmly observes the customs of his ancestors. Rabenu Meir gave him a piercing look and said: "This is what his honor says? Do you have any idea who my holy ancestors were?"

hours of Rabenu Meir's life. As his children entered, his lips uttered the words, "Faithful are the wounds inflicted by a lover" (Mishle 27:6). Immediately after that, before they had the chance to digest what was about to take place, Rabenu Meir began to recite *Shma Yisrael* with all its special *kavanot* and when he reached the word "Echad" his voice was silenced.

His voice was silenced and his illustrious life had come to an end. Rabenu Meir left this world with a "kiss of death." The Pittsburgher *Rebbe* said of him, "The sanctity and purity in which he departed from this world are testimony to the way he sanctified himself every day of his entire life."

Darkness descended upon the world. Everyone who had ever crossed the threshold of Rabenu Meir's home felt great sorrow. The bitter news spread very quickly. Wherever it was heard, people were overcome with the feeling of a great void; they were orphaned. The hearts of those who loved him melted; the people were beside themselves with bewilderment and pain. The senses refused to believe that the sun had set at midday while its rays were still strongly illuminating the way for the many disciples. "The angels which had vanquished the righteous ones," (Ketubot 104a) had not disclosed the fact that they had even seized the Holy Ark (Rabenu Meir) and before anyone knew, they had captured it.

That day, thousands accompanied him to his final resting place, walking behind the bier which was held aloft by his disciples, silenced by their mourning, unable to open their mouths even to praise him. Before the start of the funeral procession from his home in Ashdod, words of *hitorerut* were heard from the *Rishon LeZion*, the Kabbalist HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu Shlit"a as well as the Gaon Rav Refael Abu zt"l who called upon the crowd to take to heart the loss of the great *tzaddik*, "Because of the evil the righteous man is gathered." (Yeshayahu 57:1).

The body was then taken to Jerusalem where it was laid in Yeshivat *Porat Yosef* before being taken by his disciples for burial on the Mount of Olives, close to the graves of the *Ohr HaChaim* and Rav *Shalom Sharabi* (the Rashash). Before the grave was filled with earth, a suitcase filled with the Torah insights he had recorded over the years was placed in the grave, as he had instructed.

Following the funeral, the Kabbalist Rav Yosef Waltuch told Rav Yitzchak Morsiya that when they arrived at the Mount of Olives, he noticed a pillar of fire descending from the sky down to the body as it was being transported to its final resting place. He added that the only time he had seen such a sight had been at the funeral of the saintly Rav Shlomole of Zvhill on 26 Iyar 5705 [9th May 1945].

The family returned home after the funeral having to uproot their emotions from the abyss of mourning and the desolation of orphanhood to the festive *Pesach* atmosphere where mourning is prohibited. They were joined by Rav Eliyahu Sheetrit who, as we related, had been by Rabenu Meir's side during the final moments of his life. Rav Eliyahu astounded his listeners as he revealed the reason for his unexpected visit the previous night.

"**Forty** days ago," he said, "I had a dream that Rabenu Meir was going to pass from this world in forty days! I trembled, yet I kept the dream to myself and did not share it with anyone. When forty days had passed and Rabenu Meir was still with us, I was filled with immense joy and I wanted to see him face to face. When he asked me to remain for the night, I became suspicious. It seems that the heavens wished for me to be by his side when he passed away. They had made me think that the time fixed for his passing had gone by and the world was saved from losing its crown. I came to rejoice over the fact that the *tzaddik* was still with us ... now, I am forced to enter my house like an orphan, "like one mourning his mother bent over in gloom" (Tehillim 35:14).

"G-D OF MEIR ANSWER ME" (Avoda Zara 18a)

Rabenu Meir's grave became the lodestone well for many of his disciples – those who were privileged to visit his sanctuary during his lifetime as well as those who heard of his greatness only after his passing. Many people were only exposed to his great light when they heard the eulogies after his passing. Their souls immediately yearned to form a connection with the soul of the *tzaddik* who had possessed the power to bring salvation, which was now delighting in the presence of the *Shechina* in the upper heavens.

From his son, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira we heard an interesting insight into the words of the *Gemara*: "Righteous persons are even greater in death than they are life." (Hullin 7b) During their lifetimes there is limited access to *tzaddikim*; some times are more appropriate than others for viewing their shining countenance and receiving the blessings they bestow upon the Jewish nation both collectively and individually. After their passing, however, the *tzaddikim* are able to receive the entire nation at once, and there is no one who does not have the ability to connect to them.

He added the following story which is testimony to the power of belief in *tzaddikim* as well as the fact that *tzaddikim* after their deaths are always available to all who seek them.

A car full of passengers wishing to visit the grave of Rabenu Meir, near the graves of Rav Chaim ben Atar, the *Ohr HaChaim* and Rav Sholom Sharabi, the *Rashash*, made its way up to the Mount of Olives. They had left their homes in Nahariya in the early hours of the morning, accompanied by their elderly father who had wished to visit the site and pour his heart out in prayer. Their father, a devout Jew from Tafilalet, had moved to the Land of Israel many years before and was among those who steadfastly adhered to the word of the Rav of Tafilalet.



On arriving at the Mount of Olives, they parked their car and began searching for Rabenu Meir's grave, but were unable to locate it. They asked a *Chevra Kadisha* member who happened to be passing, for assistance, but he was unable to point to the precise location of Rabenu Meir's grave. "The Mount of Olives is filled with the graves of many great *tzaddikim*, and it is impossible to know the precise location where each and every *tzaddik* is buried. You can pray from over here at the roadside and your prayers will be accepted as if you were standing before the *tzaddik*'s grave," he said as he continued on his way.

The people were bewildered. Had they undertaken this long excursion from the North only to be unable to locate the grave? They decided to spread out and to try to cover the length and breadth of the cemetery, reading the inscriptions on each of the gravestones until they found Rabenu Meir's grave. They did not wish to trouble their father, who was already well on in years, with having to walk between the broken stones, so they left him sitting on the steps at the entrance, promising to call him when they found the grave.

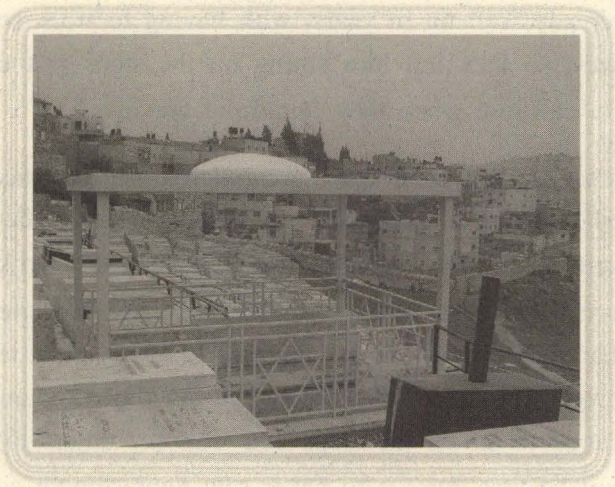
The man sat down to wait and a great sigh arose from his heart. He was flooded with the memories of the old days, when the people of Tafilalet were spiritually dependent on Rabenu Meir. Brokenhearted, the man turned his eyes upwards to the Heavens and cried out: "O saintly Baba Meir! I had the privilege of knowing you decades ago when you were our leader in Tafilalet during those tranquil times. I am now forced to sit on the steps and wait for others to find your grave. Can it be that those who never saw your shining countenance and never knew you by name will be the ones to summon me to your burial plot? How shameful!" Tears streamed down his cheeks and his voice, the cry of a devout Jew, rose up over the mountain.

Suddenly a strong gust of wind blew the beret off his head. The old man struggled to his feet to follow his hat which was now rolling down the paths of the cemetery. He had to keep himself from slipping

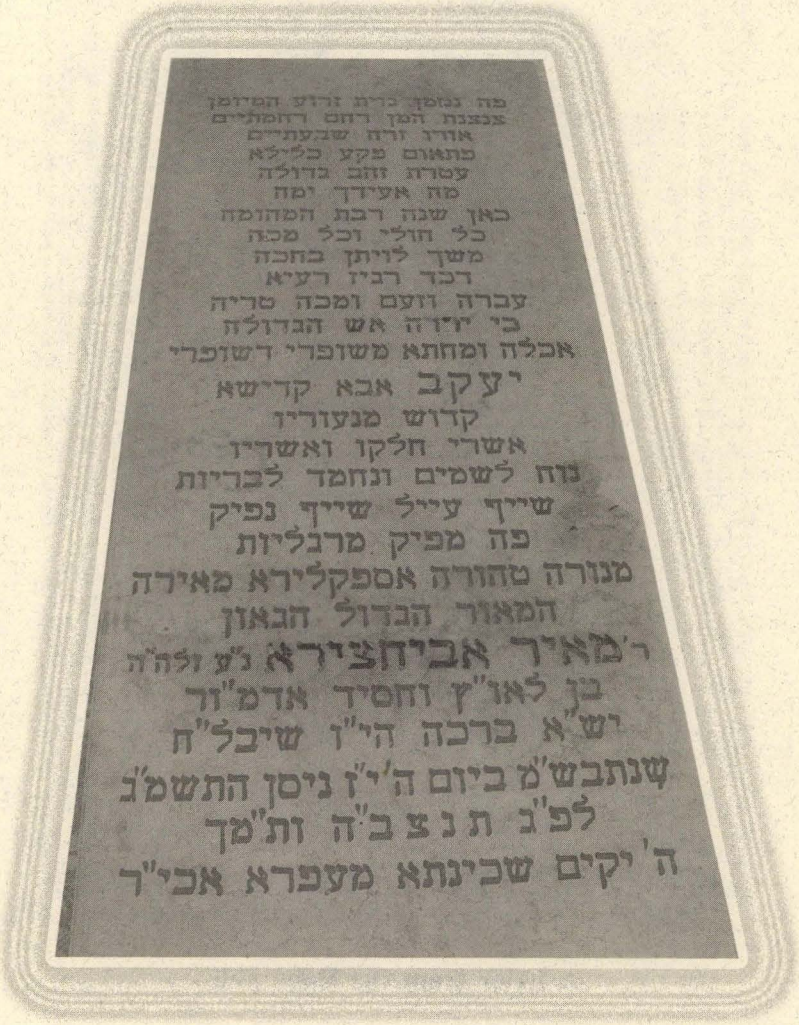
down the steep slope and more than once his feet gave way and he almost fell to the ground. His hat had kept blowing further away and he went after it.

A few minutes later the hat came to rest ... on the grave of Rabenu Meir.

There, "Where the lawgiver's plot is hidden" (Devarim 33:21 – see the commentary of the *Ohr HaChaim*) the physical remains of Rabenu Meir are buried while his saintly soul is in the upper heavens bringing an abundance of good and blessing to those with steadfast belief in the *tzaddikim* and their great ability to bring salvation to the Jewish nation.



Rabenu Meir's holy gravesite on Mount of Olives


פה ננוחך כרית זרוע המדומן
צנצנת המן רחם רחמתיים
אורו זרח שבעתיים
פתאום מקע כלילא
עטרת זהב בדולה
מה אעידך ימה
כאן שנה רבת המהומה
כל חולי וכל מכה
משך לויתן בחכה
רכד רביז רעיא
עברה וזעם ומכה טריה
כי יזוה אש הגדולה
אכלה ומחתא משופרי דשופרי
יעקב אבא קדישא
קדוש מנעוריו
אשרי חלקו ואשריו
נוח לשמים ונחמד לבריות
שיף עייל שיף נפיק
פה מפיק מרגליות
מנורה טהורה אספקלירא מאירה
המאור הגדול הגאון
ר' מאיר אביחצירא נ"ע זלה"ה
בן לאו"ץ וחסיד אדמ"ור
יש"א ברכה הי"ו שיבל"ח
שנתבש"מ ביום ה'י"ז ניסן התשמ"ג
לפ"ב תנצב"ה ות"ת
ה'יקים שכינתא מעפרא אכי"ר

A letter from the Baba Sali

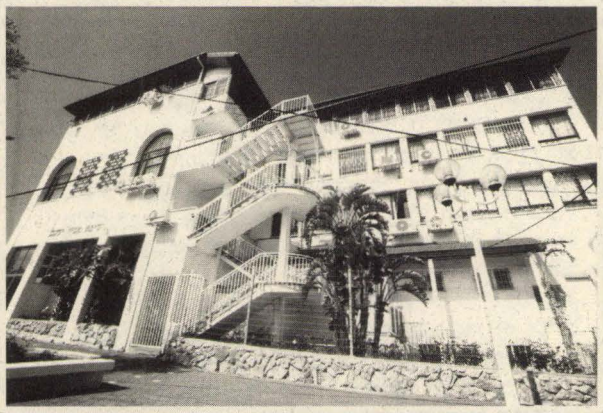


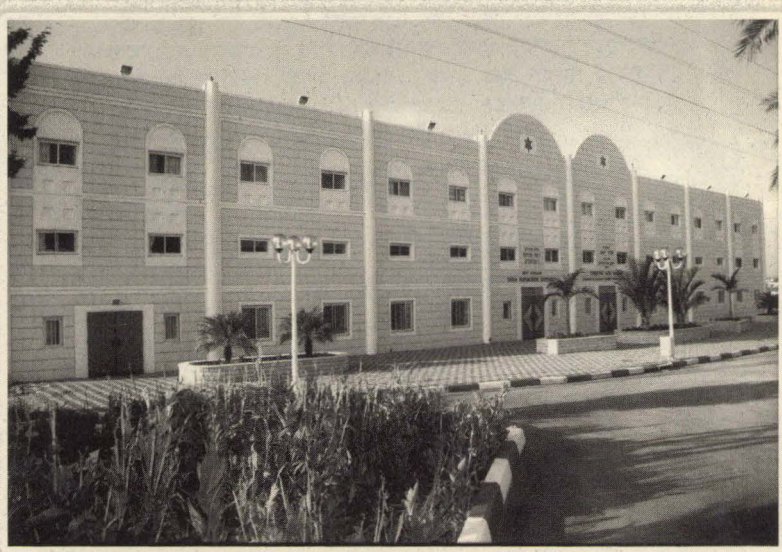
ב״ה ט״ו מנ״א תשל״ג

לַמְפָרְסָמוֹת אֵין צָרִיךְ רְאָיָה כְּבָר יָצָא טִבְעוֹ בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם, צַדִּיק וְיסוֹדוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אוֹר מָמִיר וְנֶעֱלָם, קֹדֶשׁ הַקָּדָשִׁים, הַמְלוּבָּ״ן, מָרָא דְּרָזִין, אמו״ז בקש״ת האדמו״ר מָרָן רַבֵּנוּ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיחֲצִירָא וצוקללה״ה זיע״א, וְהֵנָּם שספה״ק סִפְרֵי דְּבֵי רַב רביה״ק ע״ה עָלוּ עַל מִזְבַּח הַדְּפוּס בַּשָּׁנִיּוֹת מִדְּבָרֵי סוֹפְרִים, מֵרֹב חִבַּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ עִיר וְקָדִישׁ, כָּלַי עָלְמָא רַהֲטֵי אַבַּתְרַיְהוּ וְכִמְעַט אָזְלוּ מִן הַשּׁוּק וְיֵשׁ לָהֶם תּוֹבְעִים, אִי לָאוּת נָתַתִּי רְשׁוּת וְהִרְמָנָא לִידִיד נַפְשִׁי וְאוֹר עֵינַי נָבְדֵי הַבֵּן יָקִיר לִי כה״ר דָּוִד אֲבִיחֲצִירָא הי״ו לְהִתְעַסֵּק בַּקְּדָשִׁים לְהַדְפִּים תְּמִימִים סְפָרָיו הַקְּדוֹשִׁים פְּקוּדֵי ה׳ יְשָׁרִים מְשַׂמְּחֵי לֵב וכו׳ וּלְזַכּוֹת אֶת הָרַבִּים וְאַגַּב חָדָא תַּרְתֵּי מִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה כִּי נָעִים נָאוָה לְהַדְפִּים ספה״ק אֲחִי יָפַת הַגְּדוֹל מָעֹז וּמִגְדּוֹל חִסִידָא קַדִּישָׁא וּפְרִישָׁא נְהוֹרָא דְּשִׁמְשָׁא האדמו״ר רַבֵּנוּ דָּוִד אֲבִיחֲצִירָא זצוקללה״ה זיע״א שֶׁמְּיוֹם שֶׁנִּדְפְּסוּ בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה לֹא רָאוּ אוֹר הַדְּפוּס, אֵיכוּ הִשְׁתָּא בְּבָעוּ וּבְמָטוּ מִכְּבוֹד אֲחֵינוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל דִּי בְכָל אֲתַר וַאֲתַר לְהוֹשִׁיט לוֹ לִידִיד נַפְשִׁי נָבְדִי כה״ר דָּוִד הי״ו הנ״ל יַד עֶזְרָה וּלְעוֹדְדוֹ וּלְהַחֲזִיק בְּיָדוֹ וּלְעַשְּׂרוֹ בְּזוּהֲבִים בְּמָנָה יָפָה לֹא נִצְרָכָה אֶלָּא לְהַעֲרָפָה, וּכְזֹאת זְכוּת רביה״ק אוֹר שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים אמו״ז הַמְּחַבֵּר זיע״א ע״ה וּבֹר בְּרִיהּ רַב אַחְאִי גָּאוֹן הֶחָסִיד הַקָּדוֹשׁ מָגֵן דָּוִד וצוק״ל לְהָגֵן אֶלֶף הַמָּגֵן עָלָיו וַעֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָכֶם בְּמוֹטָ״ב תְּלָתָא כַּחֲדָא בְּנֵי חַיֵּי וּמְזוֹנֵי מְבָרִיכָה הָעֶלְיוֹנָה בְּגַשְׁמִיּוֹת וְרוּחָנִיּוֹת לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וּלְשָׁלוֹם בְּכָל חוֹתְמֵי בְּרָכוֹת וְעֵינֵיכֶם וְעֵינֵינוּ תֶּחֱזֶינָה בְּבִנְיַן בֵּית קָדְשֵׁנוּ וְתִפְאַרְתֵּנוּ וּבָא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל הַ״ן מָשִׁיחַ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ אָמֵן וְאָמֵן.

הַחוֹתֵם בִּבְרָכָה וּבִבְרַכַּת הַתּוֹרָה.

ע״ה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיחֲצִירָא ס״ט



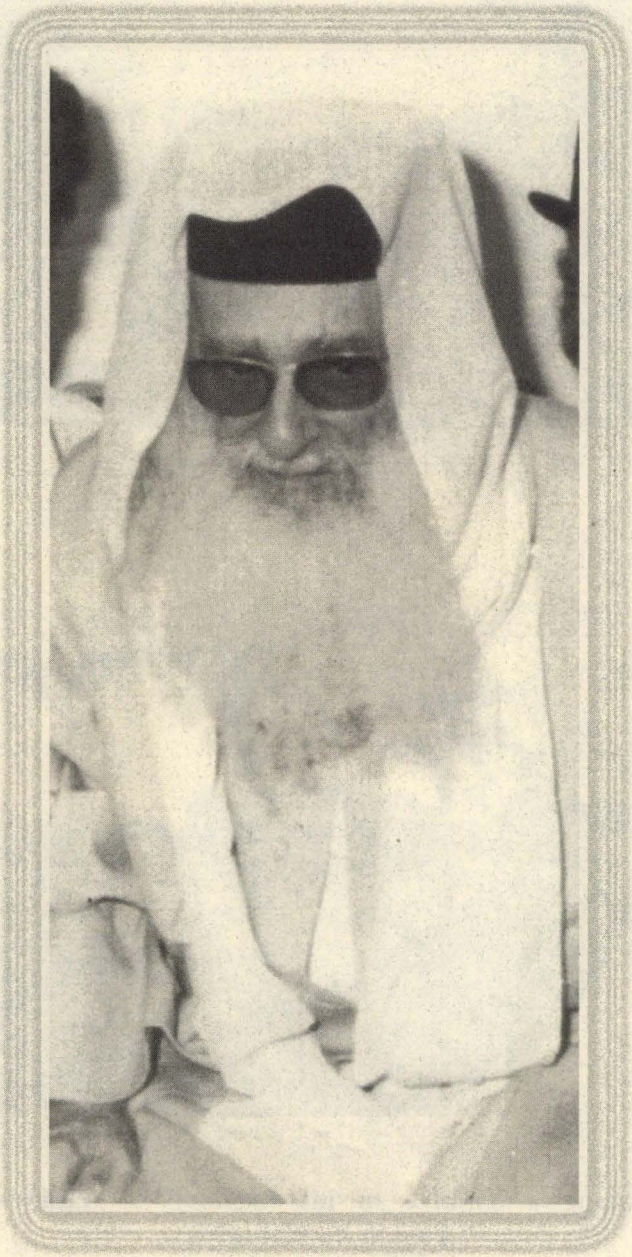


"Establishing a Yeshiva in his memory" – Yeshivat Abir Yaakov in Nahariya





"Establishing a Yeshiva in his memory" – Yeshivat Abir Yaakov in Nahariya



GLOSSARY

Aleph-Bet - The Hebrew alphabet
Amoraim – Sages of the Talmud
Beit Din – Rabbinical Court
Brit Milah – Circumcision, referring to the religious ceremony as well as the *mitzvah* feast accompanying it.
Chevlei Mashiach – "Pangs" heralding the arrival of the Messiah
Chevra Kadisha – Jewish Burial Society
Chiddushim – Novellae in Torah learning.
Drush – Homiletic derivations of Scripture.
Gabbai – attendant
Gabbai tzdaka – charity officer.
Gemara – the Talmud
Halacha – Jewish law
Haskala – the enlightenment – refers to movements aimed at secularizing the population.
Kabbalah – study of the hidden areas of the Torah.
Kashrut – Laws determining if a food is kosher.
Kavanot – intentions, usually referring to special thoughts one might have in mind while praying, studying Torah, or performing some other *mitzvah.*
Kiddush – Blessing sanctifying a holy day such as Shabbat or Yom Tov recited over wine
Lishma – (performance of a *mitzvah*) for its own sake.
Machya – *araq*
Malach – alleyways of the Jewish quarters in Moroccan cities.
Maskilim – see *haskala*
Massechet – Tractate of the Talmud
Metivta – Institute of Jewish Learning.
Mikveh – Ritual Bath
Mitzvah, Mitzvot – performance of Torah commandments.
Pardes – acronym for four types of Torah learning, *pshat, remez, drash, and sod.*
Parsah - measurement of length.
Paytan - composer of *piyut*
Pilpulim - hair-splitting analysis of Talmudic text.

Piyutim – Liturgical poems.
Posek, poskim - Those with authority to rule in Jewish law.
Ruach HaKodesh - Divine Inspiration
Shabbat - the Sabbath day.
Shacharit - The morning prayer.
Shakla veTaria - the questions posed by the Gemara and corresponding answers.
Shas – the Books of the Talmud.
Shechita/Shochet – Ritual slaughter
Shliach Tzibbur - Leader of prayer service (lit. – representative of the public)
Siddur - Prayer book.
Sofer -Scribe of Torah, *teffilin,* and *mezuzot*
Sugyah - Topic discussed in the Talmud.
Sukkah -Booth lived in during the festival of *Sukkot.*
Sukkot - Festival of Tabernacles beginning 15th Tishrei.
Taanit – a fast.
Taanit Hafsaka – Fasting from the conclusion of one Shabbat to the beginning of the next.
Tanach - The twenty-four books of the Bible (acronym for Torah, Neviim (prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).
Tanna – Sage of the Mishna
Tefillin - phylacteries.
Tikkun - Remedy.
Tzaddik – Exceptionally pious holy individual.
Tzdaka – charity.
Tzitzit – Ritual fringes placed on four-cornered garment.