CHAZON ISH

A biography of

RABBI ABRAHAM ISAIAH KARELITZ



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The Original Manuscript in Hebrew

EDITED BY THE RELIGIOUS WRITERS COMMITTEE

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RABBI SHLOMO COHEN

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Written by AHARON SORASKY

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The Chazon Ish

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Order of Photographs

Preface 11

Foreword by Rabbi A. Soraski 13

Introduction 15

Glossary 19

Chapter One: 21

The Ancestry of the Chazon Ish
The Family of the Chazon Ish
His Father, Rabbi Shmariahu Yoseph Karelitz
His Mother, Reshe Leah Karelitz

Chapter Two: 35

His Youth
Brisk and Vilna

Chapter Three: 50

His Marriage with the Torah
Their Partnership
Visits to Kossova
Beilis Blood Libel

Chapter Four: 72

The First World War
Hatred of the Rabbinate as a Vocation
Voting for the New Rabbi of Stoibtz
The Chofetz Chayim
Evacuation
The Blue Card
His Approach to Mussar
A Painful Incident
Back to Lithuania
A Specific Paragraph in the Mishna Brura

Chapter Five : 98

Vilna — The Lithuanian Legend
Their Home in Vilna
His Books — the Apple of His Eye
A Never-Ending Source
Visits to Kossova
The Bond with Rabbi S. Cohen
Rabbi Cohen's Reminiscences
Compromise — Chance — or Intention
Encouragement of the Weak
An Incident with a Diplomat

Chapter Six : 118

A Subtle Influence over Vilna Jewry
An Astounding Incident
Who Is the Chief Rabbi of Vilna
A Storm Breaks out in Vilna
An Unusual Reaction
The Hidden Treasure
A Constant Confidante
Public Affairs

Chapter Seven : 135

A Lion Rises from Babylon
Difficulties of Immigration
Gone Is Its Glory; Gone Is Its Light
The Path Through Stormy Waters

Chapter Eight : 146

First Steps on Holy Soil
A New Existence
Bnei Brak
I Am Not a Man of Words
Secret Visits to Jerusalem
A Sad Occasion
His Choice of Bnei Brak

Chapter Nine : 168

Vilna to Bnei Brak
Rosh Hashana in Bnei Brak
A Turreted Wall
Problems on Farms

Arab or Heretic
Electricity on Sabbath
Guardians of the Sabbath
Water Mains
A Fine Difference
By Miracle to Survival
Caves and Wildernesses
His Influence on the Local Council

Chapter Ten: 195

Father of All Yeshivot
From Babylon to the Holy Land
Ponevezh Yeshiva
Slabodka Yeshiva
Sharon Yeshiva
Beer Yaakov Yeshiva
Alien Elements
Yeshiva Problems
The Qualities of a Rosh Yeshiva
The Kollel
The Idea Spreads

Chapter Eleven: 218

Tiferet Zion
The Hand Which Holds the Building
And They Were Sitting in the Bnei Brak
Personal Supervision
The Traditional Examination

Chapter Twelve: 229

The World of the Individual
Career or Torah
Planted in the House of the Lord
Questions and Answers
Maternal Compassion
Psychological Advice
Practical Remedies
The Key to Success in Torah
Resonant Strings

Appendix 250

ORDER OF PHOTOGRAPHS

	Page
The Chazon Ish	1
The Holy Ark in the Grand Synagogue in Vilna	22
The Gaon of Vilna	23
The Valozhin Yeshiva Etz Chayim	24
Rabbi Yitzchak Elchonon Spector	26
The Chazon Ish's father, Rabbi Shmariah Yosseph Karelitz	31
The Chazon Ish's mother, Rebbetzin Reshe Leah Karelitz	33
The Netziv of Valozhin	36
The Chofetz Chayim	37
Rabbi Chayim Ozer Grodzinski	39
Rabbi Yosseph Dov Soloveitzik of Brisk	41
Rabbi Chayim Soloveitzik	42
Rabbi Yosseph Kahaneman	43
Rabbi Itzale Blazer	44
Title page of the first volume of the book Chazon Ish, published more than 50 years ago	59
A manuscript of the Chazon Ish	60
Reb Itzale Ponevezher	61
Mendel Belis	63
Rabbi Yoel Sorotzkin, Rabbi of Stoibz	76
Rabbi Yosseph Eliahu Heinkin	77
Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel	78
Rabbi Avraham Zvi Kammai of Mir	79
Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel, the "Sabba of Slobodka"	80
Rabbi Yeruham Leibovitz	81
Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin of Lutzk	89
The synagogue of Stoibtz	90
The Chazon Ish in middle age	99
A letter of the Chazon Ish concerning Orlah	117
Rabbi Avraham Yakov Cohen of Vilna	124
Rabbi Chayim Zonenfeld	125
Rabbi Moishe Bloi	126
Rabbi M. M. Epstein, Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva	127
Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, Rebbe of Gur	129
Rabbi Y. Z. Dushinski	130
The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Y. Rozenheim	131
Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Levine	132
Rabbi Akiva Eger	133
Rabbi Moshe Olivitzki	137

	Page
The corner stone laying ceremony of the town of Bnei Brak	139
Rabbi Nachman Shmuel Miaduser	141
Rabbi M. Shzigel	141
Rabbi A. Pomeranzig	141
A letter to Rabbi Olivitzki concerning the Chazon Ish's immigration to the Holy Land	144
Corner stone laying of the Bet Yosseph Yeshiva	147
The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Zalman Yankelevitch	151
Rabbi Issar Zalman Meltzer with Rabbi B.Z. Yadler	155
Rabbi Yisrael Alter, the present Rebbe of Gur	163
Rabbi Dov Weidenfeld, Rabbi of Tshibin	165
The Chazon Ish with the Rabbi of Ponevezh	167
The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Gershenkorn	169
The Chazon Ish in Bne Brak	170
The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Landau the Rabbi of Bnei Brak	171
The Chazon Ish attending the Bar Mitzva of Rabbi Landau's son	172
The Chazon Ish with Reb Zelig Shapira	
The Chazon Ish travelling with Reb Zelig	175
Rabbi Y. Teillebaum	177
The Rebbe of Satmar, Dr. Yitzchak Breuer	179
A letter of the Chazon Ish requesting an Etrog	180
The Chazon Ish examining an Etrog	181
The Chazon Ish's home on Chazon Ish Street	183
Or Hachayim Girls College	185
Bet Yaakov Seminary in Bnei Brak	189
A letter of a Bet Yaakov Insitution	191
The Ponevezh Yeshiva	197
The Beer Yaakov Yeshiva	204
The Directors of Tiferet Zion Yeshiva with Pupils and Teachers	219
Kibbutz "Chofetz Chayim"	233
Rabbi Meir Karelitz	252
Rabbi Shlomo Cohen, the "Cheshek Shlomo"	253
Bet Meir Yeshiva	255
Rabbi Itzale Karelitz	258
Rabbi Moshe Karelitz	260
Rabbi S.E. Kahan	263
Rabbi Issar Zalman Meltzer	264
Rabbi S. Greineman	266
Rabbi A. Sviatitski	271
Rabbi N.M. Karelitz	273
Rabbi Aharon Kotler	274
Rabbi I.Z. Kanieffski "Steipler"	276
The Wailing Wall	279

PREFACE

The Chazon Ish is the treasure of the whole Jewish nation, yet few have any notion of the magnitude of this Torah luminary. His pre-eminence, vision and saintliness are qualities which must be made known to all, therefore we have translated the book "Peer Hador," a biography of the Chazon Ish, into English. The first two volumes of this book deal with his life in Lithuania, his arrival in the Holy Land and the great turn in his life from then on. This translation into English is a synthesis of these two volumes, featuring the most striking of his life's achievements.

The translator has worked in close conjunction with the author while rearranging the original, in order to avoid any slight possibility of deviation from the facts.

The translator is indebted to Mr. Norman Solomon, M. A., for editing this book and for having rendered his invaluable advice.

We hope that this genuine goal will be reached and that the Jewish world will benefit from this humble attempt at delineating the personality and influence of the saintly Chazon Ish.

M. K.

FORWORD

by Rabbi A. Soraski

The Torah is so complex and profound that it is virtually impossible to grasp its ultimate meaning. Few are those who reach any further than the mere facade of this vast construction, and most are only familiar with the more external of its teachings. Some penetrate deeper and understand hidden connotations, but only a few in any generation are guided directly towards the center of this manifold phenomenon and are actually shown the maximum knowledge which a mortal can imbibe.

The one in the last generation who rose above the people was the "Chazon Ish," Rabbi Abraham Isaiah Karelitz. His eye pierced the rock bottom of the most difficult and obscure passages and even reached into its basic elements. There was no branch of the Torah which he did not master, and the results of his unique brain-power he perpetuated in his numerous works, which are a rich harvest of scores of years toil.

He once wrote in one of his letters: "A man who is lucky to really comprehend the Torah seems to walk normally among people and the beholder sees him as a mortal, but he is in fact an angel who lives among his fellow men in an exalted and elevated life."

So great was this man that it is difficult to commit to writing a genuine and loyal description of his personality. We are too insignificant to be able to fathom his true identity and, even if that were possible, mere words are inadequate to delineate his dazzling character.

The aim of this book is not to relate the integrity of the man for its own sake, for that would never do him justice. Those who knew him experienced a supreme feeling of inadequacy, humility and insig-

nificance in front of his forceful and dynamic spiritual powers. Those very people have contributed to the compilation of this biography in order to project the impact of the Chazon Ish upon the wider public and the generations of the future.

He was indeed an historical phenomenon and even the greatest of his contemporaries bowed in humility before him. During the time he lived in the Holy Land, he was the spiritual heart of the people, providing vital resources for Orthodox Jewry. The universality of his mind, the range of intellect and knowledge, the depth of his immortal vision and the clarity of his spiritual conceptions were indeed awe-inspiring, and because of these, he was acclaimed the nation's father and guide.

INTRODUCTION

Let us take a glimpse at the Lithuanian landscape so different from its surroundings and maybe we can sense something plain, quiet and sober about its geographical qualities. These very traits are reflected in the character and temperament of the Lithuanian Jew, who tends to possess a reserved and serious personality in contrast with his East European neighbours. Thus Lithuanian Jewry was not agitated into a mystical outlet of any sort, but crystallised a solid basis of intellectual Torah study as its protection of the future of Orthodoxy. Lithuanian Jews were steeped in a pure and unadulterated Torah existence which provided them with a spring of life and hope in their miserably impoverished lives. This fact was probably the secret of Lithuania's success in producing the most renowned contemporary scholars; as Chazal say "Take heed of the children of the poor, for Torah comes from them." Poverty frequently brings humility and that is the vital ingredient for assimilating Torah, as the commentaries say. G-d did not want to give His Torah on any of the lofty mountains, but preferred to show the world that He gave it on the lowest, on Mount Sinai!

Before the Haskala ravaged Lithuania, there existed a unique loyalty to the traditional life of Judaism with

a persistence that was phenomenal. Torah ruled supreme and its battlements guarded every nuance of their lives. Staunch and uncompromising observance of the law went side by side with continual study of it; old and young, great and simple shared one common goal — to be first and foremost "Talmidei Chachamim".

At that time so high was their regard of the scholar, that he ranked as an aristocrat, and the simple layman would not aspire to a profession of any kind but made Torah scholarship his prime ambition. Rabbis enjoyed unquestionable respect and obedience and were in complete command of every communal affair. Even the lullabies which mothers sang to their children described the intrinsic value of the Torah and the reward for its study. Indeed the women played a vital role in rearing this outstanding generation of scholars and spiritual guidance by foregoing many a personal preference for their children's priority of study.

One of Lithuania's glorious features was the Yeshiva system, in which the most prominent was the one erected by the disciple of the Vilna Gaon, Reb Chayim of Valozhin. The "Yeshiva" phenomenon spelt the beginning of a new epoch. The era of communal Torah study had been born. Young men streamed to this unique institution not only from Lithuania itself but from White Russia, the Ukraine and Poland. The greatest scholars of the time graduated from these schools and they made it their vocation to spread their knowledge throughout the world.

A specific method of learning was developed —

the analytic Lithuanian system which still today is used in Yeshivot everywhere. The purpose of this intense study was to find logical solutions to Talmudical problems which opened the way to a more profound conception of the Torah. Lithuanian scholars had a particularly sharp and analytical approach in their study, which gave a pungent tone to their brilliant results.

Another feature which delineated the unique atmosphere of the Yeshiva was "Mussar," founded by the great Rabbi Israel of Salant under the inspiration of his spiritual father, Reb Zundel of Salant. Rabbi Israel objected to the exclusive concentration on "pilpul" and exhibition of mental agility, and he inculcated a new school of thought into the Torah realm of the Yeshiva, parallel with its intellectual study. The "Mussar" system was instilled into the Yeshiva curriculum as a complement to abstract Torah study, and it brought the students to think of their own spiritual condition as well, and to liberate themselves from natural impulses, habits and temptations. Mussar strove to awaken a will to WANT only to do the right thing and Rabbi Israel once said "He who learned Mussar properly ONCE in his life, will never forget that moment."

And furthermore, he used to say "Everything else becomes unimportant compared with the desire to gain control over oneself." The Mussar movement produced many truly saintly men who have gone down in the history of Torah Jewry.

We have hitherto mentioned the two dominant factors in the consolidation of Lithuanian Jewry, but there

existed another stronghold which succeeded no less in guiding this brilliant generation through its resplendent epoch... the Gaon of Vilna. He held the reins of his people and spurred them on to higher and more intense study. By the force of his intellectual and spiritual power, without ever imposing himself in person, he formed a mass yearning, a common desire to be near the Torah. Rabbi Israel Lipshitz of Danzig once wrote about him: "The whole universe lies beneath one star (The Gaon) which rises once in a thousand years, and has now come down from the firmament illuminating the whole world." Few were those who knew him, a kind of superman living aloof from his fellow man, yet all thirsted to discuss and reveal his Halachic expositions and be familiar with his brilliant interpretations on Talmudic problems. The Gaon was considered the 'King' of Vilna, and Vilna the virtual capital of Lithuania. Vilna, although never an official Lithuanian capital, was looked upon by Orthodox Jews with greater importance than Petersburg or Warsaw. Vilna was of Torah royalty where the Gaon began a glorious dynasty of Gedolim, including later on Rabbi Chayim of Brisk, Rabbi Chayim Ozer Grodjinsky and the Chazon Ish.

Thus Torah with its bundle and stick found respite in Lithuania, after its constant persecutions, since its shrines in Sora and Pombedita, Spain and France were annihilated. In Lithuania it laid its foundation stone, and in Vilna built a fortress, Vilna, in which the Gaon flourished and where later the Chazon Ish imbibed his inspiration.

GLOSSARY

1. **Admorim** — Spiritual leaders amongst the Chassidic sects.
2. **Aggada** — Narrative sections of Talmud.
3. **Avodat Hashem** — In the service of G-d.
4. **Baal Habos** — Layman.
5. **Bet Hamedrash** — House of Torah study.
6. **Cheder** — School of Torah study for young children.
7. **Chidushei Torah** — Original interpretations in Talmudic exegesis.
8. **Chilul Hashem** — Profanation of Holy Name.
9. **Chuppa** — Marriage canopy.
10. **Dayan** — Judge.
11. **Din** — Law in Torah.
12. **Din Torah** — Civil dispute decided by judges.
13. **Drush** — Homiletical explanations in Torah.
14. **Gaon** — Brilliant Torah sage.
15. **Gehinom** — Hell.
16. **Halacha** — Application of Talmud to life practice.
17. **Kabbala** — Torah study at a mystical level.
18. **Kashrut** — Jewish dietry laws.
19. **Kiddush** — Ceremony of sanctification.
20. **Lishmo** — Torah activity with no ulterior purpose.
21. **Maasim Tovim** — Good deeds.
22. **Marit Ain** — For the sake of appearance.
23. **Melamed** — Torah teacher of young children.
24. **Mesirut Nefesh** — Personal sacrifice.
25. **Mideoraita** — Law deriving directly from the Torah.
26. **Mikvaot** — Baths of Ritual Immersion.
27. **Mishloach Manot** — Traditional sending of edibles on Purim.
28. **Mussar** — Moral and ethical teachings.

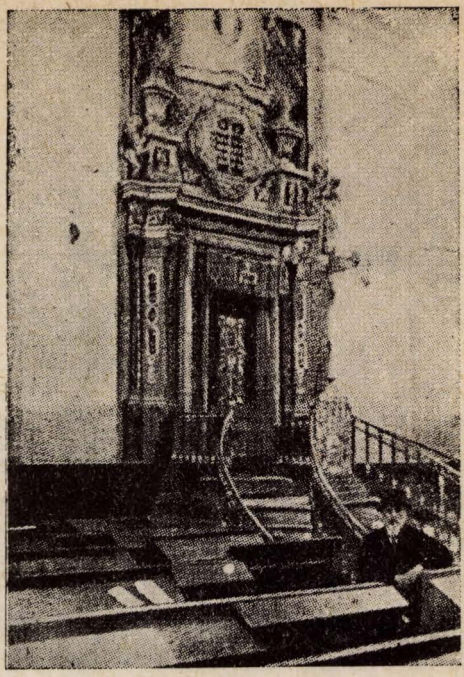
29. **Negel Vasser** — Washing of hands after sleep.
30. **Parnes** — President of a Jewish community.
31. **Pikuach Nefesh** — Danger of life.
32. **Pilpul** — School of analytical Torah study.
33. **Piskei Halacha** — Definitive halachic decisions.
34. **Pirkei Avot** — "Sayings of the Fathers". The tractate of ethical teachings.
35. **Poskim** — Sages deciding authoritative Piskei Halacha.
36. **Prubbul** — Legal arrangement concerning annulment of loans, in the Sabbatical year.
37. **Psukim** — Textual sections from Torah sources.
38. **Rashi** — Great Talmudic commentator.
39. **Rishonim** — Torah sages of the period from the "Gaonim" till Shulchan Aruch.
40. **Rosh Chodesh** — First day of the month.
41. **Segula** — Propitious sign.
42. **Shass** — The six orders of the Talmud.
43. **Shacharit** — Morning prayer.
44. **Shechita** — Jewish ritual slaughter.
45. **Shulchan Aruch** — "The Prepared Table" systematic presentation of Halacha made by Reb Yoseph Karo.
46. **Simchat Torah** — Rejoicing of the law.
47. **Tallit** — Prayer shawl.
48. **Teffilin** — Phylacteries.
49. **Teg** — The daily meal provided by local residents to Torah scholars.
50. **Tehillim** — Psalms.
51. **Yirat Shamayim** — Fear of heaven.
52. **Zohar** — Classical source book of Kabbala.

Chapter I

THE ANCESTRY OF THE CHAZON ISH

Off one of Vilna's ancient and twisted lanes, lived the Gaon of Vilna. From this small abode evolved a massive and weighty influence which left its mark not only on his generation but on all those to come. He was not ostentatious and did not despatch letters to all those who asked his advice, but was locked up in his world of study and only wrote "Hidushei Torah" or "Piskei Halacha", leaving his close pupils to reply to the questioners on their problems. Even when writing his Chidushim, the Gaon limited his pen to the minimum and in later generations scholars used to say "It takes seven full days of careful scrutiny (Shiva Nekiyim) to decipher each drop of ink which the Gaon wrote." Many Torah authorities entreated him to grace their books with a literary recommendation, but rarely did he agree.

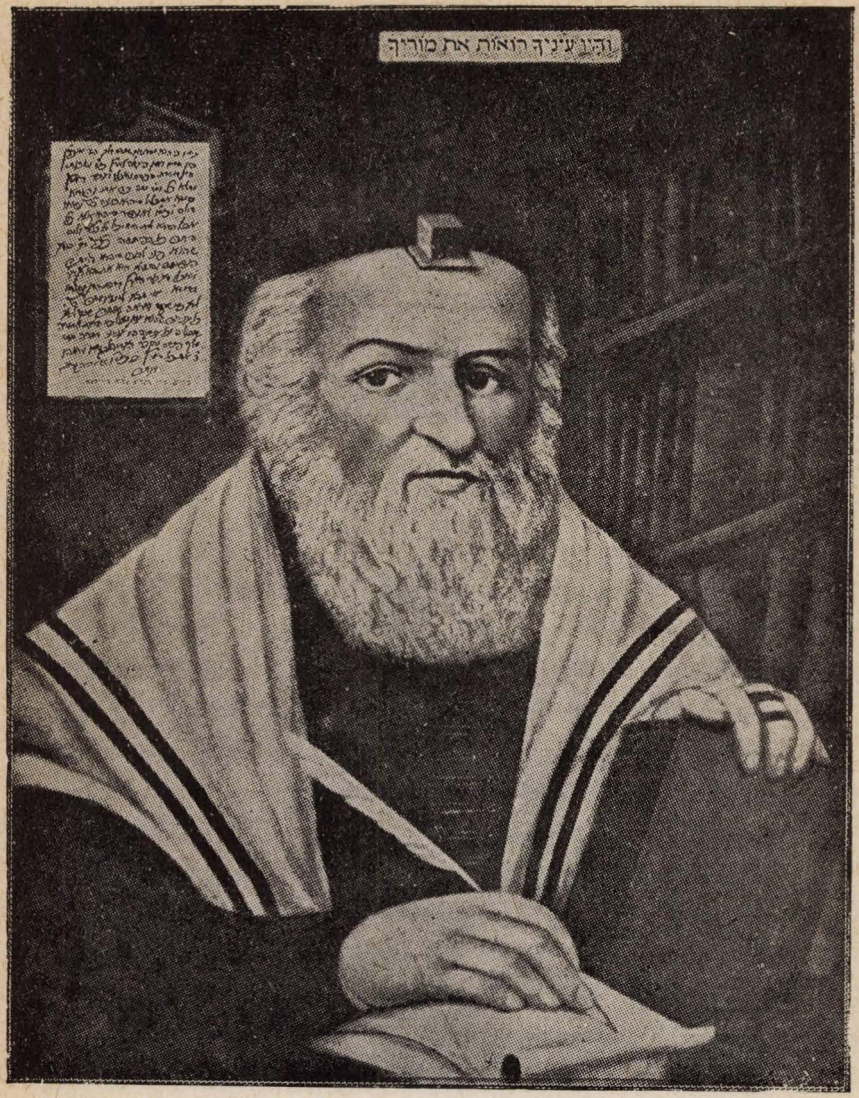
Three books were honoured with a recommendation from the Gaon, two of which were written by Reb. Arieh Epstein, known as "the Pardess." His books were called "Halacha Achrona." The Pardess was Rav of Konigsberg and in the forward which the Gaon wrote in his books, were these elaborate tributes, "To my beloved friend, the great



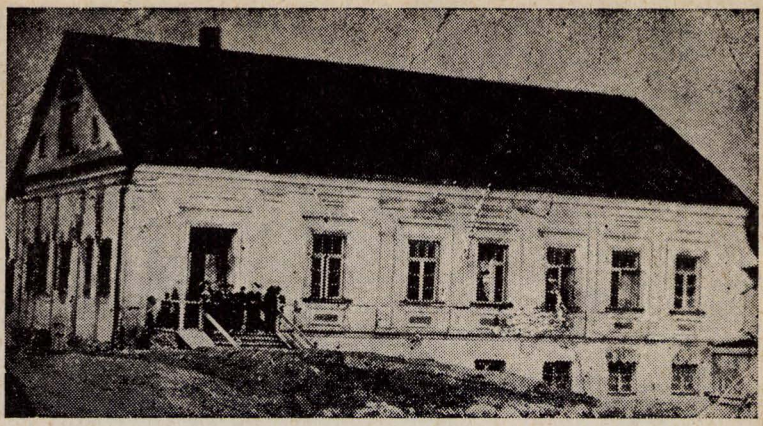
The Holy Ark in the Grand Synagogue of Vilna

luminary, famous for his Torah and Hassidut, the light of Israel, pillar of strength, Rabbi Arieh Leb... I hereby confirm that I have received his holy book and that I have always known him as a saintly person continually labouring in Torah and toiling in the fear of G-d. In the second volume the Gaon compares him to an "angel".

His ancestry was one of the grandest and most famous in the Jewish world. His father was the "Parness" of Horodna, Rabbi Mordechai Vilner, who was the descendant of Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Barcelona (Haraoh) and Rabbi



The Gaon of Vilna

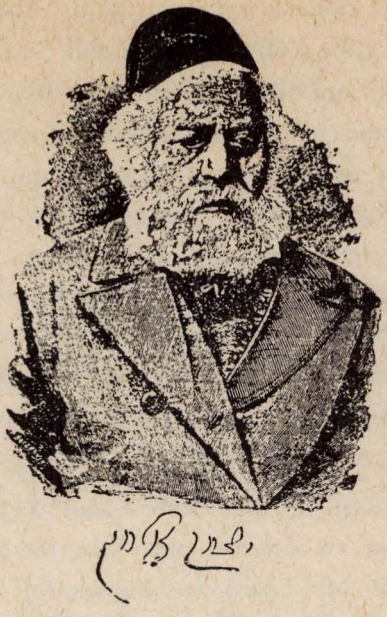


The Valozhin Yeshiva, Etz Chaim

Zerachia Halevi, the "Baal Hamaor", one of the "Rishonim". Reb Arieh Leb ("The Pardess") used to call his father "prince of the Levites" and would tell of his trials and troubles which were so unbearable that they could be compared to those of Job. As a very young child, the Pardess was brought up in ways of great sanctity. For example, his father would weigh him every Rosh Chodesh and then distribute charity corresponding to his weight. His education was one of painstaking care over little details, forming in him a perfect composition of saint and scholar. He married the daughter of the "Pardess of Slutzk," a direct descendant of the Maharal of Prague. He was always in Tallis and Tefilin, learning and probing in Torah or Kabbala till he developed into one of the greatest Gaonim of the generation. His strength was not only as a Rav, but also as the teacher of many disciples. He was intrinsically bound up with the people and in 1768,

when there was a serious pogrom in the Ukraine area, resulting in the killing of sixty thousand Jews, the Pardess mourned so long and bitterly the fate of his wretched brethren, that he could not be comforted. He compiled twenty-three books in his lifetime, ranging from "Halacha" to "Drush" and from "Kabbala" to "Aggada", but the magnum opus which brought him fame, was his book the "Pardess". He explains each of the 613 Mitzvot from their source in the Torah, Prophets, Hagiographa, Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, Zohar and Kabbala, and claims to have received the bases of interpretation not from other works, but from a direct verbal tradition from the "Ari".

His great-grandson was Reb Shaul Katzenellenbogen-Epstein, the Rav of Kossova, who was the grandfather of the Chazon Ish. Reb Shaul was known for both his piety and knowledge. He frequented the Batei Midrash of Vilna, and absorbed the unique inspiration of the Gaon. He was profound and had an incisive approach in his learning and, at an early age, showed signs of becoming one of the prominent Torah authorities of his generation. His renowned discourse at the age of seventeen in the large synagogue of Grodno, was attended by the Rav of Lublin and others of such calibre, who considered him to be a genius. Once on a visit to Warsaw, he met the Rebbe of Gur (author of Hidushei Harim), and the two probed into matters of learning and exchanged ideas on interpretations of the Talmud. Reb Shaul made such an impression upon the Rebbe that he accompanied him home—a thing he had never done before. He was hesitant to accept the coveted post of Rav of Kossova, claiming that as long as he was free from such duties, he



Rabbi Yitzchak Elchonon Spector

could continue to acquire knowledge and piety undisturbed, but when Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, the Rav of Norvardok (later of Kovna) urged him strongly to accept the post, he succumbed. For twenty-four years he shepherded his community by quiet waters and always gave a helping hand to anyone in need. He was efficient and exceedingly clever and witty, which attributes merged with an attractive personal charm captivating everyone who had contact with him. He would rebuke his congregants in such a subtle way, that they did not take offence at his criticism of them.

Reb Shaul Kossover (as the people called him) once had to judge a Din Torah concerning a money dispute and

the plaintiffs called before him were two diametrically opposed types of people. One was honoured in the community, and the other a renowned fool.

Both were adamant that their claim was right, and, upon hearing both sides, Reb Shaul suddenly interrupted. Turning to the fool he said, "It is clear to me that you are correct in your arguments for you are in the habit of speaking the truth." The honoured claimant was slighted by the remark, thinking that his honesty was being questioned and, thereupon, became impatient. "Sit down", said Reb Shaul, "and be at rest. I'll first cross-examine him." So he turned to the fool and asked him, "Tell me, did you make a Kinyan according to the law, with a kerchief ?" The answer was forthcoming, "Oh, sure, we made a Kinyan, but we didn't use such things as kerchiefs." Reb Shaul continued to enquire, "Did you make a Tkiat Kaf (binding agreement effected by shaking hands)?" "Of course we made a Tkiat Kaf but we forgot to shake hands !" answered the fool. Reb Shaul hesitated a moment and then in a subdued voice concluded, "This case is void of significance since a contract cannot have force without a proper Kinyan," and both plaintiffs left their beloved Rabbi amicably.

In 1882 Rabbi Shaul Katzenellenbogen became Rav of Kovrin and guided his community with utmost discretion and consideration of each and every sect. Whether Chassidim or Misnagdim, upper or middle class, they were all united in their reverence of him — the man who never considered his own health nor honour but who devoted his days and nights to the welfare of the poor and repressed. One of his outstanding enterprises was the "Gemilut Chasadim" (charity

for the poor fund) which he established and which, after his death, was called "the Deed of Shaul". Many were the Torah works which received a literary commendation from him and which bore his name in their forewords, flanking others of the greatest of his time, names such as Rabbi Y. L. Diskin of Brisk, Rabbi Shmuel Salant of Jerusalem, Rabbi J. Dov of Brisk, the Netziv of Volozhin and Rabbi Yitzchok Elchanan of Kovna. He was a man whose life was filled with suffering, yet he bore his pain courageously and nobly. Not only his eloquence impressed his congregants in his High Holy Days' sermons, but also his piety and integrity. For he was unusually precise in his observance of the law, furthermore he denied himself any wordly indulgences. The melody of learning never parted from his lips until a fateful Wednesday on Succot, 1892, when at the age of 64, he was taken from his people, who flocked in thousands to pay final homage to their revered master.

Rabbi Shmariahu Joseph Karelitz, the Father of the Chazon Ish

The prize member of Rab Shaul's family was his son-in-law, Reb Shmariahu Joseph Karelitz, the father of the Chazon Ish. He too was a distant relative of the Pardess, though much further removed than his father-in-law, who was a direct descendant. Reb Shmariahu was named after his grandfather, Reb Shmariahu Karelitz, who was the grandson of the Pardess's niece. He too was a great Torah personality, described as a "divine genius at whose sermons angels attended."

It was not surprising, therefore, that Reb Shaul

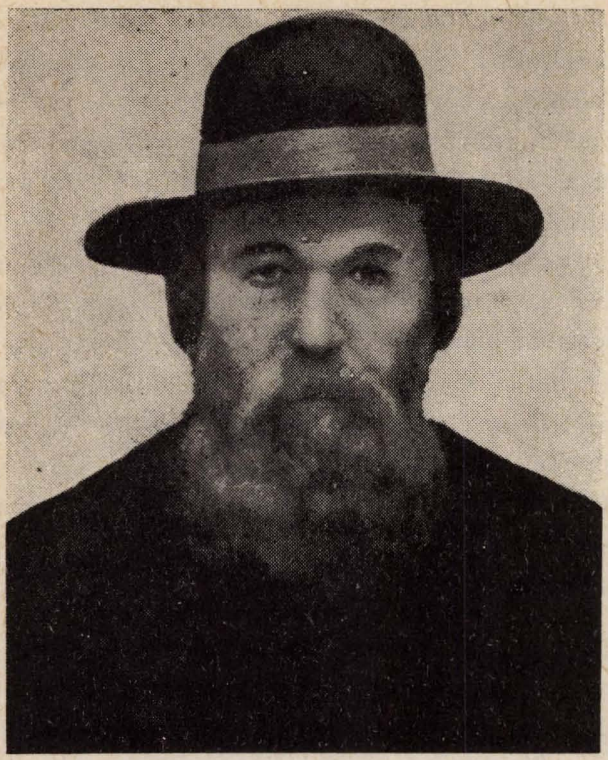
Katzenellenbogen found this young man a worthy suitor for his daughter, Reshe Leah; a young man of distinguished lineage, stemming from the Pardess and, above all, himself a promising Torah scholar whom everyone knew about and praised. The first five years of his married life were supported by his parents; one year his father and the other four his father-in-law sustained his needs so that he was completely freed from any financial worries and was able to be immersed solely in his studies.

Reb Shmariahu Joseph was popular not only in the family but also in his immediate surroundings and in Kossova at large. He had an unusual combination of genius and good-naturedness. He was a sweet-tempered person, friendly and forever cheerful with his fellowmen; peace of mind glowed in his eyes and a unique calm and tranquility contoured his fine features. His gait was noble; he was a man of outstanding aristocratic bearing. Small wonder that after his father-in-law left for Kovrin he was ordained Rabbi of Kossova in his place. He was then under the age of thirty and served as Rav of this town till the end of his life, never being attracted by offers in the big towns, nor surrendering to the attraction of change. He was the symbol of modesty and devotion and preferred to remain in the small community of Kossova above all else. The most prominent of this man's attributes was affection for his fellow Jews, no matter what their status; he had unlimited and boundless love for all: Kossova was a typical Lithuanian village with only two thousand one hundred inhabitants, most of whom were Jews. This was a vital factor in his capacity to have close contact and influence on each and every member of his

community. He studied the needs and failings of each of his congregants, as a father would his child and in each individual case he put the result of his study into practice. There is a story told about him that he once strolled among the seats of the Beit Hamedrash before Shacharit and stopped at one place, opened the Talit bag, and put into it the ethical work "Mesilat Yesharim." In this discreet way be informed his congregant of the need to improve himself.

He was no ordinary Rabbi : due to him, the rites and rituals were not performed with tedious routine and the congregation was more than a mere conglomeration of homes. Kossova was a family, a living heart-beat pulsating in unison with the Torah. Its Shabbat was an unforgettable experience. Everyone, whatever his profession, merged in the light and warmth of a communal Shabbat together with their "Reb Shmerl", as they fondly nicknamed him. When they came to the synagogue on Friday night, they found him in ritual garb, and, after the cordial "Kaballat Shabbat", they would pass in line before him wishing him "Good Shabbat". To one he would say a hearty word, for another just a twinkle in the eye sufficed, while a third received a tight hand-shake. After the meal, he gave a sermon on the weekly section with a Rashi commentary, and elaborated by using homiletical elucidations on the deep meanings of the Torah. Before dinner next day, there was a weekly Talmud lecture and in the afternoon a lesson on Pirkei Avot. How enviable this village of Kossova was whose Rabbi, Reb Shaul, when leaving for Kovrin, compensated them with this price less son-in-law.

After the Sabbath and all the week round, the Rav sat



The Chazon Ish's Father, Rabbi Shmariahu Yosseph Karelitz

and learned at home in an atmosphere of perfect tranquillity. He considered everything seriously; when a woman came with a question of a drop of blood in an egg, he would take out a kerchief, don his spectacles and examine the egg in all earnestness. He was an exceedingly just and gifted arbiter and his son, the Chazon Ish, cites some of the outstanding cases in which he merged expert knowledge with a unique practical adaptation of the hypothetical Law. He was not a superficial scholar and was never satisfied with any speedy conclusions, but preferred to labour in his learning until he reached the desired solution. Although he ranked as a famous Halachic authority, he never imposed his verdict on the public, but always concluded: "It is advisable to ask the Gedolei Hador for the practical application of this Halacha." Perhaps this trait of humility arose from his interest in Mussar literature and the Kaballistic works of the Shlah, such as the "Two Tablets of the Covenant", which had a marked influence on his trend of thought.

Despite his scores of years of labouring in his studies and of successfully reaching a distinguished status in Torah scholarship, Reb Shmariahu Joseph never found it necessary to publish his works. Only two years before his death did he finally print a book called "Beit Talmud" which, although small in quantity, was great in quality, so much so that it impressed the Torah world immensely. Once the "Cheshek Shlomo", father-in-law of Reb Meir Karelitz, called the latter and exclaimed, "How expertly your father comprehends the real truth of the Torah". The success of his "Beit Talmud" echoed everywhere, and once when Reb Chaim Soloveitchik met the Chofetz Chaim, their foremost topic of conversation



The Chazon Ish's Mother, Rebbetzin Reshe Leah Karelitz

was the new book of the Kossover Rav. Another book which he wrote was called "Givat Shaul" — a biography of his father-in-law, Reb Shaul Katzenellenbogen, about whom he felt duty-bound to write, to perpetuate his revered father-in-law's memory. His literary style was rich and elegant, yet concise and to the point. He had a great love and longing for the land of Israel, which is depicted in some of his letters written more than seventy years ago.

Reshe Leah Karelitz

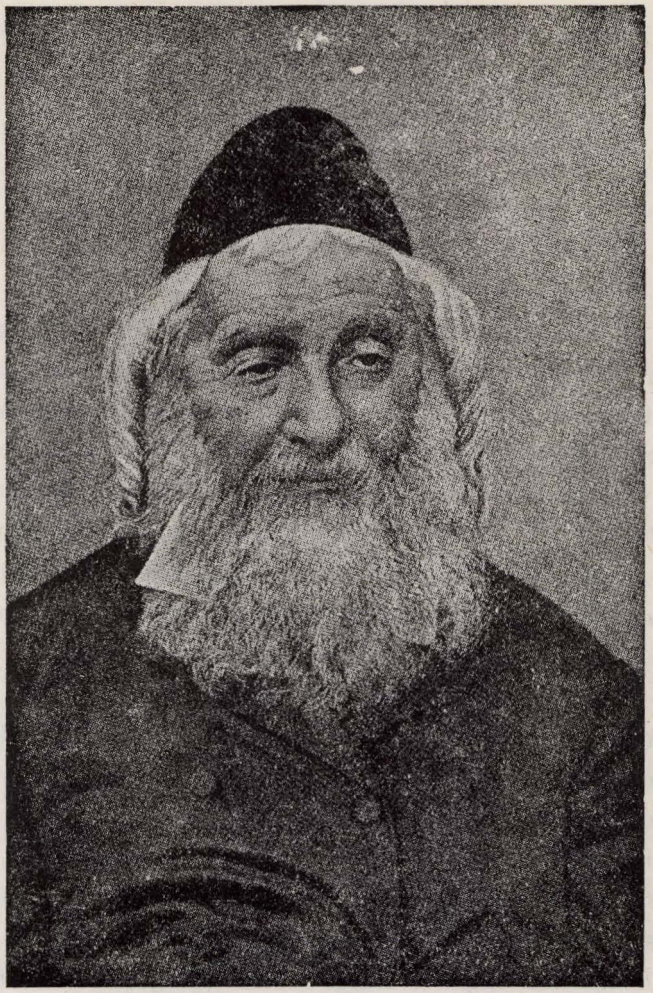
Reb Shmariahu's wife was a pious and modest woman with a deeply engrained "Yirat Shamaim" clearly expressed in her striking face. She was a clever and perceptive person, and it was she who saw to the running of this historic home, which was to become a lighthouse of the Jewish nation, and a culmination of the endeavours of the Pardess and his unique offspring, whose crowning glory was the "Chazon Ish". Nine children were the survivors of the fifteen she bore, and each one was in his own right a great person. Rebbetzin Reshe Leah had been warned by her doctors that pregnancy and childbirth would be fatal for her, and her father, Reb Shaul, even suggested to his son-in-law to give his daughter a divorce on the grounds of her incompetence to bear children. But she, in her piety, as though her heart told her of the prospects of the future, refused to heed the ominous words of her physicians and said, "Childbirth is what I have been created for and the Heavens will have mercy." Indeed the Heavens were merciful and blessed her with nine wonder-children and a long lease of life close to 90 years. As she grew old and meditated on her children, her contribution to mankind, she would smile and murmur to herself, "How happy I am that I did not listen to the doctors, and how poor the world would have been had I not given birth to the Chazon Ish."

Chapter II

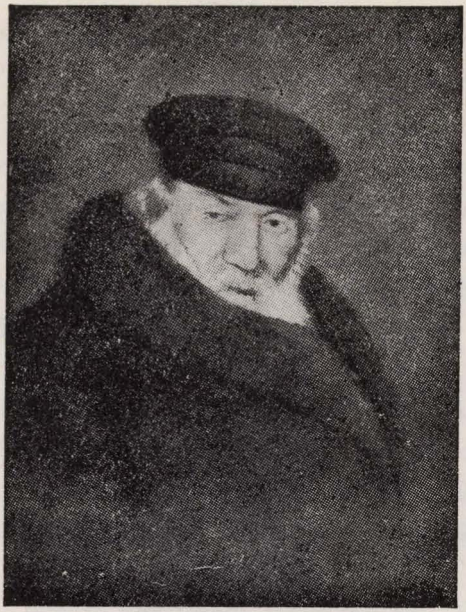
HIS YOUTH

On Thursday night, 11th of MarCheshvan, 5639, one could hear footsteps on the cobbled streets of Kossova, making their way to the humble abode of the Rabbi's son-in-law, Reb Shmariah Joseph, as friends conveyed their hearty mazeltov on the birth of their second son, Abraham Isaiah. All that day Reb Shmariah had fasted and secluded himself in a room, learning and praying. Suddenly there was a knock and the news of his son's birth was announced. His face shone with joy for a moment and then he shut the door to conclude his fast in peace. Only when the stars had begun to shine, after the setting of the sun, did he emerge to break his fast. Then he entered the living room, where his well-wishers awaited him, to shower him with their warm mazeltov wishes. They congratulated him, and from the bottom of their hearts blessed him to bring up this child to Torah, Chuppah and Ma'asim Tovim, little realizing that their blessings would bring bountiful fruits far greater than their minds could fathom.

From babyhood, Abraham Isaiah grew up with meticulous emphasis on his spiritual environment. His saintly mother would cover his head with a velvet skull-cap, which



The Netziv of Valozhin



The Chofetz Chaim

she had embroidered, from the first day he was born, as a "segula" for "Yirat Shomayim". From the age of thirty days she would wash his hands for "negel vasser", taking care to do so alternately three times. Then, when he began to talk, he was taught to recite the blessing on the Torah, a few selected "Psukim" and the alphabet. He was no doubt a child prodigy, and when he was three years old, he once said to his father, "Father, I am expert in all Shass." His father was stunned by this remark and asked how that could be. His clever son replied, "Find me one letter in the Shass which I do not know!"

He did not attend the local school, but studied privately with a tutor, Reb Moishe Tuvieh, who was a great

scholar and saint who had adopted the method of learning of the Gaon, and who had also been the tutor of Reb Shmariah Joseph.

From childhood, the Chazon Ish displayed exceptional gifts as a student and his assiduity was unprecedented, so that his tutor could no longer cope and was compelled to give up his brilliant pupil. Reb Shmariah Joseph decided to learn with his son every day and the rest of the time the Chazon Ish spent learning by himself in one of the old Batei Midrash in Kossova, his hometown. He was unlike the townsfolk who flocked to the large and famous Yeshivot as the accepted practice, but preferred to study alone and to crystallize an original and independent style of learning. His guide in his lone search for the truth was the Gaon of Vilna, who had formerly inspired both his father and teacher, and who became a moral and ethical influence on the Chazon Ish's spiritual aspirations. A frequent remark of his was "Well, if one has to decipher a difficult Halacha, then one must stay up a whole night." Repeatedly did the Chazon Ish say things to this effect in his old age, and this very rule he observed in his childhood. He would learn with enthusiasm sometimes all through the night, much to the anguish of his watchful mother who disapproved, out of anxiety for her child's health. Her admonitions were of no avail and in order to avoid hurting her, little Abraham Isaiah would cover his lamp with a blanket so that the light would not give him away, and sat up nights learning secretly. But not for long did this trick succeed and in time his mother discovered that her wondrous son "loved the Torah more than his mother."



Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski

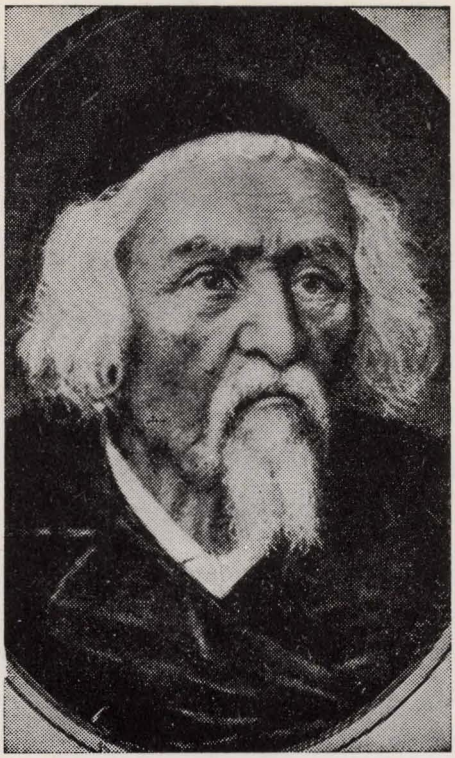
His external behaviour was extraordinary too, and aroused the admiration of all who knew him. The mischievous games and carefree pastimes of his friends never lured him into their domain, but he remained faithful to one sole aim, and that was Torah study. He was born great and never passed through a transitory stage of instability, and this inherent greatness later ripened into a genius the like of which the world had rarely known. Later he articulated this in one of his philosophical works: "Material indulgement

endows a person with an illusion of pleasure, but it can by no means compete with the joy derived from continual Torah study, which, if done intensely, elevates the human being above this mundane world into the domain of the heavens, where one can taste a part of G-d's Knowledge. Beyond this, no greater gift could be offered mankind."

This lad was imbued with a natural instinct of purity, and his adherence to the Torah and its study was done with ease and little effort. In this spirit he strode through his childhood years, reinforcing each stride till he reached perfection; and the keystone to this goal he defined thus, "My teachers taught me that one must take counsel from the Shulchan Aruch on each movement one makes." So we see that the secret of his self-education was the stress he laid on the practical application of the law over and above the abstract knowledge of it.

His refinement too was one of his striking characteristics and this anecdote is told about him. Once the family was sitting at the meal when his mother noticed that he wasn't eating meat like everyone else. Upon questioning him, he replied, "I didn't receive a knife and fork" (not wanting to shame his mother for forgetting the meat as well). When his mother saw that she had forgotten both, she smiled with satisfaction at her son's wit and refinement reflected in this reply.

Chazal say that Torah learning weakens the health of a person, and he was, unfortunately, faithful to this proverb. There are clear signs of his ailing health all through his life. His first concern was never to cause his parents any worry or anxiety, so he would restrain himself even



Rabbi Yosseph Dov Soloveitzik, of Brisk

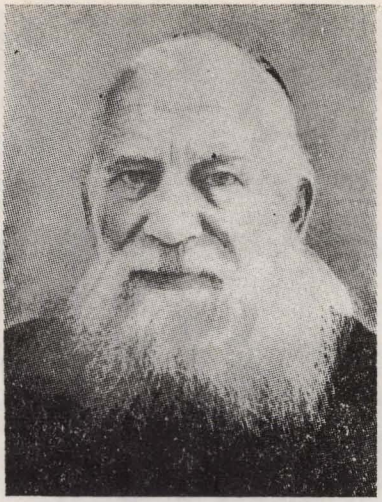
from the faintest sigh, and when he got an attack of pains while learning in the Beit Hamedrash, he would steal secretly into the ladies' gallery, and there, where no-one saw him, let out his groans till the pains subsided.

His vocation in life was crystal clear to him and even before he reached manhood, he knew only of this one uncompromising path, to which he adhered till the end of his days. He had no conflicts whether to become an academic or professional in some secular field; these thoughts never



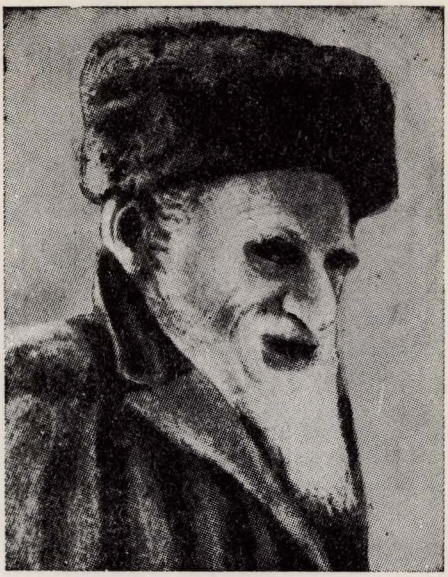
Rabbi Chaim Soloveitzik

entered his mind, though intellectual enlightenment was the rage of the day. Even the likely temptation of a young Talmid Chacham, that of learning Torah to become a Rabbi or Dayan, never lurked in his head and this truth-searching lad swore on his thirteenth birthday, his Bar Mitzvah, that "I am going to learn Torah for its own sake all the days of my life." At the tender age of thirteen, the Chazon Ish had discerned the fine difference between Torah study for a profession and Torah Lishmo — just for the purpose of fulfilling G-d's wish "And thou shalt meditate on it day and night." He was never to utilise his knowledge for any personal gain, profit or respect, but spent most of his life in seclusion, away from the public eye, in order to be genuinely close to his coveted Torah.



Rabbi Yosseph Kahaneman

At that time the peak of Torah scholarship was in the town of Brisk where Reb Chaim Soloveitchik expounded his interpretations on the Talmud. The constant flow of scholars brought with it the Chazon Ish from Kossova, in order to imbibe the brilliant knowledge of Lithuania's greatest Gaon of the time. Being a severe adherent of the law and very stringent where possible, he did not accept the lenient ruling of the Bach concerning "Hodosh" (new wheat). So he directed his footsteps back to his hometown, Kossova, where he was to remain, influenced only by one "Rebbe," the Gaon. His individuality in Torah-study stands out to this day, since his method is different from those used in the Yeshivot. He was in opposition to the accepted mode in the Yeshivot of "Pilpul" and remained adamant on this point, always stressing this to anyone in contact with him.



Rabbi Itzale Blazer

In Torah study it is permissible for a Gadol to impose his own interpretation on any problem in the Talmud. The Chazon Ish preferred taking a different course in his travels through the large pages of the Gemarrah. He remained loyal to the writings of the Gaon of Vilna, striving hard to master them fully, rather than making new interpretations of his own. Only after he reached forty years of age did he begin to deviate occasionally from the conclusions of the Gaon and interpret some passages in his own style.

Although known chiefly for his intellectual genius, he laid great stress on improving his personality. His prime medium was prayer. He would pray with emotion and pour forth his heart to his Maker, lingering on each word in

utmost concentration. It was his conviction that learning and prayer go hand in hand. The perseverance and diligence in Torah study gives understanding to one's prayers, and prayer brings spiritual aid to one's learning. It makes no difference which text one prays as long as it comes from the heart, was his opinion.

Although secluded from society, the Chazon Ish as a child had several good companions with whom he shared his spiritual aspirations. One of them was Reb Abraham Jacob Kwint. This young man had formerly learned in Slonim under the Gaon "Pne Yehudah". He ate "teg" like his fellow students and on Shabbat he would dine with a rich family. One of their sons began to taunt him on his "inferiority" — being a Yeshiva student in comparison with him, an enlightened person. When he could no longer bear it, he left Slonim and set out for Kossova in search of undisturbed Torah study. There he was encouraged by Rabbi Karelitz and became a good friend of his two elder sons, Reb Meir and Reb Abraham Isaiah. The three fixed two Shiurim a day, each of which lasted six hours. No-one ever dared to disturb them, even for the most urgent reason. When they came across any difficult passage in the Gemarrah, the Chazon Ish in all earnestness would stop and say, "Let us ask G-d the solution, let's entreat Him to clarify His Torah to us." And the three of them would take a Tehillim, each one in a different corner of the room, and would weep in prayer, begging their Maker to cast light on their problem. When they had finished one or two "Kapitlach", they resumed their study and started again from the beginning until they discovered the formerly concealed answer.

The great paradox in his personality was the combination of social superiority and friendliness to everyone. Usually when a person concentrates on his studies, he tends to go into solitude and becomes introvert and awkward in society. But not so the Chazon Ish — he was the perfect example of the true scholar, immersed solely in his books yet an exceptionally pleasant and beloved human being like his father. He once wrote, "I have pleasure from giving another man joy." This quality was not only limited to treating people nicely, receiving everybody with a smiling face and conversing humorously. His deeds were an even greater proof of his noble spirit and love for mankind. In Kossova, there was a man who was ill and could not empty his bowels unaided. His doctors advised his family to help, but they were sickened by it. When the Chazon Ish heard this, he went several times a week to help with this unsightly task and with his own hands relieved the sick man of his discomfort. On another occasion, an animal fell into a pit and couldn't get out, so the Chazon Ish, feeling sorrow for the dying animal, let himself down into the ditch, and saved it.

BRISK AND VILNA

In that period it was the fashion in the Torah world to study for some time at Brisk and then continue in Vilna. On the way people would stop in Kossova to meet the renowned Rabbi's son, Abraham Isaiah, and discuss their different schools of learning with him. He listened politely to all they had to say, although not everything was satisfactory according to his approach. Despite his reservations regarding the learning in Vilna under Reb Chayim Ozer, he

was in close contact with him. He was endowed with an unusual perception of everything happening around him, although people tended to look upon him as an innocent and diligent scholar who sat day and night in the Beit Hamidrash hardly lifting his eyes from his books. They were convinced that this young man was ignorant of world events, and were certain that he did not even know them as they came and went while he was absorbed in his study. They soon learned that they had made a mistake, for not only did he know each one, but his insight into every individual was deep and perceptive. The only "paper" he ever read was the Torah pamphlet "Hapeless". He never listened to the towncriers nor the people bringing the news from street corners, yet he was fully informed by reliable sources on everything that had taken place in the world, so much so that even his immediate family was surprised by his expert knowledge in these spheres.

Those were the stormy days of the war between Russia and Japan which broke out in 1905. Poland too, which was then under Russian domain, was dragged into the whirlpool of war, and its terror and fear cast an ominous shadow over Eastern Europe. Outbursts of all kinds appeared in its wake and some were even daring enough to rise against the Czar himself. Part of all this excitement drifted even as far as Kossova which soon seethed in curiosity and anxiety. Groups of people stood on street corners at all hours of the day exchanging bits of news on what was happening on the front lines. People of all classes and professions literally abandoned their work, for now the chief interest lay in how the war was progressing. So contagious was the

atmosphere that even the Batei Midrash were empty of their scholars.

Only one young student in Kossova remained loyal to his books, and he was none other than the Rabbi's second son, the Chazon Ish. There he sat, bent over the old Sphorim, never stopping in his study for a moment. In these troubled hours his assiduity grew even more intense and he neither spoke nor inquired about anything. Even his parents were amazed at his strength of perserverance in study during those hard times. When conversing about the war, after the cannons had ceased to roar and the battles were over, they were even more taken aback when the Chazon Ish showed detailed knowledge on each stage of the war.

Also in that year raged the Socialist Revolution, which succeeded in sweeping along some of the prize Jewish youth in its torrential currents. The new spirit of unbelief tried to feel its stealthy way into Jewish homes, till it even managed to find itself within the walls of the Kossover Bet Hamedrash. Discussions and arguments broke out and stormed the peaceful atmosphere and many were the defenders of belief and anti-communism who plucked up courage to defy the onslaughts of the atheists. The Chazon Ish remained silent, never taking part in any of these discussions, as though they didn't interest him at all. When he was questioned about his behaviour he answered, "Many of my friends were stubborn and adamant about their cause for belief and religion until the persuasion of the other side drew them into their snare and they too became, in the

end, staunch socialists. I kept silent and could strengthen my viewpoint and thus I was saved."

This phenomenal man knew about the world and its mundane contents, and yet was so distant from it. He was a man who had a penetrating eye for people yet who rarely had close contact with them. He discerned their innate qualities and perceived their natures, and had an uncanny gift of diagnosing the people of his generation.

This revolutionary period spelt upheaval in the Jewish realm as well. Danger lurked in the street, destroying much of its former innocence and consistency. This began to trouble the young Chazon Ish, leaving him no peace. How was he going to remedy the growing laxity of Kashrut, how was he to restrain the upsurge of disbelief and betrayal of the Torah? In utter distress and destitution, he turned to his pen to be his most loyal agent, entreating his people to restore the endangered Judaism.

Chapter III

HIS MARRIAGE WITH THE TORAH

When the Chazon Ish became eligible for marriage, his family was inundated with tempting suggestions, but their son refused them all. Some were enticing because of their illustrious lineage, others for the wealth offered, but the Chazon Ish neither searched for a Rabbinical future nor any other career in life. He was waiting patiently for a life of undisturbed Torah study.

One day the daughter of a businessman from Constantine-Kveidan (border of Russia-Germany) was suggested. The family were negative in their approach to this offer, especially the Rebbetzin Reshe Leah who had grave doubts as to the suitability of this match. Their independent son soon alleviated the tension and put a stop to their oscillating opinions and finalised his positive decision by packing his things and setting off for Constantine. He felt that his destiny had arrived, that his unique dream of continuing his path hitherto was about to materialise.

His one interest in his future wife was to know if she was willing to accept this prospect for life — seclusion from the world, likely suffering and poverty and complete for-

bearance. She, Batia Bei, heard his request and accepted it enthusiastically. She agreed to free him from the burden of their livelihood and to enable him to learn all his life "Lishmo". Having ensured their life-investment, they celebrated their engagement.

Batia was the daughter of Reb Mordechai Bei who combined two worlds successfully. He was both a flourishing businessman, and managed to learn Shass every year. He dealt in textiles and travelled to South Africa to extend his trade. His daughter was graced with many qualities but her chief strength lay in her love of Torah.

The wedding day arrived and most of the townsfolk appeared at the ceremony, curious to see whom their Batia was going to marry. They heard that he was a scholar, but his silence and withdrawn behaviour hid his potential qualities, which only revealed themselves many years later.

He had planned the blue-print of his life, and this plan was beginning to lay its foundations. His ideal of unadulterated Torah study was to be a fact, executed in cooperation with his pious wife.

Their Partnership

From their dowry, which they received at the wedding, the Chazon Ish's wife opened a textile shop. She herself ran the business and took upon her capable shoulders all the responsibility, in order that her husband might sit undisturbed at his studies. Very soon she began to understand her husband's hidden qualities and cherished them, caring for his every need and wish. She particularly tended his ailing health which deteriorated as a result of his assiduous

study, and would not allow him to help her in any way. There were certain things, though, which he did interfere with, but only in a very limited way. For example, he would not allow her to accept discount cheques, in order to avoid any likelihood of interest. After morning prayers, he was wont to come into the shop to wish his wife "good morning". The gentiles discerned that he was a holy person and would go out of their way to be present at that time, early in the morning, just when the Chazon Ish was there, as a lucky sign for their purchase. When he noticed that the shop thronged with people so early in the morning, he realised the reason and was repelled by the idea, and also apprehensive that other shops might suffer from this, so he would come in secretly through the backdoor so that no-one should see him. Sometimes at high season, when his wife was overburdened with work, he would come at night to help her with the calculations. Also, when she collected the debts which the farmers in the nearby villages owed her, he would accompany her.

Besides these few occasions, his footsteps trod the road to the Beit Hamedrash, where he spent all his days and most of his nights.

Once his wife had an argument with one of her clients concerning a money matter. This man offered to put forward his claim before the Chazon Ish, which is forbidden in Jewish law, since husband and wife are one, and therefore, he may not judge her case. The Chazon Ish listened to their story and, after considerable thought, justified the customer. When he saw that his wife was hurt by this, he said to her, "What is life worth, and what value is there in

one's profit, if G-d forbid one wrongs another in money affairs."

There were members of her family who had no appreciation of the intrinsic value of Torah study, and who were, therefore, critical of their mode of life. In their hearts they pitied this young woman who had relinquished all this world's pleasures, indulgences and even a woman's right to be sustained by her husband, for the Torah. To their notions this young man was a parasite, because he did not utilise his gifts for anything substantial. Many simply did not appreciate him; this precious acquisition in the family. Batia did not take this to heart, and neither heeded their taunts; on the contrary, it even strengthened her devotion to her husband. She saw her life as having one task — to facilitate his Torah study all his days.

A great man once said, "Hillel used to divide the penny which he earned into two. Half of it he gave to the gatekeeper of the Beit Hamedrash to let him in, and the other half to his wife. To find a man like that is an unusual thing, but is it at all possible to find a woman who is prepared to make do with half a penny ?" Batia gave up even the half penny for her ideal and provided their livelihood alone.

The Rabbi of Constantine, Reb Moshe Rozin of Brinske, was a scholar who had been qualified for rabbinical authority by Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan of Kovna. He was a perceptive person and soon discovered the gem hidden among his townsfolk. The young Chazon Ish fled from pomp and ceremony and made every effort to remain anonymous. The Rabbi, although recognising his greatness, complied with his wish and never publicised his phenomenal gifts and per-

sonality. Behind the scenes the experienced Rabbi and the newly-wed Chazon Ish wove a deep relationship between them based upon their mutual interest in Torah learning. The Rabbi would call him whenever he had a complex case to solve, together with two other experienced Dayanim.

It was no easy thing for Reb Moshe Rozin to heed the Chazon Ish's wish not to publicise his true self, and it hurt him to see how people of his town scorned him and ignored his hidden treasures. The Chazon Ish's wish to remain unknown was genuine and, therefore, the Rabbi reluctantly kept the secret. The Chazon Ish once wrote concerning this subject, "A person has the potential to motivate hidden forces in this concrete world; even his slightest thought can have repercussions on things around him. People's admiration at something successful has the power to endanger its development and could cause its downfall." This most probably was the secret of his wish to remain unknown, and he succeeded in his quest for anonymity.

Nevertheless it was impossible to remain completely out of the public eye in such a small community and people were bound to witness some of his great deeds. This is one incident told of him. There was a poor scholar living in Constantine who sent all his sons to learn in the great Yeshivot. He eked out a bare existence and was in dire straits to support his sons. When the Chazon Ish heard of this, he took some of they money left from his dowry and collected the rest. Then, every Rosh Hodesh, he delivered him his monthly income, thus enabling a complete family to continue their Torah studies in peace.

Reb Moshe Rozin published his first Sepher "Divrei

Sophrim" in the year 1912 and included in it many of the Chazon Ish's expositions. As he was very poor and just eked out a living from his job, he saw no prospect of ever seeing his book printed, and he despaired. Again it was the Chazon Ish who provided the means. When the Chazon Ish saw his distress, he came to his aid and lent him three hundred silver rubles in order that he need no longer postpone his project.

Once Reb Moshe Rozin went to Vilna to talk to Reb Chaim Ozer. The latter enquired after the Chazon Ish — how he had developed and what he was learning. At that Reb Moshe for the first time told the whole truth, everything he had withheld until now. He described his intensity of learning and the modesty which accompanied it, he told of his phenomenally good deeds and piety. When Reb Chaim Ozer heard all this he rubbed his hands in glee and said joyfully, "Thank G-d that fate is already preparing the light of the Jewish nation for the next generation."

The great strength of the Chazon Ish lay in his perseverence and diligence. His one and only incentive was to find the truth and practical application in his learning. For this reason he spent an unusually long time over each section of the Talmud. It is said that he was capable of taking a hundred days to learn one page of Gemarah. He spent five full years to learn the treatise "Avoda Zara", reciting whole pages by heart and deepening his comprehension of them. Then when he came to write his expositions and personal interpretations (Hiddushim) on the passages, he would write proportionately very little in comparison with the length of time he took over thinking about each word.

It seemed as if understanding each letter was for him a mental effort; he explained it this way: "Everything I learn has a profound connotation; I have never come across anything trivial."

These laborious studies were detrimental to his health and when illness threatened, his physician suggested that he rest a while from intense mental strain. During that period he lay in bed, only perusing Tanach with Rashi (which he considered to be the basis of understanding the Torah). He himself scorned his unique persistence at his studies and belittled his greatest asset, calling the time spent over his learning but a drop in the ocean. On the other hand, he described it thus, "The reason I take so much time over my learning is that I enjoy the toil and labour over the Torah."

Besides working on his intellectual advancement, he also paid great attention to his spiritual development by way of prayer. When he recited the prayer on the Torah, his whole being quivered with excitement. He once claimed that during his life he reached higher results in his work on the merit of his prayer than that of his studies, for which he was chiefly known.

Despite his desire for isolation, he nevertheless adhered to G-d's ruling of acquiring Torah by attachment to friends. There were several select people with whom he learned regularly and with whom he later corresponded.

The rare occasions of his visits to his parents in Kossova caused great excitement in the family. All turned up as though on a festival, but there too, he withdrew from

the bustle around him and retreated to the Bet Hamedrash till the evening. No-one took this amiss as his warm expression and hearty greeting to everyone were full compensation for his unsociable behaviour. On the contrary, he even renewed former acquaintances by the mere twinkle in his eyes. In one of his letters he wrote, "I am rich in other people's love towards me." Rabbi Kahaneman of Ponevez said about him, "I have never seen a person give so much joy to his Maker and so much happiness to mankind as the Chazon Ish and the Chofetz Chaim."

In 1911 his first book was published. His brother, Moshe Karelitz, had it printed in Vilna. No elaborate commendations flanked the front page and neither did his name appear in the preface. Only three letters, A.I.K., his initials, were modestly inserted and no-one even deciphered the title "Chazon Ish", as being the Hebrew initials of his name. He had no intention of circulating his book to the wider public and certainly not of gaining profits. His reason was entirely personal and he only wanted his works bound and put in order for his own perusal. He was not involved in the technical arrangements — that he left to his brothers who went out of their way to publicize the book.

Once he was asked why he didn't publicize his name and his reply was this typical joke about himself: "I am by nature lazy, so what was important I wrote, but superfluous things I just couldn't be bothered about." After the book was printed and published, he would not identify himself as being the author of it and he would often say in all earnestness, "Let's see what the Chazon Ish says about this." He was sincere in his humility without any pretense, for

his chief interest lay in the contents of the book and he was not concerned with the limelight around his name.

His book was a novelty in every respect and made a contrasting impression against the other books printed at that time. First and foremost, his style of learning differed vastly from the system used in Brisk and the other Yeshivot. He aimed at elucidating the "Pshatt", the simple logical meaning of the Halacha, bringing it to its practical and concrete conclusions. His brain pierced the core of each problem without necessitating explanations or argumentations of the kind prevalent in other approaches, a method to which he was diametrically opposed. His was the direct method; a crystal clear perception of the Halacha, culminating in strict observance of the law.

Other original features of his book were subjects like "details of the order of the sections of the Torah and the times of their recitation." He threw light on many tractates of the Shass which others had neglected and a part of his book dealt with accentuated precision on certain subjects of the written law. Each study he dealt with was aimed primarily at enriching his reader's knowledge of the Torah in order to strengthen its perception.

Although the Chazon Ish championed his specific theories opposing the style of learning in Brisk, once, when Reb Chaim of Brisk saw his book, he said to Reb Moshe Karelitz: "Why isn't the author's name printed? He really has nothing to be ashamed of."

Little by little the pseudonym "Ish" leaked out to be none other than that of the son of the Rabbi of Kossova. Nevertheless, many never knew his real name, Abraham



Title page of the first volume of the book "Chazon Ish" (vision of man), which was published more than 50 years ago



Reb Itzele Ponevezher

Isaiah, just as the Chofetz Chaim was not known as Rabbi Israel Meir Hacohen. It was his ardent wish not to have his works called after his name, but people did precisely the opposite; they called his name after his books and thus he was to be remembered for ever.

He once attended a wedding in a nearby village where no-one knew him. He took his seat among the beggars at the bottom table and did not look as though he belonged anywhere else. There he sat and listened to the speech delivered by Reb Itzele Ponevezh (Rabbi Jacob Isaac Rabinovitz). Part of his sermon dealt with the time allowed for "Pruzbul", which he claimed could only be written at the end of the Sabbatical Year. At that the Chazon Ish jumped from his seat and

cried, "I have proof from a Mishna that you are wrong." Reb Itzele looked around at the paupers' table and was reluctant to enter into an argument with such a simple "Baal Habos", but on second thought, challenged him. "Where in the Mishna?" he asked. The answer was, "In Moed Katan, page 18, where it says, 'These things are those which may be written in Chol Hamoed — marriage certificates, divorces, wills and Pruzbul.' We all know that Chol Hamoed comes twice a year, once at the beginning of the year and once in the middle, but certainly not at the end of the year." When Reb Itzele saw his mistake and the Chazon Ish's swift perception of it, he took his chair and went to sit at the paupers' table next to the Chazon Ish.

When reading the first Sepher of the Chazon Ish, Reb Itzele claimed that he could not penetrate the depth of the author and set about studying the relevant material more profoundly. This was how one of the prominent Torah experts of that time looked upon the Chazon Ish, the young man "without a name."

THE BELIS BLOOD LIBEL

Although the Chazon Ish had taken the policy of remaining incognito while in Kveidan, he knew his duty and, at the moment of national crisis, he participated in full devotion. One outstanding and historical case was the Belis Blood Libel in 1911—13, when the whole Jewish nation held its breath in suspense at what the outcome would bring. Jews



Mendel Belis

the world over were on the alert over the problem, and even Gentiles who had some notion of justice were horrified at the farfetched aspects of the case. Hostile nations, who were at war with Russia, took this opportunity of distracting Russia from the war, and printed blatant articles in its disfavour. "Blood Libels like those of the dark medieval period, are brought against the Jewish minority in Russia" — these headlines could be read in the progressive Western European newspapers and intercessors the world over tried their hand at softening the antagonism among the Russian leaders.

Anti-Semites automatically sprang up everywhere and cooperated with the accusers by giving their opinions and information on the subject of the need for Christian blood for Jewish bread. This was the background of the case :

One spring morning in 1911, when the snow had somewhat melted, the children of Luvkanowka, a suburb of Kiev, went to play in a field which bordered a brick-factory owned by a Jew called Zaichef. On the outskirts of this field was a cave and, when the children went inside, they discovered the body of a dead child, who was later identified as Andrei Yuschinski, a boy of 12 years. He had disappeared from his parents' home a week earlier, and no signs of his whereabouts had hitherto been found. The children called the police, who made a lengthy investigation, but were not successful in finding any clue which would bring them to the murderer.

As the police were unable to get on the right track, the anti-Semitic movement, "United Russian Nation", took

advantage of this opportunity and, on the next day announced that the Jews were to blame for the murder of the lad in Provoslavi.

These anti-Semitic agitators claimed that the Jews committed this murder for the purpose of religious worship, and they had little difficulty in proving this, as the boy had disappeared only three weeks before the Passover and had been found stabbed, obviously for the purpose of extracting blood; and it was an undoubted fact that the Jews needed gentile blood for their Passover unleavened bread. "Isn't it obvious beyond any denial that the Jews have murdered Andrei Yuschinski, the wretch ?" was their slogan.

Court Proceedings

The murdered boy was buried with a large procession accompanying him, in which every anti-Semite in the Ukraine participated. The burial developed into an angry demonstration, where the war-cry was "Revenge to the Jews." An atmosphere of a pogrom could be felt. Leaflets were distributed in various towns and they described at length the "horrifying cruelties" the Jews had committed on the Russian boy. Priests delivered sermons in their churches and denounced with greater and greater severity the bad deeds of those "cursed Jews".

At that time the Russian Parliament in Peterburg, was dealing with a suggestion of annulling some of the anti-Jewish decrees which had been ordained, but now decided to postpone the session because of the scandalous murder in Kiev. The discussion was cancelled until after the case had been investigated.

The incitement grew from day to day. Six weeks after the discovery of the body, a petition, signed by thirty-seven members — twelve of whom were priests — was presented to Parliament, in which they made a protest against the laxity of the Russian State in the investigation of the murder in Kiev. The undersigned stated bluntly that, in their opinion, it was Jewish influence that was preventing a trogough examination of the incident, and that they had revealed beyond doubt that the Jews sought Gentile blood for the baking of their mazot for Passover.

After the protest, a parliamentary discussion ensued and some of the speeches were spiced with this sort of reasoning :

"Till when are we going to suffer the wicked deeds of the cruel minority which knows no pity." And another anti-Semite shouted :

"If the accused aren't brought to justice, the Russian people will take revenge. There will be pogroms. Not only will pillows be torn and feathers fly, but all Jews, until the last one, will be liquidated."

Several days after the protest had been presented, the Russian Minister of Justice, Cheglovitov, sent one of his assistants to Kiev in order to speed up the investigation. Documents, which were found later, revealed the terrible truth that, when the messenger came to Kiev in order to "inquire" about the examination, he had told the local Judge, Mr. Chaplinski, that the Minister of Justice in Peterburg had had no doubt as to the murder being a form of Jewish worship.

Mendel Belis Imprisoned

The next step was to turn to two doctors from the Kiev University — both known anti-Semites — who provided them with their medical opinion, which claimed that the body was sapped of a great deal of blood before the boy had died. In a miraculous manner, two more "important pieces of information" were provided by a student from the University — also a member of the anti-Semitic movement. He told the police that from reliable sources, which he could not disclose, he knew that the murderer was called Mendel. As he was speaking, a drunkard walked in and told how he saw the boy near Zaichef's factory being chased by one of the workers named Mendel, on the day of his disappearance. In view of this "reliable information", there was no choice but to arrest Mendel Belis, who was immediately imprisoned in Kiev.

The despicable libel was about to be construed by the most bestial of oppressors. Mendel Belis's family hired a mediocre lawyer, and the anti-Semites exulted in their prospective victory. The leaders of Russian Jewry began to understand the horrifying truth — not only Mendel Belis was to be the sacrifice of this cold-blooded accusation, but the whole Jewish nation was on the threshold of a gruesome danger, which was the direct continuation of the blood-libels from the time of the Crusades; the London libels in the early sixth century; the libels of Damascus and Ashkenaz; and those of Tissa-Asslar in Hungary. There was no point in waiting for "public conscience" or "righteousness and justice", so they recruited Jewish public figures — Rabbis, Admorim and famous Jewish administrators. The

best possible defenders were stationed against the prosecution's barricades, which had been built up by Jewish enemies from the whole of Russia and even further afield.

The Talmud — an Alibi for Oppressors

Belis sat in prison for almost two and a half years waiting for his case to begin. During this time the prosecution had diligently exerted itself in preparing every detail for the attack. The court offices in Kiev had piles of books which proved "black on white", that the Jews needed gentile blood for their unleavened bread. Priests would pour over tractates of the Talmud in their feverish search for the "Blood Command". History experts wrote "historical sources" based on the fact that there was no country in the world where such a case didn't happen.

All these paragraphs had been proven beyond a doubt. Only one part of the proceedings was still obscure — where were the clues that Mendel Belis was the murderer? This obvious point was quite obtrusive in the court proceedings and, as Rabbi Maza wrote in his memoirs, one of the defence lawyers got up and said:

"These past two weeks many "witnesses" have been cross-examined, but not one of them has mentioned the name Belis, who is the one sitting in the dock!!!" When he concluded his speech, the Chief Justice reprimanded him for causing this most grave case to be turned into a joke. He brought the session to a halt for a few minutes, and retired to his Chamber. Then the Chief Prosecutor burst into laughter and all were certain the Chief Justice had gone out to do the same.

This did not deter them from developing the case further, since everything was worth their while if they could publicize the ugly deeds of the cruel Jews.

The leaders of the Defense were determined not only to refute the accusation against Belis, but also to demolish the outrageous claim for the Jewish need for blood in their matzot.

The name Belis became the central topic of every Jew the world over, and everyone prayed for his well-being, knowing that his destiny was the seal to the destiny of each and every one of them.

The Case Begins

On the 8th of October, 1913, the case of Mendel Belis began in a magistrate's court in Kiev. The world held its breath at this drama awaiting intensely its positive or negative results. Jews prayed with all their might that G-d may have mercy on Mendel Belis.

He was brought to court in a black police-car, with three body-guards holding drawn swords, standing by him. His hands and legs were chained and thus he sat in the dock listening to the accusation :

"Menachem Mendel Belis, son of Tobias, 39 years of age, born in Vassilkov near Kiev, is accused of murdering Andrei Yuschinski, for the purpose of religious traditional worship, around the 12th March, together with others who were not caught by the police".

A jury was chosen by lots — seven were farmers, three were civilians and two were clerks. The case was opened by testimony of dishonest witnesses whose false

evidence was soon dissembled by the defence, who found no difficulty in dismembering their baseless arguments. This part of the procedure continued tediously until the ideological subjects started to liven up the case. Questions like:

"What does the Talmud fix as the departure of the soul ?"

"Is theft from a gentile permitted ?" were asked. From morning till night, the word Talmud was thrashed out in the staid atmosphere of the Court, but the striking question which was most emphasized, was "Why did the sages say that you are called **Man,** and the heathens not ?"

You Are Called "Man"

Rabbi Maza was the Chief Rabbi in Moscow, and he supported the Jewish barrister, Grozenberg, by supplying answers on many ideological subjects, which he gathered from a varied selection of great sages. On this particular question, that is, why only the Jews are called **Man,** he received a reply from Rabbi Meir Shapira, the Rabbi of Lublin, and founder of "Daf Hayomi", containing the following reasons :

"The Torah states that every Jew is responsible for his fellow-Jew, and this is precisely the feeling prevalent in our nation. When one man, namely Mendel Belis, is put to justice, the whole Jewish nation unite like one man in sympathy with their kinsman. That is the meaning of 'You are called Man'. Whereas the heathens are not as loyal and never would a whole nation, scattered over the face of the earth, stand up for one man !"

After thirty months of torture, Mendel Belis was at

last confronted with his final ordeal — whether the Jury would condemn him for murder or acquit him. The judgement was... Not Guilty! With Belis's acquittal, the whole Jewish world breathed freely again, and were relieved at the prospect that the rising upsurge of anti-Semitism would now be curbed.

A tortured and exhausted man went back home, no longer accompanied by bodyguards, not chained, nor watched. He received congratulations from all over the world, and from the greatest Jewish figures of our time!

One of the outstanding interventions, explaining the Jewish viewpoint to the Russian Government, was the lengthy exposition written by the Chazon Ish, bringing a profound Jewish philosophy to elucidate his ardent feelings upon the subject. As a young man, far away from the scene of the drama, tucked away in Constantine-Kveidan, he, the Chazon Ish, felt personally involved in the events happening to his people, and elegantly, in exquisite style, participated in his people's plight.

Chapter IV

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The upsurge of the First World War shattered everyone's dream of peace and tranquillity. The Chazon Ish, who had aspired to a life of Torah solitude, sitting in the most secluded spot in the Bet Hamedrash, had also to acclimatise himself to the new situation. His short-lived Utopia was soon to be abolished by the horrors of international dissention. On the other hand, the change of his habitation as he was evacuated from the danger spots, brought him to light in the public eye and little by little his integrity became known.

The war began by a dispute between Austria and Moravia, which then developed into a marathon whirlpool swamping most of the European countries, Russia, Germany, France, England and Turkey. It seemed as though the majority of the world had been turned into a blood-stained battlefield. Tens of thousands of Jews participated in the suffering of the war. Either they died in battle or were driven from their homes, completely destitute, remaining with the bare clothes on their backs. They were always the scapegoats when there was a serious crisis of any sort and were made to feel the "disadvantage" of being a Jew.

Constantine-Kveidan was captured by Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, whose soldiers were particularly vicious towards the Jews. Most of the Constantine Jews succeeded in escaping the German invasion and the Chazon Ish settled in Stoibtz. Here, too, his wife opened a small textile shop, which she ran together with her sister-in-law. The Chazon Ish returned to his studies with even greater zeal than before and it was here in Stoibtz that he developed his mental powers to the maximum. Although in Kveidan, he participated somewhat in his wife's work, here even less, and only on occasions did he seem to remember his wife's occupation, and that was on market day. This was when the shop overflowed with customers, and he was afraid that, in the pandemonium of the crowd, and in the haste to serve everyone, mistakes could occur in measurements and payments. Therefore, on that day he would stand behind the counter, ruler in his hand and measure carefully the cloth which his wife sold, in order to avoid any possibility of fraud or overcharge.

In Stoibtz, too, the backwash of the waves of the war could be felt and its inhabitants were desperate and panic-stricken. The Chazon Ish remained calmer than ever and occupied himself with his Torah-studies as before. He once said, "I wrote this Chiddush while sitting in a basement shelter in Stoibtz with the bullets and shells flying above my head."

Gone was the lively twinkle of his eye and the delight in life which his expression used to bear. Instead a deep pain and depression took their place in his soul for he was in constant sympathy with the plight of his brethren. He

could not forget those Jewish sacrifices slain upon the altars of barbarian murderers to purge the iniquities of their generation. His heart refused any rest or consolation, and bled with the wounds of the slain. The Chazon Ish could no longer enjoy any aspect of social company and thus he secluded himself entirely from people. Strangely enough, it was in this fire-consumed town that he found supreme spiritual satisfaction. Here he fulfilled his life-long wish to hide between the pages of his books; in Stoibtz his dream came true.

Little did his townsfolk really know him but they were able to discern that there was something strange about this young man and they instinctively revered him. One of his neighbours once recollected seeing him pacing his room after midnight wearing silk slippers in order not to wake his wife, mumbling something. Then he saw him go to his desk, dip his pen into ink and set about writing his "Chidushim".

Although he deservedly earned people's respect, he never exploited it; on the contrary he fled from it. He behaved with utmost simplicity, never in any way being ostentatious, so much so that even the uniform garb of the scholars — the long, black coat and wide brimmed hat — he refused to wear. He preferred the simple layman's clothes but was nevertheless always immaculately clean. He was practically never to be seen among people. In the morning he was up at the crack of dawn, prayed in the earliest Minyan, then went to learn, always alone, never raising his voice nor swaying his body as other scholars do. He concentrated entirely on the content of his study and probed

feverishly till he found the right solution to his problem, and then he would hum a tune as though expressing his joy at finding the answer, as the proverb says, "There's no joy like settling a doubt."

Only once a year was he wont to revèal himself in the public eye and then, on that occasion, he manifested his true self in the most genuine situation. It was on the day of Simchat Torah, the day when the whole town of Stoibtz turned out in the synagogue to dance around the Torah. Among the crowd, one small figure stood out, shining in true happiness at the coveted festivities over the Torah, and he was none other than the scholar of Kossova, dancing to the music of their song. He hugged the Sepher Torah closely and kissed it fervently. His ardent love burst the dam which he had built around his resources and his ecstasy genuinely flowed forth.

During the war days, Stoibtz came to be a danger-spot as it was on the border of Germany and Russia. The Russians feared Jewish rebellion and revenge on the Czarist regime by passing key security secrets to the Germans. Because of this suspicion, they expelled every influential Jew from Stoibtz, including the Rabbi, Reb Yoel Sorotzkin (the brother of Reb Zalman Sorotzkin). As a matter of course, the Chazon Ish was chosen to be the substitute during his absence. Within minutes he was called to the Rabbi's house, and had to wait in the corridor for his interview. As he waited, he paced the passage in meditation when another man walked in. He was Rabbi Yosseph Eliahu Henkin, who had been called to serve as the acting Rosh Yeshiva of Stoibtz. The latter looked condescendingly at the Chazon Ish dressed in



Rabbi Yoel Sorotzkin, Rabbi of Stoibtz

his layman's garb, without the long black Rabbi's frock or wide-brimmed hat and asked him, "Who are you ?"

"The Kossova Rabbi's son."

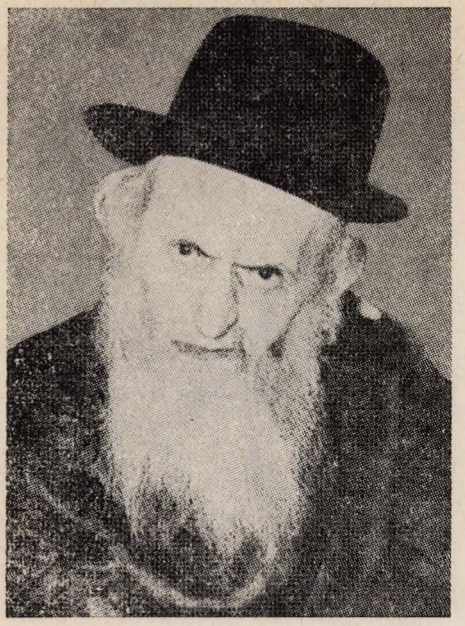
"What do you do ?"

"I'm a shopkeeper."

"What business have you in the Rabbi's house ?"

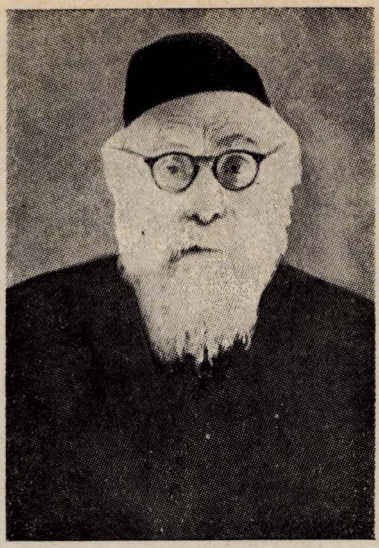
"The Rav sent for me to come to see him."

Rabbi Henkin thought that this man had probably come



Rabbi Yosseph Eliyahu Henkin

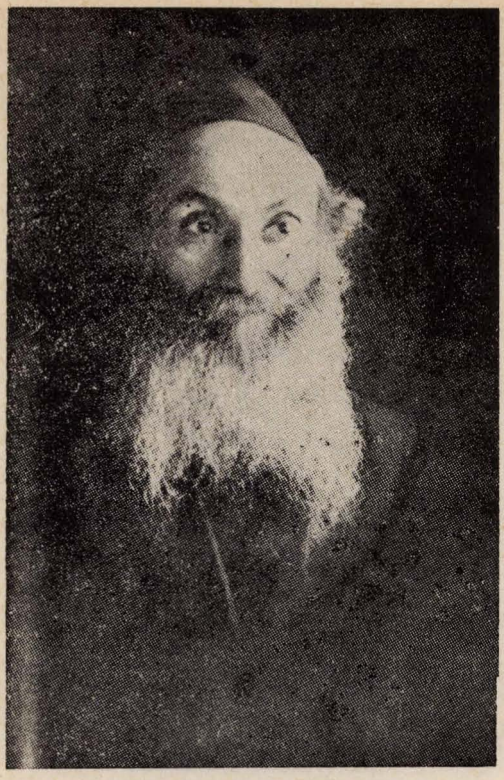
to clear up some money problem he had had in his shop and that the Rabbi wanted to reprove him. He went pallid with shock when, a few minutes later, Rabbi Yoel came out and introduced this young man as a genius, the author of a famous book and the substitute Rav of Stoibtz. Reluctantly and modestly the Chazon Ish officiated as Rabbi, performing all his duties meticulously without remuneration nor official pomp. He became very influential and attracted every connoisseur in the Torah realm. At that time, Mir Yeshiva found its temporary station in Stoibtz for two years and the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Yehudel Finkel, down to the most common-place student were all charmed by the Chazon



Rabbi Eliezer Yehudah Finkel

Ish's superhuman personality and remained loyal friends for always.

Little by little his prestige grew in that area. Stoibtz was by no means a religious centre as the dangerous seeds of "enlightenment" had infiltrated the soft earth of its weakened Judaism. The simple strayers had no notion of the wealth of Torah and forgot about the existence of the "Cheder", and exchanged the new culture for the old tradition. Of course, the modern schools led them to deteriorate in their morals and ethics and left ignorant parents barren with "enlightened" children. This the Chazon Ish could not passively tolerate so he pioneered a campaign to jolt these apathetic parents into a recognition of their folly. He recruited students from

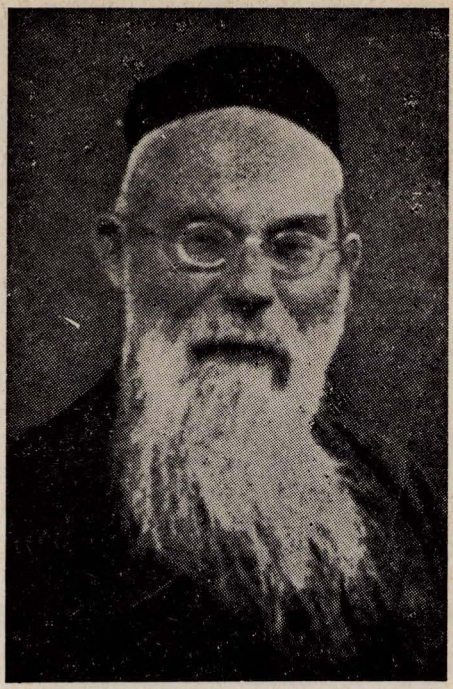


Rabbi Avraham Zvi Kammai
one of the Roshei Yeshiva of Mir

the Mir Yeshiva, eloquent speakers, to captivate their audiences into hearing the truth. He made a Junior Yeshiva to attract the youth and checked Mikvaot and other vital institutions of religious life. The Chazon Ish, out of sheer force of circumstances, proved to be a public agitator of genius.

"Hatred of Rabbinical Honour"

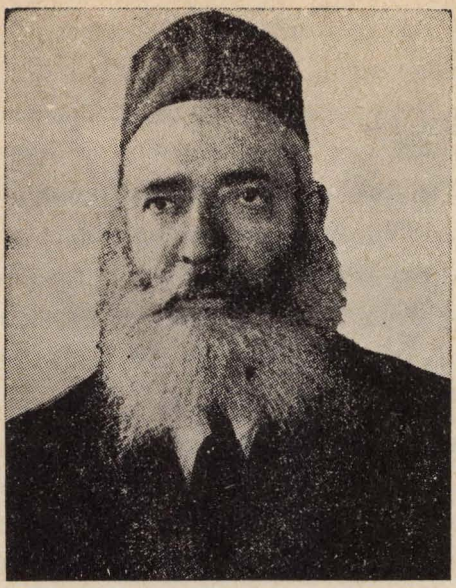
To this very saying in Pirkei Avot did the Chazon Ish adhere with all his heart; yet on the other hand, he executed his



Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel
The "Saba" of Slobodka

duties as substitute Rabbi with utmost loyalty and devotion and exerted super-human efforts to care for everyone's needs. The greatest emphasis he placed was on strengthening Torah education in that area, and on several occasions donated large sums of money to the "Yeshiva Ketana" which he erected in that town. He would examine the students' knowledge from time to time, and was the backbone of Torah publicity in Stoibtz and its suburbs.

As stated before, Stoibtz was not a concentrated centre of religious or learned people; many were irreligious and



Rabbi Yeruham Lebovitz
Spiritual Director of Mir Yeshiva

even those who were observant, were often ignorant. Many of those underestimated the value of their substitute Rabbi and thought that he was mostly silent because he had very little to say for himself. One such congregant aproached him one Friday night, and asked him to recite the passage "Va-yechulu" with him, since one of the Posskim claims this passage to be a testimony to the creation of the world by the Almighty and that He rested on that day. As every testimony is only valid if given by two witnesses, therefore, according to one version, this should be read by two. The Chazon Ish, however, was opposed to this interpretation and began to hold forth his theory thus: "Does G-d need our testimony that He created the world; does not the creation by its very

existence point further and deeper ?" The questioner was astounded at this fluent flow of words from the silent Rabbi and went straight to his friends telling them of his discovery. Like lightning, the rumour of his true character passed from mouth to mouth and one man, upon hearing his virtues, remembered an unusual incident which, more than revealing his intellectual gifts, unveiled his saintliness.

Once he was informed about a very sick man in town. The man was dying but the Chazon Ish persisted in praying on his behalf. Within a few days the dying man was completely cured.

Once they had discovered these qualities, they began to trace his every movement in the hope of gleaning more information about his intimate life. They soon saw that his way of life was indeed incomprehensible and much beyond them. Those were days of danger, and journeys were only undertaken in emergency. One Sukkot eve, the Chazon Ish saw that there was not even one Etrog to be procured in the whole of Stoibtz. He went to Minsk where he found an Etrog, but he did not arrive back home till Issru Chag. When he arrived, he was asked, "Why did you make such an effort to get the Etrog, wouldn't it be better not to observe the Mitzva at all ?" His answer was logical and calm: "If this were Passover time and the same problem would exist over Matzot would you be prepared to starve rather than make the effort to find Matzot ? Of course not. You would go to the ends of the earth to find Matza in order to exist over Pesach. This is how I feel about my Etrog."

His unconventionality was one of his strongest characteristics; he always had a good reason for doing anything even

if it was alien to public feelings. Once he received an important guest and he himself cooked him a tasty meal and made his bed. As soon as he had put him at his ease and exchanged a few words with him, he returned to his studies. One of his family, who had witnessed this strange behaviour, plucked up courage and asked him, "How can you treat such an important guest with so little attention?" A mischievous smile lit his face, and he retorted "What guest could be more important than the Etrog, and even that, after barely mumbling the blessings, we put it straight back into its box."

His wit became one of his most popular features among the simple folk of Stoibtz. Once people saw in him this rare combination of genius, saint, wit and general knowledge, they confided in him and he emerged from his solitude. His versatile personality lent itself to having a deep influence upon the congregation and many drifters returned to the true tradition through him. Very soon the town was rid of its rebels, the "enlightened" youth, by frequent war invasions, and once the position grew quieter, Stoibtz had changed entirely. Gone was the upstart element and instead, a small but unified community was formed. They rebuilt the ruined houses, re-erected every facility for the continuation of real Torah life. The Chazon Ish inspired girls' education by founding a Bet Yaakov, besides the boys' Yeshivot, and more students were brought into the hitherto thinly populated Bet-Hamedrash. In next to no time, the youngsters were continuing their studies in the large Yeshivot in other towns. This was indeed an achievement, a complete renovation of a whole town — from one extreme to the other.

Voting the New Rabbi of Stoibtz

Rabbi Yoel Sorotzkin had left Stoibtz only temporarily but since the dangers were so great during those hazardous times, he was afraid to return and went to live in Moscow. There he waited till the tides ebbed, but this took fifteen years.

When the Chazon Ish saw that his position was becoming more permanent than temporary, he decided to hand in his resignation and ask to appoint a new Rabbi. By this he caused a serious problem. No-one was courageous enough to nominate anyone else to compete with the Chazon Ish. A senior shochet by the name of Rabbi Shlomo Liberman was asked to serve as Rabbi which he agreed to. He died a few years later and the problem was again acute.

The Chazon Ish recommended Rabbi Liberman's son, Reb Yehoshua Dov, who was then one of the most outstanding scholars in Slobodka. When the people of Stoibtz saw how highly the Chazon Ish thought of this man, they agreed to accept him as their Rabbi.

Rabbi Yehoshua Dov displayed exceptional qualities while serving the Stoibtz community, particularly when their former Rav, Rabbi Yoel Sorotzkin, informed him of his return. Without any ado he departed from his honoured position even though a controversy was pending in the town between the admirers of both Rabbis. Actually the Chazon Ish considered that there was no reason for the existing Rabbi to give way, but, as the Rabbi did not want dissention, he abdicated, yet continued to be active in the realm of Halacha. He died on 12th Tishrei, 1943, and, in his cruel death, at the hands of the Nazis, he made the greatest Kid-

dush Hashem by going towards them gallantly with Tallit and Tefillin.

The Chofetz Chayim

After his resignation from the Stoibtz Rabbinate, he returned to his former solitude and practically never came into contact with people, although the students of the Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Henkin, did frequent his house to elucidate difficult passages. The latter was surprised to hear the Chazon Ish's express admiration of the Chofetz Chaim as being a "genius in Torah" as he was more known for his saintliness and piety than for his genius in learning, since he had never learned nor taught in a Yeshiva. The Chazon Ish had his own particular appreciation of the ideal Torah study and as mentioned, he was averse to the current mode of pilpul and persisted in a genuine search for practical application. This was the common factor which he found with the Chofetz Chaim, being a Possek, bringing all his learning down to a basic application to daily life. He once said about him, "His lucidity and concise conclusions are similar to those of Rabbi Akiva Eger." It is interesting to note in this context what Rabbi Meir Karelitz once wrote concerning the specific outlook of the Chofetz Chaim: "The Chofetz Chaim never wished to be known for greatness in learning and his wish was heeded. The truth is that in previous generations a high standard of learning was estimated by the rule "Investigate the subject matter, and bring it to its Halachic application." We see this trend of thought in the works of the Riff, Rambam and Beit Yosseph, where no sharp analytic Pilpullim are to be found but merely "Psak Halacha". Although for-

merly, this system had been current, in Reb Chaim Brisk's generation there came the necessity to combat the growing "enlightenment" and so his analytical research system emerged. The Chazon Ish opposed this form of learning and persisted in his independent opinion, and, till this day, his disciples study differently from the general Yeshiva system.

The Chofetz Chaim was one rare exception whom the Chazon Ish accepted fully. He would not usually quote his contemporaries, whereas he would recite whole passages of the Chofetz Chaim. The Chazon Ish referred to his works in the same breath as the greatest Posskim of the previous centuries, and was wont to bring proofs from the BeitYosseph, Magen Avraham and Mishna Brura in one line. Another unusual factor in the Chazon Ish's admiration of him was the title he gave him, "Rabeinu".

This anecdote depicts clearly the discrepancy between the various approaches to the Chofetz Chaim's simplicity. The Chazon Ish was having a discourse in Halacha with one of the analytically minded Rabbis when he, at one stage, based his argument on the Mishna Brura. The Rabbi retorted, "How can you rely on the Mishna Brura when its author was a simple 'Baal Habayit' " (The Chofetz Chaim kept a shop for his living).

The Chazon Ish replied somewhat ironically, "He most certainly was a Baal Habayit in every way — Baal Habayit in Kryat Shma, and in all the 'Chambers' of the Torah — he was in perfect control of them all."

The war brought unrest to the life of the Chazon Ish, as for all the Jews in Europe, and his bundle and stick was in constant use. Jews were expelled from one town to the

other, and their existence became intolerable. This atmosphere, despite its hazards, was no hindrance to his development; on the contrary, he seemed to blossom in it. One day he arrived in Minsk, and there he managed to find himself a temporary residence which he rented from Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin. Having acquired a room with a separate entrance, he resumed his former occupation of study in utter solitude, which became so intense, that he frequented the synagogue only three times a week — on Sabbath, Monday and Thursday to hear the reading of the Torah. Apart from those three occasions, he remained in his room learning.

The night before Rosh Hashannah, 1917, as he paced his narrow room, clad in simple and worn clothes and felt slippers so as not to wake his neighbours as he walked, he noticed someone standing at his door. The man had been standing for some minutes, but saw that the Chazon Ish was so engrossed with his work, that he did not have the courage to disturb him. When the Chazon Ish finally approached the man, with a questioning expression on his face, the man said, "Take off your leather shoes, your father has died." When he heard these words, his face turned white with shock, but, not losing a moment over trivialities, he went to a drawer, took out a penknife and recited the blessing, "Blessed art Thou, O Righteous Judge," and with a quivering hand, cut a tear into his coat, a tear which was never to be stitched again. Then he sat down on the floor and wept, his whole body shivering with sorrow for some time. A depression came over him. His father had not been simply a father to him — he had been his spiritual guide all through his development until his wedding day. We have said before

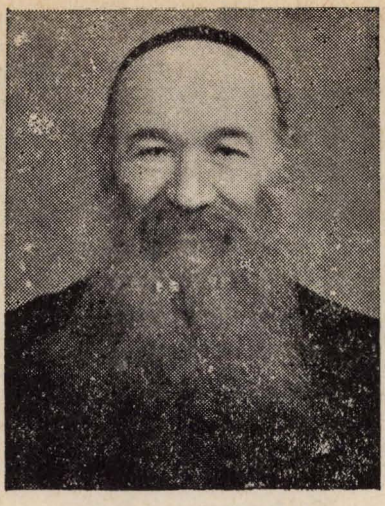
that the Chazon Ish did not go to a Yeshiva but preferred to remain in Kossova where his chief tutor was always his father, Rabbi Shmaryahu Joseph. Besides Torah study, he had been a brilliant educator, and much of his intelligence and common-sense he bequeathed to his famous son. And now... now he must mourn his father's death alone! He was prevented from taking leave of him, of being at his bedside and of honouring him in the last seconds of his life. The news reached him after three months' delay, through the International Red Cross, but it penetrated into the Chazon Ish, wounded him and took a long time to heal.

From that day on, he performed the impossible; he sat even more assiduously than before at his study, for this was his only comfort.

While in Minsk, his wife, Rebbetzin Batia, went back occasionally to Stoibtz to manage her shop, which brought them but a frugal income. Each journey lasted several weeks and in these solitary times, he invited boys from the Yeshiva to be with him. Once Rabbi Elchanan Sorotzkin, as a young child, had his turn to "guard" this Talmid Chacham. He entered the room and found the Chazon Ish sitting on his bed learning silently, with only a faint movement of his lips. A wonderful silence ensued, when suddenly the Chazon Ish saw young Elchanan, and, in a fatherly manner, he shooed him off to bed.

The Blue Card

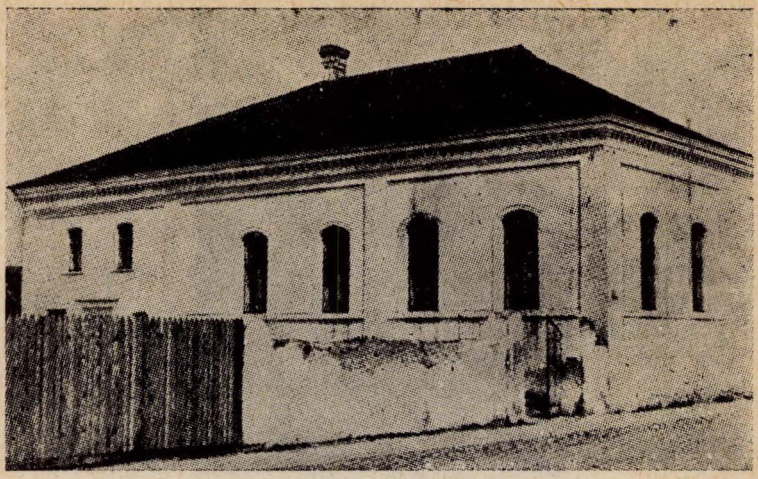
The Blue Card meant exemption from the Russian Army service. Most of the Jewish refugees in Minsk possessed a blue card and sat and learned in peace, but, as the battle raged more fiercely, the Russian Government ordered that



Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin of Lutzk

even possessors of blue cards must be recruited to the Army. Reb Zalman Sorotzkin played the role of Rabbinical ambassador and was successful in some of his interventions for the liberation of Rabbis from Army service. His home thronged with high-ranking Roshei Yeshivot and Rabbis who came to ask him to plead for them. The situation was not easy as the Russians did not recognize great scholars who studied as "Rabbis". A Rabbi was only one who had a synagogue, and only he could be considered for exemption from the army. There was just one solution and that was to find a synagogue and get the congregants to sign a petition to the Government.

There was however, one Sage, Reb Chaim Solovechik, who was very rigidly opposed to this manner of evasion and claimed that a counterfeit Rabbinate, which many ar-



The Synagogue of Stoibtz

ranged for themselves in the hope of avoiding army service, could be discovered by the Russian authorities, thereby endangering the "real" Rabbis who most deserved liberation. In consistence with his viewpoint, he forbade his son, Rabbi Yitzchak Zeev, and son-in-law, Rabbi Hirsh Glickson, to be connected with any Rabbinical position even though they were beyond doubt suitable for that post.

Nevertheless, Reb Chaim considered participation in the war as treacherous and this case is told about him. Once a young man, who had been eligible for service fell ill. His medical examination was to take place on Shabbat so his father came to Reb Chaim to ask him if he might travel on Shabbat with the intention of pleading for dismissal. Reb Chaim allowed him to profane the Shabbat for this reason, with the explanation that even a possibility of "danger of life" may cancel out the observance of Shabbat, and

since he could be put in the front lines and be killed, there was obviously danger of life involved.

The Chazon Ish was also in possession of a blue card but, since he was so very bound with his studies, he never troubled himself with getting permission to be feed from the army. Reb Zalman Sorotzkin attained this for him under the pretext that he was the Chief Rabbi of Stoibtz. The Chazon Ish was so indebted to him that he gave him the sepher "Shaalot Utshuvot of Rabbi Akiva Eger" and he wrote a poem on the fly-leaf, of which every line began with a letter of Rabbi Sorotzkin's name. The family was stunned to see that he had portrayed so precisely the current problems involved in the army service. They had been sure that he knew nothing of what was happening around him. Neither was he ignorant of the fact that hundreds of Yeshiva students had been dismissed from the army, thanks to Rabbi Sorotzkin. The latter formed the Aguda in Minsk, which soon grew into a huge party numbering ten thousand members, and which caused a spiritual revolution in that town.

Minsk was at that time an exclusive Torah centre numbering tens of high ranking Rabonim and Roshei Yeshiva. Even the Chofetz Chaim evacuated from Radin with his Yeshiva and family to a neighbouring village, Smilovitz. The Slabodka Yeshiva under Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel, the "Sabba," was also located for security reasons in Minsk, and last but not least, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik spent the war days there too. Although intellectually opposed, these two Gedolei Torah formed a genuine friendship. One Sukkot they had difficulty in procuring an Etrog, and, after the Chazon Ish had purchased one for a high price, the two

shared it during the whole of Yom Tov. Rabbi Chaim of Brisk learned in time to appreciate his colleague's virtues and soon discovered his innermost personality, yet he respected his express wish to remain unnoticed.

One day the Chazon Ish's wife presented him with a problem. She was offered some valuable merchandise on Hol Hamoed, and her question was if she was allowed to ask the merchant to leave some of his wares aside till after Yom Tov, when she would buy them. The Chazon Ish's reply was negative. His explanation was as follows: "Your business transactions are not comparable with my writing 'Chidushei Torah' on Hol Hamoed, as in my case there is a serious probability of my forgetting what I have learned, and, therefore, I allow myself to write on Hol Hamoed! Business is not so important and, therefore, not allowed." She did not dare to enter into an argument on the subject as she knew that her husband was very particular on refraining from speaking about profane subjects on Hol Hamoed, just as he was on Yom Tov. Seeing that any progress in her cause was futile, she went to Reb Chaim Soloveitchik. When he heard her story, he asked her to identify herself, and upon hearing that she was none other than the Chazon Ish's wife, he replied with a smile, "You can certainly rely on him."

His Approach to Mussar

While in Minsk, the Chazon Ish had several dealings with the illustrious "Sabba of Slobodka", Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel, and on these occasions, had heated arguments about various systems in the approach to Mussar, which at that time played an important role in the Yeshiva curriculum everywhere. The Chazon Ish had a very definite opinion on this subject

and he considered the present Mussar as being somewhat a diversion from the original intentions of Rabbi Israel of Salant, the founder of the Mussar movement. He held that too much emphasis was being laid on an exaggerated Mussar campaign which pre-occupied the Yeshivot and diverted their attention from the essential pursuit of the Halacha. Not only was he critical of the basic danger of Mussar, in that it deterred students from learning more Gemarrah, but he denounced some of the Mussar proponents in that they falsified the written law by their interpretations, which often gave a misleading picture of the true facts.

Despite his difference of opinion, the Chazon Ish was well-disposed towards these pioneers of Mussar, and he wrote in one of his famous letters, "I have had close relations with the Sabba of Slabodka and the Sabba of Mir, and we have always felt boundless love for one another, although I never refrain from voicing my criticism of them, which they enjoyed."

A guest of the Chazon Ish once heard him speaking somewhat derogatorily about Mussar and he, being at a public gathering one day, unwittingly portrayed a false impression of the Chazon Ish's ideas on the subject. His deceptive report was to the effect that the Chazon Ish (G-d forbid) was waging a war against Mussar and utterly denouncing it. So controversial was this rumour, that it went round fast, and finally came back to the ears of the Chazon Ish. He was greatly perturbed by this, and sent a letter to his guest immediately, rebuking him sharply on his deed and demanding from him never to do it again.

One day he himself went to listen to one of the talks

given by Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel. After the lecture, the Sabba asked the Chazon Ish.

"What are you doing at a Mussar lecture ?"

"Indeed I am averse to Mussar, but I object to the people against Mussar even more," replied the Chazon Ish.

A Painful Incident

One day the Chazon Ish witnessed a scene which was to have a painful impact on him and which aroused him to visualise a terrible truth. He saw a group of Jews driving away a teacher with his disciples who sat and learned in the Bet Hamedrash. This was the period of constant expulsions and many Jews were forced to take their bundle and stick in hand and wander from town to town to find minimum respite from the horrors of war and its tribulations. Teachers and Melamdim who left their hometown, left behind their schools as well, but took their disciples and sat in the Bet Hamedrash of any town they came to, thus perpetuating Torah study in the worst of conditions. At this scene of expulsion, where Jews expelled their fellow refugees from the Bet Hamedrash, the Chazon Ish woke up to a fearful prospect for the future, and an ominous danger which had loomed ahead was now hovering over the heads of the youth; the steady deterioration of the spiritual status of the Jewish nation was rapidly progressing. The Chazon Ish found no peace at this realization and one of his spontaneous reactions was to write a letter to his people:

"That which my eyes have seen, and my heart has witnessed, is motivating me to act. The former light of Jewish purity has changed face and is veiling its brilliance. Profanity is polluting the innocence of our spirituality. Few

are those who have remained fighting for the truth; who are strong enough to dam the floods of modern enlightenment. Ever since we have been in exile, those few have served the fortresses of the Torah, and their teachings have healed many of the contagious and malignant spiritual diseases of our time

"In our town, many of our youngsters are straying in other fields and are tasting alien pastures, void of Torah or spirit and are tempted by this secular study to write on Shabbat. The evil inclination has vanquished this town and its activity has born bitter fruit. Yet on the other side, there are Torah institutions instilling holiness and wisdom into our youth as in the days of yore. Thus the inhabitants of this town are confronted with a paradoxical life; upheaval, 'freedom' and immorality on the one hand, and truth and goodness on the other.

"The Satan knows no relent and has even dared to enter the holy of holies, the Bet Hamedrash, bringing with him an alibi which the Baalei Batim soon accepted — that the students learning in the Bet Hamedrash were misbehaving and were unruly. And what happened ? Satan made a coalition with these people, and together they locked the doors of the synagogue."

Back to Lithuania

At the end of the war, the Chazon Ish returned to Stoibtz where he had once found relative peace from his trials and tribulations, and where he wrote most of the material for his books. On some of his books, the place and year are even marked "In the year 1919, Stoibitz". Then the war ended,

the cannons ceased to roar, and when the dust settled, the formerly treacherous roads were open to all, although not for long, since Russia was under Communist rule. Despite the difficulties, the Chazon Ish and his wife succeeded in joining a group of refugees and they crossed the Russian-Lithuanian border to Kveidan, their hometown. How happy they were to return back home! But they were soon horrified to see that their village had been practically annihilated in the war, not possessing one live family anymore. Once again they were homeless, and so they turned their tired footsteps to Vilna, then called "Jerusalem of Lithuania". The Chazon Ish had close family living there — his two brothers Reb Meir and Reb Moshe and his sister, Civia Greineman.

He arrived in Vilna in 1920, as humbly as he could, but, since his name was already famous, the most renowned scholars of the area, including Reb Chaim Ozer, came to greet him warmly.

His family knew no bounds to their joy at seeing him — their prize brother come back from behind the Iron Curtain after having been separated from them during the most terrible war days. They hired an apartment for him, which was very near theirs, and saw to all his needs. Reb Meir Karelitz was at that time the Rav of a suburb of Vilna, which he took over after his father-in-law, the "Cheshek Shlomo", died. The suburb was called Poplavas and there the Chazon Ish now settled.

A Specific Paragraph in the Mishna Brura

No sooner had the Chazon Ish arrived in Vilna, when Reb Chaim Ozer snatched the opportunity of being close to him and the two practically never parted. About a year after

the Chazon Ish's arrival in this town, a telegram arrived for Reb Chaim Ozer from his colleague the Chofetz Chaim. The latter, while fleeing from one town to another in Russia, decided to go as far as Odessa and, via the Black Sea, to travel to Eretz Israel. We have already mentioned that while the Chazon Ish was in Minsk, the Chofetz Chaim with his disciples had temporarily evacuated from Radin to a suburb of Minsk. His plans of emigration came to a tragic standstill at the death of his son-in-law, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Levinson in 1921, and then he decided to return to Poland. It was already summertime and the Communists had put obstacles in the way back to Radin, when the Chofetz Chaim suddenly realised that he was facing serious danger. It was then that he sent the telegram to Reb Chaim Ozer entreating him to procure a visa for him to ease his way out of Russia.

Reb Chaim Ozer immediately after perusing the message, turned to Rabbi Shmuel Greineman and delegated him to go straight after Yom Tov by express train to Warsaw in order to attain the visa. In his usual manner, the Chazon Ish had been silent during this dramatic episode, but now he intervened.

"Why! This telegram is virtually a specific paragraph in the Mishna Bruro. If the Mishna Bruro were to ordain that something was dangerous to one's life, one would profane the Shabbat. In this case, the author himself writes a telegram saying he is in danger of his life. Is it not obvious that we must heed his judgement?"

With that, Rabbi Shmuel Greineman set out for Warsaw on Yom Tov eve...

Chapter Five

VILNA — THE LITHUANIAN LEGEND

Vilna was and will forever be a legend. Its achievements were almost unreal and its atmosphere totally intangible. It is difficult to define just what the element was which turned Vilna into a town which the Jewish world had rarely experienced. The striking exterior feature of this town was its poverty. When strolling along its winding, narrow and shaded lanes, one couldn't but be overcome with pity for the people who lived in them. The edifices were gloomy and unattractive; shops here and there seemed meagre and uninviting; their shabby wares were slovenly displayed in the windows, and everything seemed to breathe dereliction.

This very phenomenon bred a unique unprecedented spiritual standard which totally veiled the squalor of their material existence. Nothing mattered — not the lack of luscious food for Shabbat, neither the frugal daily diet — all this was for them of secondary consideration when the Klaus or Bet Hamedrash lured them enticingly to their places. When going to work in the morning, grudgingly fulfilling their duty of earning a living, they procrastinated, not caring to hasten their footsteps, almost loathing the



The Chazon Ish in Middle Age

path they trod; yet when the hour came for learning, their pace took on a determined beat and they simply ran to the Bet Hamedrash. We can derive a most obvious conclusion that since their notion of material indulgences were so limited, their penetration into the world of the spirit was wholesome and pure. They cleared their hearts of any hindrances and obstacles, and made ample room for their real desires.

Reb Chaim Ozer Grodjinski lived in one of those typical Vilna houses although his home was clean and well-kept. He was at that time, the leader of the Jewish community in that illustrious town. All eyes turned to him and every decision was left for him to resolve.

Somewhat further in the slum area of Vilna in a dreary house lived another of the greatest of that time. He was screened from the public eye learning day and night without ever ceasing, occasionally jotting down interpretations which were later compiled in his books. He was . . . the Chazon Ish.

Again he hibernated, hoping that this new town would shield him from publicity and again he camouflaged himself, taking his place among the laymen and the poor. Once he was invited by Reb Chaim Ozer and when the two came to the synagogue, Reb Chaim asked the reader to call the Chazon Ish to the Torah by the title "Rabbi". No greater chagrin could he have been called upon to bear. He blushed, hid his face in shame and tottered to the platform. There he took off his spectacles as he always did, so as not to have any partition between his eyes and the words on the Scroll of the Law. As much as he tried to humble himself,

the great scholars living in Vilna knew his intergrity and respected it.

Vilna played a vital role in his development, and he seemed to merge with its specific characteristics. He was simple in its simplicity, humble in its humility, and yet brilliant in its shadow.

Although Reb Chaim Ozer perceived the Chazon Ish's sensitivity to publicity, yet there were occasions where he told people of his exceptional personality without the intention of contradicting his wishes. Someone who was in dire straits once came to Reb Chaim Ozer and begged him for a blessing. He was hesitant to do so, feeling incompetent for such a task and, with a shrug of his shoulders, answered, "You have nothing to rely on in my blessings." The man was destitute and with a pleading expression on his worried face, he said, "If our revered Rabbi is not qualified to give a blessing, is there no-one in Vilna capable of giving one ?" At this question, Reb Chaim took on a serious expression and said, "In Vilna there are only two men who can give a blessing — one is the Chazon Ish and the other is the son of the author of 'Pischei Tshuva' (Reb Naftali Eisenstat)". Having procured a blessing from both, this man was miraculously saved from his plight to the extent that it even turned to good fortune.

Their Home in Vilna

Their home consisted of two rooms — a living room and a shop. Again Rebbetzin Batia tried her hand at her textile trade as before, only in Vilna she was not successful. Despite a great deal of work, she saw little profit, and she even got into debt, only paying them off after their arrival in Israel.

Once a gentile merchant blamed her of stealing part of his merchandise and accusingly hired false witnesses for the case. The Chazon Ish and his wife had no legal defense and had no possibility of refuting the false charges. The Chazon Ish asked his wife to tell him the name of the merchant and, in utter resignation, went into a corner to pray to his Creator, his only hope. A few days before the court case, they heard that their accuser had died...

The Chazon Ish found it necessary to leave his home to learn because of the pandemonium of the shop; since he did not have sufficient peace he went to the home of his brother-in-law, Reb Shmuel Greineman, to learn. His sister prepared him a room furnished with a bed, a table, some books and other bare necessities. There he learned entirely on his own and his intellectual and spiritual genius blossomed. As soon as he wrote sufficient material to print a book, his brother-in-law would take over the administration of its technical progress and thus several of his books came into being.

We have already mentioned his phenomenal capacity of concentration but each encounter with it was again an experience. Reb Shmuel Greineman told people that the Chazon Ish once learned one short Mishna, "Six Grades of the Mikva" for three consecutive months, till all his little children knew it by heart. That was not all; his unique feature lay in the fact that his mind never deserted the paths of the Torah; never at any time did his brain contain any other thoughts than those of the Law. He once said, "I have never ceased thinking about the Torah except in the case of accident", and on another occasion said, "The most difficult thing for

me to observe on the fast of the 9th Av, even more than the five inflictions, is the command not to interpret Torah, and it pains me to have these thoughts disturb me during my prayer."

His Books — The Apple of His Eye

No joy was greater for him than the printing of his books, which were largely published in Vilna. He once said to a friend, "When one of my books comes out in print, my exultation is so great that I feel as though I have brought a child into marriage." These were no ordinary words. The simile had a striking connotation and meant the highest form of satisfaction... for the Chazon Ish was childless.

Then his friend asked him, "For whom do you print these books, when in our generation there is no-one who is interested in such literature?" His answer was, "For myself, but later on maybe times will change!"

His books aroused the same happiness amongst all his readers, who toiled enthusiastically through the brilliant expositions and who found a crystal-clear truth in every conclusion. For the Chazon Ish sought only the truth and was opposed to misleading, complicated language on intellectually attractive suppositions, which were so often printed. He considered this to be "bribery".

His School of Thought

The Chazon Ish's trend of thought and personality were inseparable and again and again we find his original and sincere portrayal of the Law. His was often a controversial outlook, for he was never bound by conventionality, but by the truth.

Torah experts claim that his later works progressed considerably from his first book, which was more in the current style of analysis and philosophy. The Chazon Ish wanted to conform with his convictions of simplicity and elucidation of the law, rather than innovating and refuting the former sages. He did not want to be known as a Halachic creator, but followed the way of Raavad, whose books on the Rambam were a perfect example of the pure desire and ambition to elucidate the law and not to display the intellect.

One day as he was learning in the Bet Hamedrash, someone came up to him and told him that he had seen a fire in the vicinity of the Chazon Ish's home. People in the street were surprised to see this usually sedate person running along the streets, and, furthermore, what could he be running for ? To save his broken furniture and tattered clothes from the tongues of the flames ? When they saw him return from his home and his gait took on a peaceful pace and under his arm he held a heavy parcel... his manuscripts — the apple of his eye.

This was the most priceless treasure in his possession. The produce of his brain, in which he had invested so many years of toil and which cost him so many sleepless nights. Striding back to the Bet Hamedrash with this parcel under his arm, made him the happiest person in the world, and out of sheer excitement he had forgotten to save some of the essential household items including his wife's merchandise.

His small collection of Sphorim were burned in the fire and he began to learn without the various commentaries which he had had before. Later he found that the Chidushim

which he had compiled, were already written in those very books which were burned. This very system was part of his specific theory in learning. He claimed that anyone studying seriously could reach the same conclusions to Talmudical problems, which the later commentators themselves had written. This was to his mind the best method of learning, and he often suggested to young students coming for advice to look up only the questions of the later commentators but to find the answers on their own.

A Never-Ending Source

Although he distributed of his genius to the public in abundance, he was never directly involved in public affairs, but left it to his books to convey his message. He withdrew himself more and more from the outside world, but did it out of principle. In conversation someone once expressed his personal viewpoint, that in hard times every Jew should join the ranks and serve his people by doing communal work, thereby hallowing G-d's name as it says, "A time to G-d". The Chazon Ish replied to this rather insinuating remark, "Torah study is an asset to the public, since the very presence of a great scholar radiates a shining atmosphere to his surroundings. This can be compared to someone pouring drink from a flask into small cups which are empty. What happens? The flask gradually gets empty, and the cups have no more resources to get more from. If the flask is constantly filled, till it even overflows, the cups beneath are filled, yet the flask remains forever full, like a spring which is an everlasting source."

"People who persevere in their studies, do an act of

charity to the Jewish nation," was the conviction of the Chazon Ish, and that the followers of the Novardok system who exerted their energy in influencing the wider public should rather realise that the greatest form of influence is when a person perfects himself, for only then does he automatically provide himself with sufficient power to influence others.

He himself personified this very conviction and strove to be that never-ending spring of living waters which irrigated his nation. Even when the other giant Torah luminaries gathered for important public meetings, he absented himself and would usually flee from his brother-in-law's home on a day when an assembly took place. He would sit and learn in some Klaus attic and in vain did people search for him.

On one occasion Reb Shmuel Greineman (who organised these meetings), arranged for the gathering to dine at his house. The Chazon Ish was ignorant of any such likelihood and soon found himself trapped. At last they had caught him and used this opportunity to hear his words of wisdom. As usual he refused their entreaties although Rabbi Shimon Shkopp, who was a most eminent personality, was the first to raise the plea. When Rabbi Elchanan Vasserman of Beranovitz (about whom the Chazon Ish himself once testified that he never departed from his Maker all through the 24 hours of the day) joined the appeal, the Chazon Ish gave in. He stated a problem on the commentary of the Ran on the tractate of Nedorim and Rabbi Shimon Shkopp hastily refuted the argument. The Chazon Ish sank back into his silence and did not then counter-argue, but several days

later he wrote to Rabbi Shimon of his interpretations on the matter.

Visits to Kossova

In those days it was treacherous to undertake a journey from Lithuania to Poland, yet the Chazon Ish felt an insatiable urge to keep close ties with the family and above all to comply with the command of honouring his mother. One of the most striking of his visits home was for the occasion of his sister's marriage to Rabbi Nachum Meir Karelitz. This was a glorious festivity since it was enhanced by the presence of many of the greatest scholars of the age together with his own distinguished family from Vilna.

It was an unforgettable affair and the townsfolk were honoured by the presence of a noble crowd, and witnessed a uniquely aristocratic wedding ceremony. First in the procession strode the renowned scholars accompanied by a choir with orchestra, who were about to break out in music when they restrained their urge, giving way to the glorious singing of those Rabbis who were accompanied by the clapping of the crowds. The exultation became contagious and enveloped everyone; so touching was this scene that many hearts were moved by the manifestation of Torah glory and some were even brought to tears.

Few of the spectators at this event knew of the drama which took place inside the Rabbi's home during the minutes before the procession made its way out of the house. Everyone was ready and they were about to make their way into the street when suddenly the absence of the Chazon Ish was noticed. They began to worry and went searching for him throughout the town. At last they found him in the Bet

Hamedrash learning; he wanted to use every spare minute for his study.

When he found himself "caught in the act" he made his way hurriedly to the throng and mingled with them. On his way he noticed among the crowd, a group of young locals as though standing a a cross-road in iife who seemed to be spiritually deteriorating. He went straight to his brother, Reb Itzale, who was then the spiritual pillar of his home town and whispered in his ear, just before he approached the company, "Look at those youths ! Our father, blessed be his name, would never have left such precious men without instruction". From these very strayers emerged later some loyal Torah adherents...

The Bond with Rabbi Cohen

The kinship with Rabbi Shlomo Cohen began already in Vilna. The latter, of a renowned family, would in the summer time join his relatives on their annual holiday in one of the suburbs of Vilna very near Poplavas the area where the Chazon Ish lived. Most of the day the Chazon Ish spent at home but occasionally he would be seen in the rest home where Reb Chayim Ozer and other important scholars spent their vacation, usually to join in with their prayer. In that summer of 1923 the Chazon Ish wrote a letter to a friend in Petach Tikva, Rabbi Moshe Olivitzki: "This summer I have been suffering from a physical breakdown and due to this have been forced to cease my study for a while. Even now I have not yet recovered; please pray for me, that my resources may soon be strengthened in order that I may return speedily to my Torah studies."

It was in these circumstances that Rabbi Shlomo Cohen then a young man was invited by the Chazon Ish to learn with him. When the vacation came to a close they parted but the bond remained permanent.

Every day Reb Shlomo came to Poplavas which was quite a distance from his parents' home, to the other side of the river which divided Vilna into two, in order to learn his daily lesson with the Chazon Ish. This lasted ten years, till his departure from Lithuania to Israel in 1923 when he once wrote, "It is a pity that we have had to sever our bond".

Rabbi Shlomo reminisces that they had the habit to review the previous day's studies by heart. One day the Chazon Ish found it strenuous to examine his pupil so he asked him just to scan over the Schabbat Tractate which they had finished. He remembered having paused several times but the Chazon Ish always prompted him on to continue, never needing once to look into the Gemarrah.

The Chazon Ish jotted down his interpretation on the margins of the page, and on occasions when going over some passage which he had already explained he would find difficulty in comprehending his own commentaries. But since he was convinced that at the time he wrote them he was more deeply involved in the subject matter, he preferred never to correct them.

Rabbi Shlomo was fortunate to have been on very close terms with the Chazon Ish. The latter even suggested a match for him and he married the daughter of an influential and wealthy Jew from Bnei Brak. On several occasions he received letters from him containing pieces of advice.

He urged him particularly to pray for inspiration and inner awakening in learning which was bestowed from the Almighty if a person sufficiently wanted it. One of the dominant blessing for this was "Ahava Raba" "Borich Shemaya" and "Elohai Nezor." One of his staunch convictions was that learning acquired by toil and labour was far more valuable than the quick results of a fast brain The Torah has not only been presented to the gifted, the sole importance is on the effort made in acquiring it and the fact that sincerity "Yira" precedes "Chochma", that fear of G-d and the wish to adhere, dominates one's knowledge. There is never a limit to the amount of labour over the Torah, said the Chazon Ish, and each day should bring with it added assiduity and more and more enthusiasim, since a man is compared to a tree which grows and rises and is nourished by the intrinsic sap, Torah. He wrote in one of his letters that a person should make a point of praying for his part in this wonder world of Torah-Study and since one gate has been left accessible, the "Gate of Tears", man should attempt to reach that stage where he weeps about his disgust over his own emptiness and then his reward is ensured. His brother Reb Meir once wrote that the greatness which his brother reached was given him through his sincere entreaties to his Maker, and although he had been only average as a boy he had succeeded in reaching a peak of genius through the medium of prayer.

Rabbi Cohen's Reminiscences

Early in the morning while still dark he would go for his morning prayer to the Bet Hamedrash and there poured out his heart desperately to the Almighty to give him a

successful day's study. Only if someone came in would he lower his voice in an attempt to hide his emotions. He refrained from looking at money and one morning he asked Reb Shlomo to lend him a few coins, and explained with a twinkle in his eye, "What are the wretched beggers to blame that I don't look at money?" This was somewhat in contradiction to his usual habit since he was most stringent about not borrowing money, but since he felt that in his case it might be detrimental to his spiritual development not to give charity he allowed himself to take a loan.

He was very cautious about his eating habits, and refrained from tasting delicacies or eating anything out of pleasure. His needs were prepared in small doses, and were measured and weighed only for the one purpose of sustaining his physical maintenance. While eating he would behave in perfect concentration and seriousness as though fulfilling a holy task.

When Passover approached he would make haste to prepare the stove he had in his home for the purpose of baking the "Matzot". His own family and the most exclusive Rabbis would come to his home to make the Matzot themselves. But his oven was very small, only enough for two or three at a time, consequently the procedure lasted a long time and the Chazon Ish concluded this annual task in utter exhaustion.

With similar care and meticulousness he would choose the "Four Species" on Sukkot. One summer he heard of a gentile living in a neighbouring village who had grown some myrtles in a flower pot, and who had succeeded in producing exceptionally beautiful branches. The Chazon Ish set

out to visit him and immediately made a transaction with him for a high price, that at the desired time he could come to pluck some for his needs. His joy was indescribable; he had had the luck to find such beautiful branches! He would lay great emphasis on the best quality of his Sukka, by buying expensive wooden beams. He could not understand why people made exaggerated attempts at finding the best citron only because it is attributed as "Hadar", citrus (but which also has the connotation of splendour) while the command of building a Sukka is equal in importance. Yet he felt that people misinterpreted the two commands, spending exhorbitant prices on citrons whereas practically nothing on the hut, only knocking together a few old boards.

Side by side with his exactitude on the material excellence of his hut, he would also exert great effort on the Halachic validity of its construction. He was careful not to knock nails on the boards where the leaves came since metal receives impurity. This was one of his Halachic innovations, to the extent that he even disqualified a construction which had nails under the leaves.

He had an unconventional view on the method of lettering in Mezuzot and Scrolls of Law. He maintained the "Yod" of the "Tzadi" must be written straight and not upside down. There is a great argument about this matter between the Ashkenazis and Sephardis and although many were inclined to take the opinion of the Sephardis, yet the Chazon Ish went uncompromisingly in the path of the Gaon and he held steadfastly that the terminal "Yod" of "Tzadi" be upright. If he suspected that he would be called to the Torah

where the letters were not in conformity with his opinions, he found all sorts of excuses not to go !

All these anecdotes which Rabbi Shlomo Cohen reminisces happened before he reached the age of seventeen. At that tender age he was taken aback by a request made to him by his master the Chazon Ish. He wanted to teach him the art of blowing the Shofar so that he would be his horn blower every year. Usually one was particular to take someone older, bearded and imbued with the trials of life, not a young man like that. But no questions were asked and the community accepted it in obedience.

One Rosh Hashono he gave the order to abandon the break after morning prayer and still more, the chapter recited seven times before Shofar called, "To the conductor, to the sons of Korach". At this they all became perplexed what could have caused the Chazon Ish to take such a drastic step? Afterwards they heard the facts. Apparently he had heard a boy saying to his father straight after the morning prayer, "Father you have a weak heart, please take something to break the fast." His father shouted angrily at him "I have never in my life eaten before hearing the Shofar" When the Chazon Ish heard this he felt sorry for the ailing man and preferred to accelerate the service for his health !

Compromise — Chance or Intention

As strong as the convictions of the Chazon Ish as far as his systems in learning was concerned, so were his opinions on world outlook. He, his disciples and another handful of sincere Jews, were the spectators of a dramatic scene in the streets of Vilna. Two powerful movements were threa-

tening a massive part of Lithuanian Jewry but the more treacherous one was the broadminded Mizrachi party which was a disguised threat to sincere observance. The Chazon Ish would say about them things to this effect: "A Mizrachi proponent must automatically include in its policy at least one example of refutation of the wisdom of our sages. This fact alone, of defying the undoubted validity of our sages, is a severe damage to the roots of belief".

One day as he went with Reb Shlomo in the streets they saw a notice which announced the opening of a "Religious National School" for the youth of Vilna. At that the Chazon Ish took down the advertisement and tore it into shreds and fought with all his might, for the prevention of opening this school, since he saw in this a danger to the continuation of Orthodoxy. His definition of the problem was thus: "The very name "Religious-National" is a contradiction to Judaism. For someone who says that "religious" is not sufficient but "national" is essential as well, is insinuating that the two are alien and are two different phenomena, which is a severe deviation from the truth."

One day Reb Shlomo came to the Chazon Ish in complaint against someone who wasn't precise about his observance of the law. His reply was, "We have not yet been lucky enough to see all the Jews perfect saints and it is therefore not advisable to repel the strayers but to encourage them" At this reply Reb Shlomo became perplexed and asked, "But surely the Mizrachi are also strayers, why then are you so staunch in your objection of them if you say one should encourage strayers ?" His reply was concise: "There is a big diffirence between the two aforementioned types !

There is a person who strays from the trodden path because he has a strong inclination to choose the wrong way; he is weak and in his heart knows that it would be better to be a saint, only cannot muster enough strength to get there. But Mizrachi presents a "Policy", an ambition to convert the whole of Judaism to their outlook, that everyone should be compromisers. The result is that they put the saintly person in a negative light, and do not see in him the perfection of a human being. Could anything be more dangerous to Judaism than that ?"

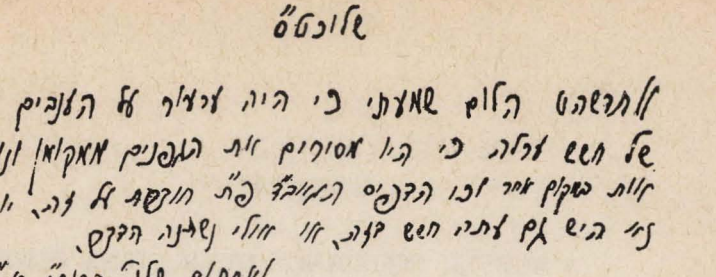
Encouragement of the Weak

As we have mentioned above the Chazon Ish defied the policy of compromise through and through. Not so those who were weak in character, who simply could not overcome their inclinations. They where the people whom the Chazon Ish cared for with every warmth and kindness of a father, thus paving his way into their hearts and forming an intangible tie with them. One of the proteges of this remarkable man was a young boy in Vilna called Chayim, who had been poor and neglected. The Chazon Ish took him into his home as a son and despite his painstaking care for him both spiritually and materially the young man left the true path and became a secular poet. Many years later the Chazon Ish confessed that even at the time he took the lad in, he knew of what calibre he was, and possessed evil inclinations. Yet he spared no effort in the slightest hope that as long as it wasn't a policy maybe he would return. Despite Chayim's rejection of his education, he never forgot those compassionate eyes of his "foster

father" and after his death he mourned him bitterly and wrote a eulogy in his memory. After all, he had felt many a loving stroke of his saintly hand on his cheeks, and for seven years had slept in the same room. Here are some of his memories :

Never during weekdays would the Chazon Ish take off his clothes but fell asleep sitting on his bed with his head leaning on the wall and a lamp burning in front of him so as to be constantly ready for learning once he awoke, and not need to waste precious minutes over dressing and such like. Only on one occasion during those seven years did Chayim see the Chazon Ish change clothing for the night. This is how the situation arose. A boy unknown to the Chazon Ish from Mir asked him if he could lodge in his home. That night Chayim decided to stay up to learn with his master, so he asked the guest if the lamp disturbed him, whereupon he replied that even ten lamps could not disturb his sleep. But to Chayims' astonishment, he saw that the Chazon Ish was undressing hurriedly and impatiently called him to put out the light and go quickly to sleep. Since when did the Chazon Ish raise his voice ? When was he abrupt? And how could it be that he actually changed for the night ? Chayim asked no questions but next morning inquired what this behavior meant. The Chazon Ish explained that he acted in this unusual manner in order to give his visitor the chance of having a night's sleep, for he was sure the lad had only made a pretext that he was able to sleep in the light and therefore had said that even in ten lights his slumber would not have been disturbed.

Once a woman came with a question of kashrut on



A letter of the Chazon Ish concerning Orlah

a chicken. The Chazon Ish took a long time to solve the tricky problem which only in the case of a serious loss could be permitted as kosher. He whispered in Chayim's ear if he knew whether this woman was poor or not and as he did not know he asked the woman "How much did this chicken cost you?" She burst out in a cry of despair, "Is the fowl G-d forbid not kosher ? From that spontaneous reaction the Chazon Ish understood the financial situation and in an authoritative voice he concluded, "The hen is Kosher".

These are the memories of a man who lived with the Chazon Ish, a man who later deviated from the trodden path and turned his back on the treasures which his master had offered. But the Chazon Ish owned a quality rarely found in people, the quality of forbearance and love. He loved people, and particularly those who had never had any acquaintance with the Torah.

Chapter VI

A SUBTLE INFLUENCE OVER VILNA JEWRY

The Chazon Ish refused Reb Chaim Ozer's frequent plea to don the formal Rabbi's gown and to step into official public activity. Yet he was vigilant on communal matters, lending a sympathetic ear where possible, and laying down the law when asked. Nevertheless the two became the closest of friends. Since Reb Chaim Ozer's home was a centre of public affairs, the Chazon Ish soon began making his influence felt behind the scenes, and the Agudist pioneers and various rabbis took counsel from him. Thus he was active in many a project for the fortification of religion and study at that time. There was one particular person who attached himself to this quiet leader and he was Rabbi Joseph Shub, the Editor of the Orthodox paper "Dos Vort", which was printed in Vilna under the enterprise of Reb Chaim Ozer and was considered the voice of the Yeshiva world of Lithuania. The Chazon Ish occasionally dictated his ideas to be printed into articles, but never allowed his name to be attached.

Some of this gradual emancipation from social isolation was due to the Chofetz Chaim. The latter was once invited to Reb Chaim Ozer's home where everyone sat around

the table and listened intently to his words of wisdom, having the unique experience of beholding his noble countenance as he spoke.

This time he began to speak of the spiritual deterioration of the generation and of the dire need to exercise every capacity of influence, and not hide under the title of humility. Every concealed power must now be revealed, he said. At that, Rabbi Chaim Ozer went to the Chazon Ish who, as usual, sat at the end of the table, and provoked him, "Do you hear? To whom is the Chofetz Chaim referring if not to you!"

Not long after this, the Chazon Ish once again met the Chofetz Chaim in Reb Chaim Ozer's home, and his piercing glance fell upon him criticizingly, and he said, "Do you think that under such circumstances, it is an accomplishment to be a genius. So could I! If I had freed myself from public activity, and locked myself behind four walls to study, I would also have become a genius."

An Astounding Incident

Once Reb Chaim Ozer went to examine the "Mikvaot" of his town, and he took the Chazon Ish with him. Together they boarded a cab when, suddenly, on the way to the Mikvah, the Chazon Ish jumped off the vehicle and continued on foot. What was the reason for this astounding act of his? Later Reb Chaim Ozer learned that he had suspected the upholstery of the wagon as being Shatnez (mixed fabric of wool and flax).

Reb Chaim Ozer confided in him on every communal issue. Once he was in doubt whether to attend the second

"Knessia Gedola". He had certain objections particularly due to his ailing health, and despite numerous entreaties, he still hesitated and called the Chazon Ish for a consultation with him. After an hour's conversation, Reb Chaim Ozer gave a positive reply, that he would attend the "Knessia Gedola."

THE STRUGGLE OVER THE PRESTIGE OF THE GREATEST MAN OF THE GENERATION

Who is the Chief Rabbi of Vilna ?

In 1928, Lithuanian Jewry witnessed a fierce dissension which raged in Vilna. This took place on the background of a dispute over the Chief Rabbinate of Vilna, which concluded in an irrevocable offence to the illustrious Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinski. He had lived in Vilna for sixty years of his life and was considered the supreme Halachic authority in the Torah world, to such an extent that no Rosh Yeshiva nor Rabbi was appointed without his consent throughout the whole of Eastern Europe. He kept his official title as modest as possible and, although he was the Dayan of Vilna, he signed his name as "Chaim Ozer Grodzinski", with no other attachment.

It had been a tradition in Vilna not to appoint any official Rabbi nor Head of Court ever since the death of Rabbi Shmuel Avigdor — the last in the dynasty of the great Rabbis of Vilna.

The honourables of the town entreated Reb Chaim

Ozer to annul this amendment and take upon himself the badly needed Rabbinate. The latter was firm in his opinion and would on no account dispel the hitherto accepted decree. In 1910, the Government demanded that every Jewish Community should have an official Rabbi, who would be in charge of the technical aspects of religious Jewish life concerning marriage, birth and death certificates, etc. Reb Chaim Ozer was opposed even to this out of fear that someone unfit in his Jewish outlook would be chosen. When Chaim Chernowitz, called the "Young Rabbi", who had formerly been the official Rabbi in Odessa and organized a Yeshiva-University there with teachers such as Bialik and Kloizner, was put forward as a candidate, Reb Chaim Ozer did his utmost to prevent his nomination.

At that time a young Slobodka graduate named Yitzchak Rubinstein, came to Vilna. He was a rarity in that he possessed the "vital" graduation certificate which was necessary for the candidature for this post. Reb Chaim Ozer saw that his attempts were of no avail and agreed to compromise, so he called this young Rabbi and impressed upon him the importance of refraining from any activity outside the realm of mere Rabbinical technicalities as demanded by the government in order to remain loyal to the Vilna tradition. Rabbi Rubenstein agreed and "ran" for the post against a non-Orthodox candidate, and was supported by all the religious inhabitants of the town. He won the post, and at first kept his promise and dealt only with the rabbinical duties in the life of the town. When the First World War broke out, and Reb Chaim Ozer evacuated to Russia, the rift between the two became enormous. Rabbi Rubinstein had

forgotten his promise and exerted his influence on most of the Jewish institutions in Vilna.

Once Reb Chaim Ozer returned and saw the new situation, he began to steer his way towards the right. He founded the Yeshivot Committee and affiliated himself with the World Aguda, whereas Rabbi Rubinstein joined the Mizrachi and was chosen as a member of the Polish Senate. The Mizrachi Movement amalgamated with the Zionists and threatened to dissemble the stable character of traditional Judaism in the desire to usurp sole Jewish sovereignty.

It was then that the non-Orthodox parties began to clamour for a Chief Rabbi, to which the Mizrachi gave their support. Reb Chaim Ozer, the great religious leader, loyal to traditional Orthodoxy, was subjected to derision and degradation when the crown of the Chief Rabbinate of Vilna was placed upon the head of Rabbi Rubinstein.

A Storm Breaks Out in Vilna

Reb Chaim Ozer's supporters were not prepared to swallow this slight and retaliated by igniting a massive demonstration which soon whipped up a frenzy among Jews all over the world. Alien to his character, the Chazon Ish played a large part behind the scenes in programming this war, although it was his elder brother who actually took the initiative in executing it. The latter was so idealistic about his mission, that it even caused him to pay a dear price when his community in Vilna demanded his abdication on the grounds of his excessive political activity. It was then that he became Rabbi in Lakowitz.

Last but not least, it was the Chofez Chaim who gave

the signal to him to fight relentlessly for the sovereignty of Reb Chaim Ozer over Vilna and not to tolerate the nomination of a hypocrite. He was at that time 91 years old, the unrivalled leader of the nation. He publicized a protest, denouncing the brutal degradation of his colleague and demanding his election. Although his rare intervention shook the Orthodox world, it did not even penetrate the sincerest of the Mizrachi and Zionist parties. On Sunday, 22nd Cheshvan, 5689, the Community Council voted for their Rabbi and, with the majority of 15 votes — 10 of whom were assimilants — Rabbi Rubinstein was ordained Chief Rabbi of Vilna.

Upon their victory, the Zionist press printed propaganda of incitement against the spiritual leaders of the "opposition" and found no other means than to criticise the Chofetz Chaim himself, in that he had profaned his own code of "slander" and had blatantly blackened the names of others. The Chofetz Chaim did not remain apathetic to this offence and reacted spontaneously by publicising his confident responsibility for "Slandering the Zionists", on the basis of the law which states that "In a situation where there is danger of the destruction of religion, then slander is not only permitted, but is even a command !" In conclusion to this fierce battle, the Chofetz Chaim wanted to ordain a fast over the degradation of the "Honour of the Torah" which had so tragically taken place, and over the danger of reform which loomed ahead.

As a result, many of the influential Rabbis of the day, protested with hostility against the Vilna community, and the Rabbis' committee of Vilna called the Community's Committee, headed by Rabbi Rubinstein himself, to a court-case.



Rabbi Avraham Yakov Cohen of Vilna

This invitation was never accepted and, therefore, the accusation remained without further investigation.

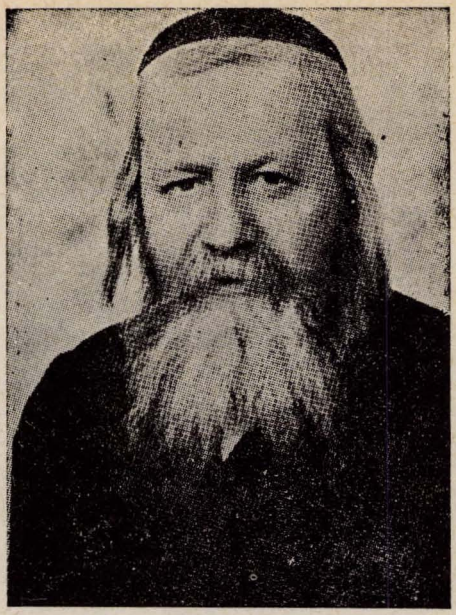
There were suggestions that they should come to a compromise and have a second Chief Rabbi, but the Chazon Ish was adamant that this should not happen. When the Chofetz Chaim wrote, from Radin, of his objections to any kind of compromise in this matter, the Chazon Ish propagated a series of articles in "Dos Vort", in which every means was exploited in order to put in doubt the legality of the Community. They paid a high price and the paper's Editor, Reb Joseph Shub, was reported to the Polish, Police and charged with "slander".



Rabbi Chayim Zonnenfeld — Rabbi of Jerusalem

The Hidden Treasure

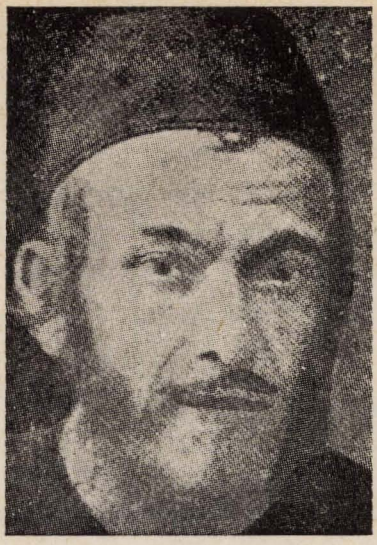
The contemporary Rabbi of Jerusalem was Rabbi Chaim Zonnenfeld, and, when he felt that he was aging and could no longer cope, he urged the leaders of the Orthodox Community to appoint a "vice" to help him in his arduous work as Rabbi. Rabbi Moishe Bloi, who was his religious ambassador to the Diaspora, was chosen to travel again and to find a suitable candidate. He toured Poland, Lithuania, Latvia



Rabbi Moshe Bloi

and Hungary, and in this visit included Vilna. There he was warmly greeted by Reb Chaim Ozer. One Day, Reb Chaim Ozer said to his boarder, Reb Meir Lieberman, "Go and show Reb Moishe Bloi the sights of Vilna."

Then they went on an excursion touring all the places of interest in Vilna — the Tomb of the Vilna Gaon, and next to his that of the proselyte who had died a martyr's death in loyalty to Judaism. (This proselyte was a Polish prince from the house of Polatski). They proceeded to the famous Vilna "Hekdesh" and the Gaon's Kloiz. Next on their route was the Shtrasson Library and other historical places of interest. When they returned, Reb Chaim Ozer asked his lodger,



Rabbi M. M. Epstein Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron

"Well, have you shown Reb Moishe Bloi all the town's attractions ?"

"Yes, I think so," was the reply.

"But haven't you forgotten the most important item, the one of the greatest value ?" asked Reb Chaim Ozer.

"How could that be ? We have seen the Cemetery, Kloiz, and also the famous library. What have we missed ?"

A revealing smile crossed Reb Chaim Ozer's face as he said, "Oh sure, you have shown him all the inanimate sights, but the living phenomenon in our midst you forgot. Have you yet been to see Reb Avrohom Yeshayahu ?"

At that broad hint, the two went off to see Vilna's hidden treasure, the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish enquired with

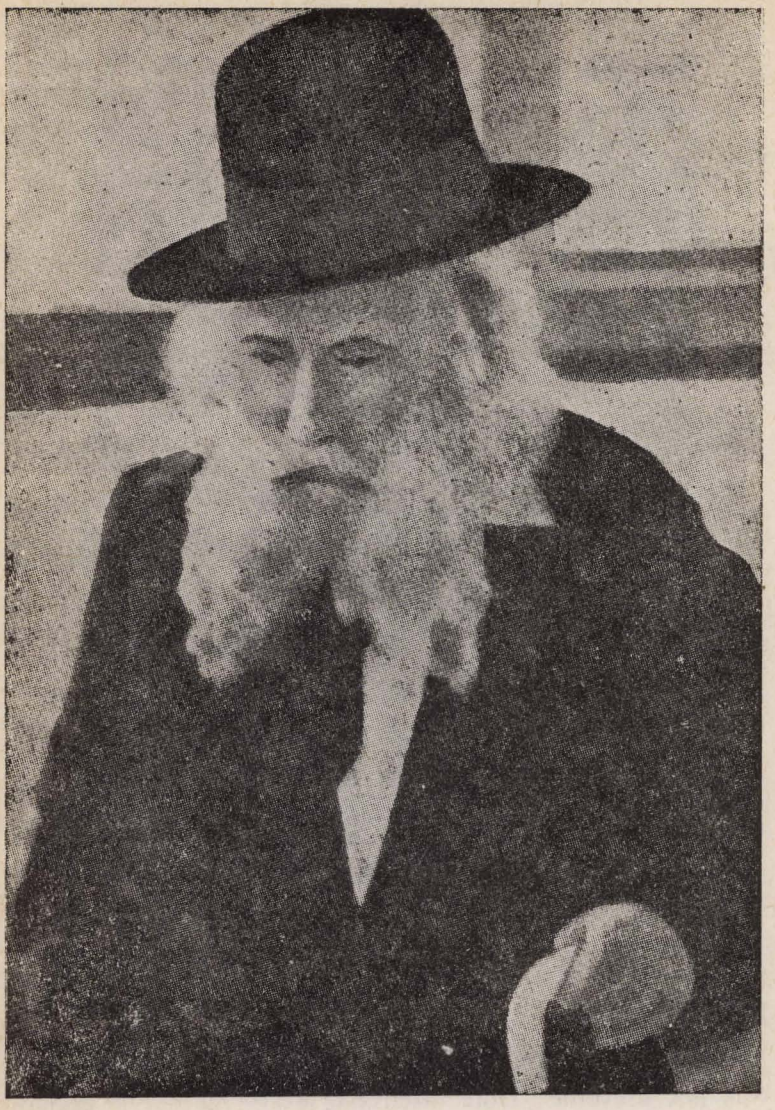
particular interest about the set-up in the Holy Land, as he had already made plans to emigrate as soon as possible. When Reb Moishe saw that he was so eager to come to Israel, he immediately offered him the post of being Rabbi Zonnenfeld's successor, but the Chazon Ish refused. They parted amicably and Reb Moishe Bloi returned to his residence, which was in Reb Chaim Ozer's home. When they returned home, Reb Chaim Ozer said to him, "I never decide anything without taking the advice of the Chazon Ish."

A Constant Confidante

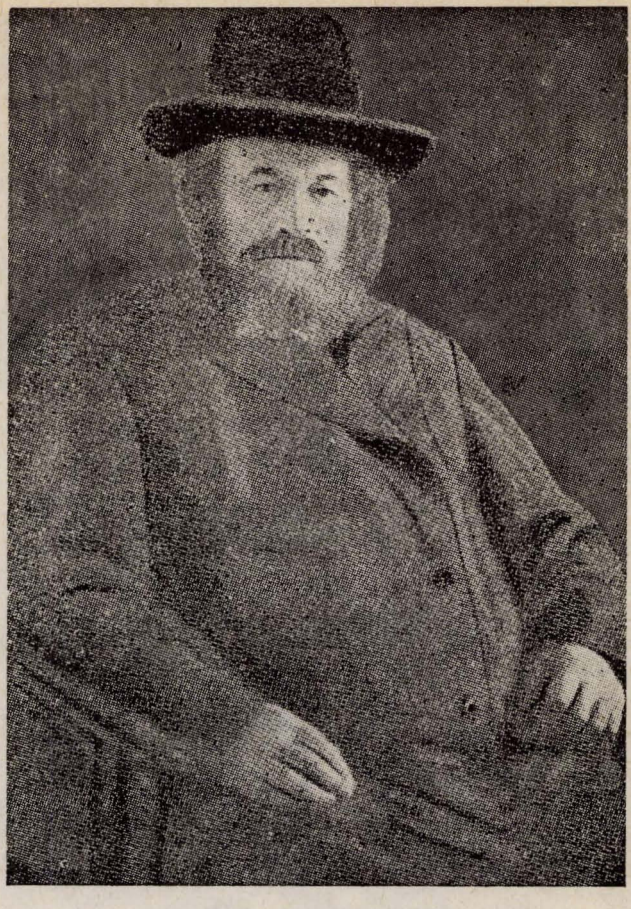
When Reb Chaim Ozer said there was nothing he did without the advice of the Chazon Ish, it meant that he confided in him on every urgent item on the agenda of communal problems. Reb Chaim Ozer was the one about whom the Chofez Chaim once said in a time of crisis, "Oh, Heavens, with whom have You left us, with one Reb Chaim Ozer alone?" This bond was kept as secret as possible as the Chazon Ish was loathe to being publicized or being involved in public matters, although he actually finalised many a solution to burning public crises.

Even after he left for the Holy Land, his colleague, Reb Chaim Ozer, continued the friendship by correspondence, although he was personally grieved at losing his closest friend. He wrote in one of his letters: "Over any communal event needing meditation and consultation, I always mention you." And in another letter:

"I still haven't stopped longing for you." And in still another letter: "I would have great pleasure from time to



Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Rebbe of Gur



Rabbi Y. Z. Dushinski

time to know how you feel and if you are happy in Bnei Brak."

Even though the ocean separated them, Reb Chaim Ozer was not prevented from discussing every matter of importance with the Chazon Ish. Their letters usually contained subjects of paramount urgency concerning the Orthodox

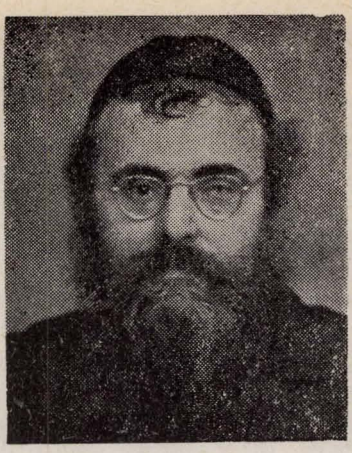


The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Yaakov Rozenheim

Jewish world and they almost worked in partnership in solving them. The bond between them and the pure love for one another was a rarity — two great men with no ulterior motives in their profound friendship.

Public Affairs

The subjects discussed in their letters were very varied. Here is an example of one of them — an interesting case stemming from Germany. Rabbi Dr. Meir Hildesheimer, the son of Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer, (colleague of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch who founded the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and the orthodox community, Adass Israel, which had been erected for the purpose of preventing the threatening reform) had the idea of transplanting this Seminary into the centre of Jerusalem. Reb Chaim Ozer was afraid that this would be



Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Levine

a serious threat to Judaism and went full force against this scheme by writing an unusually sharp letter to Rabbi Hildesheimer.

He explains his theory thus : Although his father, Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer, had founded this institution as a shield against the dangerous forces of the time, the new plan of bringing it from Germany to Israel would only mean "serious damage to the Holy Land and an offence to the Torah".

Reb Chaim Ozer was surprised "How such an idea could enter his mind ! To form a factory for Rabbis with diplomas of secular studies, when there are already Yeshivot in existence with great Rabbis as their directors. How could he want to appoint new Rabbis who made secular knowledge their priority and Torah study a secondary accomplishment ! Who wants or needs such Rabbis ?" He warns Rabbi Hildesheimer in his letter, "I won't rest nor give peace over this



Rabbi Akiva Eger

matter." Reb Chaim Ozer also wrote to Rabbi Jacob Rosenheim, President of the Aguda Movement in Frankfurt. As a result of this violent reaction, Rabbi Hildesheimer retreated from his plans.

During these proceedings, Reb Chaim Ozer corresponded regularly with the Chazon Ish and, although from Berlin the danger of this scheme had subsided, the effects of its aftermath were far-reaching and so Reb Chaim Ozer urged the Chazon Ish to be on the alert against the new faculty of Talmud about to be opened in the Hebrew University, which had been schemed by the Mizrachi movement and which was to be of even greater danger than the first idea.

This project too was annulled by the indirect influence of the Chazon Ish...

In another letter which he received in 1934, from Reb Chaim Ozer, he was informed about the impending assembly in Jerusalem of Torah experts and scientists on the subject of renovating the old idea of forming a Sanhedrin, playing the role of Supreme Ruling Body, from which the whole of world Jewry would derive its jurisdiction. Reb Chaim Ozer, in his letter, calls the Chazon Ish to try to abort this threatening scheme.

Whether on problems connected with the Holy Land, or those of the Diaspora; whether the Chazon Ish was in Vilna or in Bnei Brak, Reb Chaim Ozer confided in him, and in some cases even leaving him to give the ruling.

Chapter VII

A LION RISES FROM BABYLON

The Difficulties of Immigration

A day after Passover, 1933, the Chazon Ish called his disciple, Rabbi Shlomo Cohen, and said to him, "I intend to emigrate to the Holy Land to settle there. Go to Rabbi Chaim Ozer and ask him to write to Rabbi Moshe Bloi (head of the Israeli Aguda) to send a visa for me and my wife."

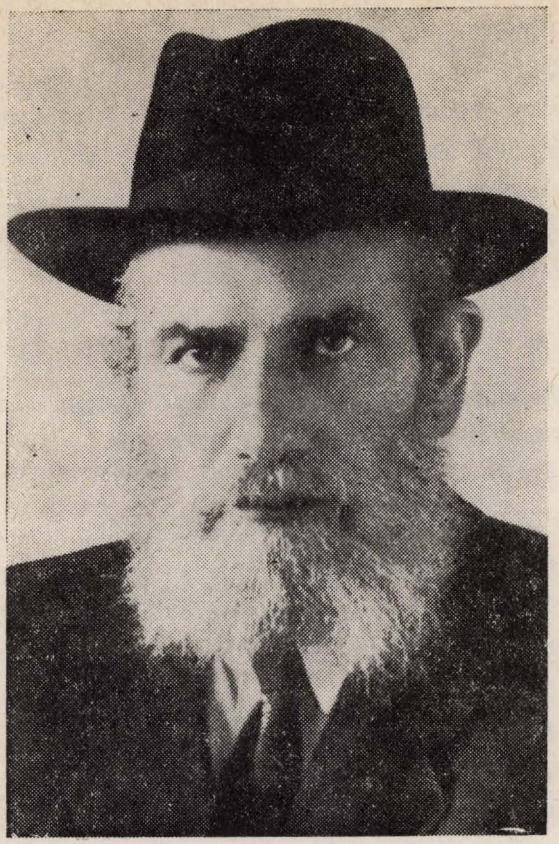
Reb Shlomo was stunned. Was the Chazon Ish seriously considering leaving Vilna forever? What would Rabbi Chaim Ozer say to that ? But he asked no questions for fear of his teacher, and made way to Rabbi Chaim Ozer's home in Zavalia Street. Surprisingly enough, Reb Chaim Ozer provided the requested recommendation, and, only on the morrow when he met Reb Shlomo again, did he say, "I am sincerely sorry that Rabbi Avrohom Isaiah is contemplating leaving Vilna," and explained his unexpected acquiescence in writing the letter to the effect that he was not aware of the real implication of the matter, and regretted having done it. Therewith, he tried every possible form of persuasion, but all was of no avail.

Several weeks later, a reply came from Rabbi Moishe Bloi stipulating that if the Chazon Ish was prepared to ac-

cept the post of Chief Judge of the Orthodox Community in Jerusalem, then he would get a visa immediately. If not, he would have to wait a number of months, as the certificates were rare to come by. At that time, the British Mandate limited the number of immigrants to Israel out of consideration for the Arab majority. Of this small number, the Zionists allowed very few permits to be allotted to Orthodox Jews, and the Aguda party received only six percent of the visas available to Jews. Thus many religious people, who were later killed in the Holocaust, were prevented from coming to Israel.

The Chazon Ish chose the latter of the two alternatives, which Reb Moishe Bloi wrote to him, and was on no account prepared to accept any rabbinical post even if it meant paying the price of another few months' wait. Finally, due to extra intervention by Reb Moishe Bloi on behalf of the Chazon Ish, the visa was procured within ten days!

The new turn of events brought pulsating movement into the hitherto restrained life of this quiet and reserved genius. He first packed his precious books and other frugal belongings, without having as yet crystallized a clear plan of where to settle and what to do. This uncertainty was of no importance to him. The main thing was the actual "ascending to the Holy Land" in all its spiritual connotations. This and this alone propelled his enthusiasm in the project of his dreams. We can detect other matters that worried him, which he investigated thoroughly before his arrival. One of the chief topics which took priority over many others, was the subject of Trumot and Maaserot which was so specifically connected with the Holy Land and which he so



Rabbi Moshe Olivitzki

ardently wanted to perform. In a letter to his friend, Rabbi Moshe Olivitzki Cohen of Petach Tikvah, he wrote of his anxieties concerning this matter, being most stringent in his observance of every iota of the Law.

Gone is its Glory, Gone is its Light

On Sabbath night, 7th Tammuz, 5693 the Chazon Ish took his modest leave of Vilna. In the blackness of the night,

one could discern several white patches moving in unison. Those were the long, white beards moving quickly and silently along the winding roads, accompanying the Chazon Ish to the station. There wasn't a crowd standing on the station platform, but only a very small number of the cream of Vilna's community. It was as though this symbolized the Chazon Ish's character — no noise, no pomp, but profound quality in its most concentrated form.

He boarded the carriage with his wife, waved, and, as the wheels began to move faster and faster, he and his smile were soon out of sight, leaving behind but a cloud of sorrow. And then... Reb Chaim Ozer sighed a deep and bitter sigh as though to say, "Why did you leave us ?"

Sad was the homeward beat of that small group of men who felt more acutely than anyone else, the impact of this departure. Their town had been bereaved of much of its glory and splendour, and a vacuum had been created — an empty place no one could fill. One comforting thought that encouraged them and compensated them on their heavy loss, was that this personality was going to become a historical figure in the lives of the people of Israel. He was going to take an active role in every aspect of Orthodoxy in the Holy Land. This is how one of Vilna's inhabitants put it, "We are proud of this great gift we are sending to Zion."

Reb Chaim Ozer wrote to influential personalities in Israel about their "new immigrant" and described him as a "lion risen from Babylon to Israel". As is the custom in his letters, he uses a complimentary style:

"My friend and companion, a true genius, is coming to you". In yet another letter he writes, "For us this is a



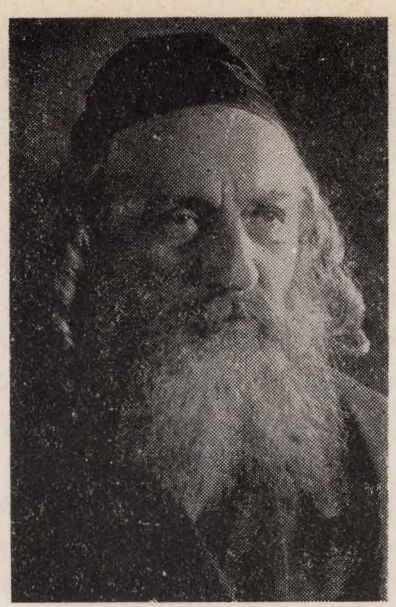
The corner stone laying ceremony of the town of Bnei Brak

great loss, but the Land of Israel has been endowed with an unparalleled gift. I hope you will heed the Chazon Ish's opinions."

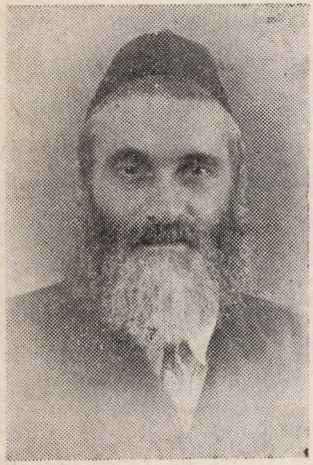
This was the first swallow that heralded the turn in the Chazon Ish's way of life, and the great change that was to overcome him. Now he was prepared to take communal problems on his shoulders and to radiate his knowledge to the wider public. In short, he emerged from privacy into the public arena. Despite this drastic turn of events, and his new facade, he remained inwardly the same modest and shy person as before, retreating from the oncoming pomp and publicity, and continuing in his former simplicity to the utmost degree.

Rabbi Itzchak Gershenkorn, Mayor and founder of Bnei Brak, wrote in his memoirs that, from the first year of his settling in Bnei Brak, he would send the Chazon Ish "mishloach manot". One year he went to him on Rosh Chodesh Adar and said, "Rabbi, will you do me a favour ?" The Chazon Ish looked inquiringly at him, "What is it you want ?" He replied that he had ordered a tailor to his home to take measurements for the purpose of making the Chazon Ish a silk coat as a Purim present. He entreated him not to refuse and received the following reply, "I have never worn a silk garment in my life !" But Reb Itzchak would not take "no" for an answer, and suggested a special suit for Sabbath instead. The Chazon Ish replied, "I am still wearing the Sabbath suit I received for my wedding."

This anecdote bears a reflection on the whole of this man's personality. He had fled all his life from grandeur and donned only simple garb. He never changed his tastes



Rabbi Nachman Shmuel Miaduser one of the first Rabbis of Bnei Brak



Rabbi Matityahu Shzigel



Rabbi Arieh Pomeranzig

nor ways, but remained consequent, genuine and simple. He refused to wear a Rabbi's cloak, and preferred the suit from his wedding !

The Path Through Stormy Waters

After a journey of ten hours, the train reached Warsaw, where the Chazon Ish and his wife checked their papers at the Palestinian Consulate in the Polish capital. Then they left by train for the Rumanian port of Konstanza, where they boarded the ship "Polonia", which sailed straight for the Land of Israel. On deck, against the twilight, one could discern the lone silhouette of that slight figure holding his belongings. His gaze enveloped that enchanting sea panorama; the softly lapping waves on the boat's starboard, the gulls cooing and circling this giant sea-monster, and the horizon where the sky meets the earth.

The sentence from Isiah, "Who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in stormy waters", seemed to come to life. He simply devoured this magnificent view, and among his many meditations, he thought of Rabbi Akivah Egar's proverb "Everyone comes and goes through the sea, but no-one has ever yet paved a path in it." He was overwhelmed, and reiterated his enthusiastic impressions, "How manifold are thy deeds, Oh G-d," and said the blessing, "Blessed art Thou, Oh Lord, who created the universe." As was expected, he was loyal to the Gaon's opinion, which differed from that of many other Poskim, among them the author of the Shulchan Aruch, Reb Yoseph Karo, who claim that the blessing one must recite when travelling by sea, is "Blessed art Thou, Oh Lord, who created the mighty sea." Then he took out a biscuit for

his wife as well and recited the blessing over food before the blessing on a journey, as the law ordains.

Most of the day he spent on deck, clad in his modest and worn overcoat, which was spotlessly clean. Beneath this, his tzitzit could be seen peeping out, since they were almost as large as a Tallit, which was in accordance with his individual calculation of the correct size of a Tzitzit. A canopy of tranquillity hovered above him, and the serenity was noticeable upon his rested face. He never parted from his Shulchan Aruch, which was his private "counsellor" on every step he took. Even in his decision to emigrate to the Holy Land, he took the advice of this very book, which, like an oracle, voiced its unquestionable opinion, "The command of settling in the Holy Land has been decided upon by the Rambam and other Poskim." This alone was sufficiently convincing, but the Chazon Ish based his final decision upon yet another phenomenon — the Chofetz Chaim's longing to come to the Land of Israel. The Chofetz Chaim was his second counsellor, for he was, in his eyes, the "living Shulchan Aruch".

He closed the book and pressed it with his right hand close to his heart, and then he stood near the rail, eyes shut yet facing eastwards, to the point of his destination, as the boat pierced the thick waters in its attempt to make its way smoothly through them. Those were the very same waves which the Gaon of Vilna had crossed on his journey towards the Holy Land, but which he never succeeded in reaching, as the Heavens had barred his way. The Gaon had considered goint to the Holy Land as a prime duty and was determined to achieve this goal despite all difficulties, yet was prevented

A letter to Rabbi Olivitzki concerning the Chazon Ish's immigration to the Holy Land

from materializing this dream. So would he, the Chazon Ish, do the same, and would overlook every obstacle to arrive at his cherished Land. The trials and tribulations with which Israel is acquired would be welcome in his eyes, if only the Heavens would grant him an unhindered arrival...

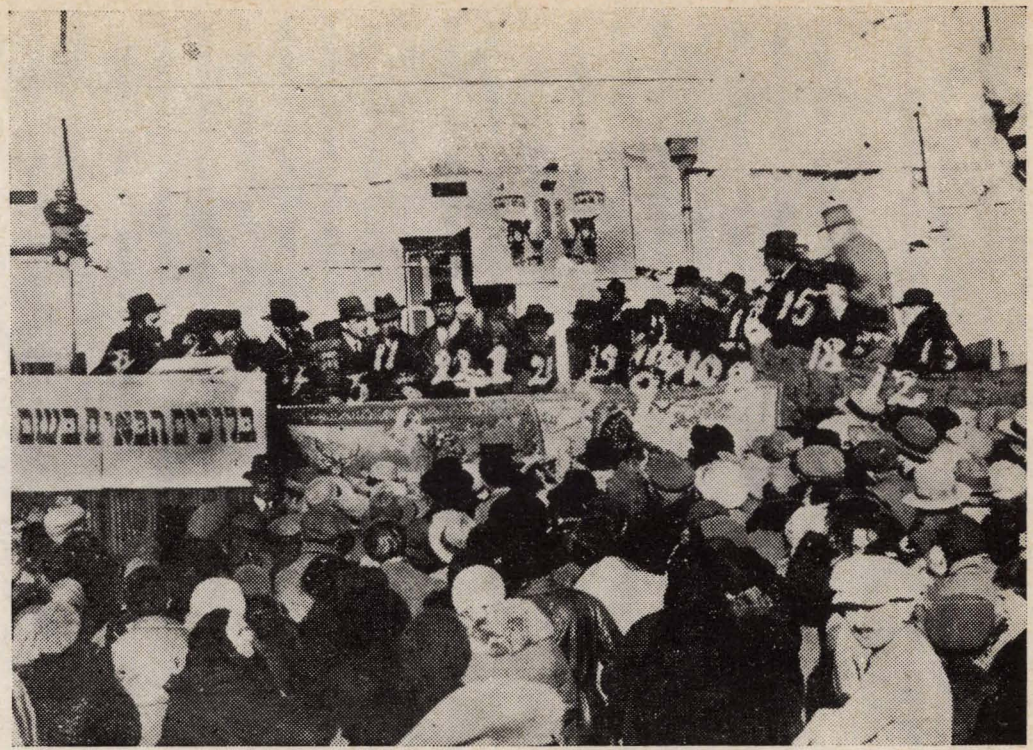
Chapter VIII

FIRST STEPS ON HOLY SOIL

No sooner did the Chazon Ish discern the distinct contours of the Land he so yearned to see, than he was filled with a wave of joy he had rarely experienced. Nearer and nearer, larger and larger the outline advanced, and soon its lines turned to borders and its curves to mountains. The boat's sirens sounded their shrill serenades, and the anchor was lowered. A ladder was set up and the dramatic moment had arrived!

Despite the heatwave on that Monday, 16th Tammuz, 5693, many of the honourables of the Orthodox community and Aguda, among them Reb Moishe Porush, left their homes and braved the furnace outside, in order to greet the Chazon Ish in Jaffa. They had received the introductory letters from Reb Chaim Ozer, but had no other idea of who this man was, or what he looked like. As the passengers slowly descended, there was no mistaking that strikingly learned countenance, and all were certain that they had guessed correctly. There he was, that slight and unobtrusive figure, taking his first steps in deep concentration — his face set and his gait measured.

The group strode towards him, thrust forward welcoming



Cornerstone laying of the Bet Yosseph Yeshiva
(Rav Kook Speaking and the Chazon Ish standing)

hands, and received him heartily. The Chazon Ish was clearly taken aback by this reception, and a profound happiness radiated from his flushed face.

He had another reason for being so excited — the mere thought of walking in the footsteps of the pupils of the Gaon of Vilna, who had settled in the Holy Land more than a hundred and thirty years ago, according to the wish of their revered master.

His emotions upon treading Holy ground, were void of material considerations of any kind; they were alien to those of the daily immigrants entering the country. He had as yet no address, no home, and no destination. Only one thing bothered him — the new tasks which had been cast upon his shoulders in that second of descent from the "Polonia" — Maaser... Trumot... and other commandments which are wholly connected with the Holy Land.

Rabbi David Potash of Tel Aviv, invited the Chazon Ish and his wife to be his guests until a permanent residence would be found. In his great gratitude, the Chazon Ish and his wife accepted the generous offer and a few days later he and his wife moved to a room in the vicinity. The room overlooked the sea, and inhaled the vigourous winds which smelt so strongly and which were so vital for the Chazon Ish's health. There he spent his first few days in solitude, with no publicity interrupting his contemplations on this wonderland. Here, by the sea, he drafted his plan of swift escalation towards self-perfection in the coming years. There he sat, poised in the very same position as in Kossova, Constantine, Stoibtz and Vilna. Bent over a large Vilna-printed Talmud, he exerted his refreshed resources in study

and, when he tired from this supreme concentration, he leaned his chin on the table and paused a while, conjuring up a brilliant picture, vividly coloured, of his versatile spiritual aspirations and projects.

A New Existence

We have already mentioned the Chazon Ish's singlemindedness in his approach to his new situation and, however much we try to probe this characteristic, it is virtually impossible to fathom. The intensity of his ardour to perform his new task in the Holy Land properly and precisely was unprecedented. He schemed a comprehensive study of the subject of Trumot and Maasrot, and thereby led the new generation of immigrants and inhabitants through this complex part of Law.

Soon after his arrival in Bnei Brak, he wrote a card to Rabbi Moshe Olivitzki of Petach Tikvah, to send him wine for the Sabbath. Shortly after this card, he sent another one stating :

"I have heard that these grapes may not be eaten for the suspicion of 'orlah', since they are transplanted within the first three years to other places. Please write if this is still the case."

So for the Chazon Ish they procured grapes which were one hundred percent valid for taking the tithes and he was deeply contented. He was careful over the tiniest detail of the law concerning this new command and, when he realised its complexities, he decided to make a research on the subject to elucidate it to the public and to educate them to observe this law and to enjoy it.

Bnei Brak

The first person to suggest Bnei Brak as a suitable place of residence for the Chazon Ish was Rabbi Matityahu Shzigel of the Novardak Yeshivah Bet Joseph. This seemed reasonable to the Chazon Ish and he went forthwith to reconnoitre the area, stipulating in advance that he would not accept any position offered him, but that he was going to make his living from his books called "Chazon Ish".

His arrival in Bnei Brak was characteristic of his own nature and, just as he did everything quietly and unobtrusively, he met his future destination likewise. He and his wife set out on a hot summer day from Tel Aviv to Bnei Brak, the Orthodox settlement amongst the sands, which lay between Petach Tikvah and Tel Aviv. Not finding his acquaintance, Rabbi Shzigel, he was led by a young man, Rabbi Shragga-Feivel Steinberg (who later became one of his closest pupils), to Mount Shalom in order to sit in the garden of a rest-home there, and to enjoy a cool breeze on that hot and dusty day. While viewing the landscape from this strategic point, he sealed the decision in his heart — this was to be his home!

He returned to Tel Aviv, packed his belongings and went to live in a two-roomed aparment in Tiberias Street, derelict, but including a Mikveh, which was so important to the Chazon Ish. The first thing he did was to change the mezuzah for a new one written according to the ruling of the "Bet Joseph". This he did without asking permission, as allowed by the law. Thus he commenced his new life.

In the mornings be prayed in the Grand Synagogue, quite



The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Zalman Yankelevitch

a distance from his home, to which he made his way wearily through deep sand. The best part of the day he spent in his humble abode, as he was wont to do in Lithuania, sitting and learning with the door open, never being disturbed by the bustle in the joint corridor. Despite these unsatisfactory conditions, he enjoyed his stay in this settlement from the first moment.

After a short while he moved to another flat which was cheaper to rent, situated on Mount Rokach. When he climbed the steep path home one day, he said to his disciple, Rabbi Simon Yuzuk, as he stopped a moment to catch his breath, "Do you know what the difference is between climbing a steep hill and walking a plane ?"

His disciple remained silent and the Master answered his own question, "There is actually no difference, only a tiny bit of patience..."

"I Am Not A Man Of Words"

As time went on, he found it inconvenient to pray in the Grand Synagogue for various reasons, and he began to pray by himself at home. He preferred to take his time over his prayers, and wanted to say "Shma" at the crack of dawn. Only on Mondays and Thursdays did he go to hear Torah recitations in the Synagogue. On Sabbath he would stand on the "bimah" with a "Derech Hachaim Siddur" in his hand and listen intently to every word as though he was hearing it for the first time in his life. Then he would leave hastily and no-one knew when he came or left. On his way out, little children would call after him, "There goes the Tzaddik

who doesn't wear Tfillin", and he would smile with pleasure not even reprimanding them, and continue on his way home.

His friend, Rabbi M. Shzigel, asked him to deliver some halacha lectures to his students. When his brother-in-law, Rabbi Kanieffski, arrived from Lithuania, he was immediately appointed as a lecturer in the Bet Joseph Yeshiva, so the Chazon Ish stopped at once.

The next winter, on 5th Adar, 1934, this Yeshiva celebrated the unveiling of the corner-stone of a new building, which was to be erected on the Rokach Mount. Many eminent figures attended this ceremony, among them the famous Rav Kook, Israel's Chief Rabbi. When he delivered his peech, the Chazon Ish rose to his feet.

When the affair came to an end, Rav Kook went to visit the Chazon Ish in his apartment. The latter invited him to sit down at the table and the two sat next to one another and were silent. After quite some time, Rav Kook began to enter into a Halachic discourse, and those who had come with him, argued heatedly on the subject, but the Chazon Ish sand and was silent. Rav Kook addressed him, "I know the Chazon Ish from his books, but now I came to acquiant myself verbally, and to hear some words of wisdom." The Chazon Ish's reply was short and to the point, "I am not a man of words !"

There was no derogatory insinuation in that remark, but an innocent and sincere declaration of his incapacity of airing his ideas in public. He was verbally paralyzed when people surrounded him, and even saying "Grace after Meals" aloud was an ordeal for him. He used to say, "The Chofetz



The Chazon Ish with Rabbi Y. Sarna

Chaim said that all the limbs of a person except for his mouth, are lazy. I am even lazy with that!"

On another occasion he confessed to Rabbi Yitzchak Gershenkorn, this interesting fact about his silent character. "Ever since I was small, I got used to working out a subject well in my mind and then immediately wrote it down. Thus I never have time to say it verbally. Before I come to the right conclusion, I don't consider it worthwhile to say anything. Once I work it out properly, it goes straight on paper."

As the visit drew to a close, Rav Kook started another Halachic discourse, this time bringing up the controversial problem of "Linotype" print, which involves a likelihood of erasing G-d's name when used for a different text. He went into a lengthy discussion on the subject... Suddenly the Chazon Ish came out of his retreat, and said somewhat em-



Rabbi Issar Zalman Meltzer with Rabbi B. Z. Yadler (The Maggid of Jerusalem)

barassed: "Have you ever seen a linotype? I think that the letters are back to front, so where is the problem of erasing G-d's name?"

As he accompanied Rav Kook to the taxi, which awaited him outside, he said, "You'll excuse me that I can't reciprocate the visit, as I shall not be coming to Jerusalem." Rav Kook replied to this, "Leave out a visit to me, but don't you want to see the Wailing Wall?" The answer was swift and concise, "I am waiting for the day when I shall see all four walls!"

The Chazon Ish never explained the reason for his not visiting Jerusalem, but one anecdote, which a neighbour of

his, Reb Zalman Yankelowitz, recalls, reveals a distinct policy in this strange behaviour. The Chazon Ish told this story in reply to the question of why he refrained from going to Jerusalem :

As you know the Chofetz Chaim spared no efforts to be active in any Jewish communal problems. One day a delegation from the neighbouring town, Eishisok, came to him with a plea to exert his influence on the town concerning the neglect of the Mikvaot. For many months it appeared as though he had forgotten the affair. Suddenly, one morning, he summoned a carriage and without saying a word to anyone, he set off on an unknown journey. Three days later he came back to Radin. What was behind this mysterious journey ?

This was the answer, "I hadn't forgotten this urgent mission, but I was in a dilemma. The Rabbi of Eishisok is a 'Mizrachi'. If I go to his town, I must visit him out of politeness, which I am loathe to do as I object to honouring such a Rabbi. On the other hand, if I do not see him, I would virtually be putting him to shame in public, so I chose to refrain from going at all, knowing the danger of the mikvaot at stake. As I was leaving the morning prayers at the synagogue, I heard, by chance, that the Rabbi had gone on vacation, so, without even eating breakfast, I took the opportunity to go there without jeopardising any principles." The Chazon Ish did not comment any further, but his listener understood the parable very well.

He once said, "People think that I don't go to Jerusalem because I would be obliged to visit Rabbi so-an-so. If it were because of that alone, I could disguise myself and go straight

to the Wailing Wall. The only reason is that . . ." Here he stopped and no-one ever knew the real reason !

In conversation one day, someone quite innocently came to the conclusion that the Rabbis of the Diaspora, who were opposed to settling in Israel, had been wrong in their policy. This remark ignited the Chazon Ish's anger, and he replied curtly, "Your words are full of heresy. Know that when our teachers prohibit settling, it is Divine Law, just as when they affirm our coming to the Holy Land." On another occasion, he said that "immigration to the Holy Land was like a thermometer in the hands of the Rabbis. They adjusted their decisions according to the situation."

Although he rejected the secular attitude of the pioneers in the Holy Land, he was not deterred by their presence, and made it his task to sow the seeds of holiness and truth in the soil of this coveted land.

To irrigate the ground and plant seeds of Torah, was his aspiration and motto ever since he set foot on holy soil, and from then on his life-pattern changed.

He chose Bnei Brak as his headquarters, and, so thorough was his quest, and so genuine his intentions, that he immediately identified its location with the Tanachic one in the Tribal allocations. "Bnei Brak by the Yarkon waters, on the border of Jaffa was in the portion of Dan, which was north-west of Judah, and it was on the west side of the land near the sea."

He controlled this little town, which, in time, grew to be the number one Torah centre in Israel. It has distinguished itself by its Yeshivot, and has put up an incom-

parable banner of Torah learning, which it still flying high today.

His Choice of Bnei Brak

The Chazon Ish was once asked why he chose to settle in Bnei Brak in preference to Jerusalem. He answered "Jerusalem is full of pious and learned people whereas the rest of the land is a wilderness... I wanted to plant some saplings of Torah... therefore I went to Bnei Brak... If I fail then I shall go to Gehinom with all its inhabitants."

With this declaration, the Chazon Ish expressed his genuine aspirations which lay behind his coming to the Holy Land. He had come to do something active about circulating and stimulating Torah. But he was not specifically rigid about Bnei Brak alone and once said to some religious people from Kfar Ata: "I haven't bound myself in wedlock with Bnei Brak; you can prepare a plot of land for me in Kfar Ata because it wouldn't be surprising if one of these days I come to you."

It was this pioneering spirit towards strengthening Torah which motivated the Chazon Ish's opinions on various issues. Someone who lived in a very irreligious area came before the Chazon Ish and asked him if he should leave. The latter replied "I should be sorry for your Rabbi losing a valuable congregant." Only when he learned that this man had a large family with little children who were still young and impressionable did he agree to his coming to Bnei Brak, for his spiritual well being.

Bnei Brak began to be an impressive Torah capital and the narrow dusty lane which led to the Chazon Ish's home

overlooking the large plane that eventually reached the Mediterranean sea, thronged with bent black-coated sages incessantly treading the beaten path to their revered guide, the Chazon Ish. The modestly furnished room, the old iron bed, musty books and manuscripts, leaning on the shabby walls, all these were the simplicity framing the brilliant centre of attraction, to whom hundreds came seeking comfort, talmudical solutions or advice of any sort.

Some years later his aged and saintly mother Reshe Leah joined him and lived in a neighbouring apartment on Mt. Rokeach. They met often and the Chazon Ish honoured her with great respect. Every morning she came to pray "Shacharit" in an adjoining room of the synagogue and the Chazon Ish himself would bring her a wooden stand on which to put her prayer book which had a Yiddish translation. But his wife would not allow him to carry it all the way for fear it might be too heavy for him and took it to her mother-in-law herself. He would also bring her some coins in order to give the beggars who came to ask for charity.

The Chazon Ish was weak and frail and received his guests while leaning on his bed, which was his characteristic pose when learning. But should his mother appear at the door, then he would jump from bed in youthful agility, help her to sit on a comfortable chair and ask how she was. When she left he accompanied her back to her flat.

The Command of Settling in the Holy Land

The Chazon Ish loved the Holy Land and longed to see the Chosen People born to observe the command of settling

the land. An ardent hope to revive the Jewish population in its natural surroundings pounded in his heart and through his inspiration much of this hope materialised.

But side by side with the emotional contact he felt towards the Holy Land, he saw its halachic significance. His view was finalised by the assumption of the law that Israeli soil must not be sold to a Gentile. This means that G-d wanted the Holy land to be inhabited by Jews and not by idolators, and the land of Israel exists even in our exile.

The Halachic conclusion is that because Abraham the Patriarch received the land as a gift, therefore the land belongs to the Jews forever. Even after the Jews were exiled and heathens bought the land, nevertheless it is still considered as belonging to the Jews. Although the land has been divided among the tribes and everyone has his share, nevertheless any individual can purchase land, due to the fact that it belongs to the whole people and in the Messianic future it will again be shared out as before.

When the war broke out between the Jews and the Arabs someone living near the front asked the Chazon Ish if it was necessary for him to move further from the battle scenes. His answer was this: "Just think what would happen if the whole population would do this, the border would then move further into the centre of the land and our settlement would shrink to nothing.

The Chazon Ish very much encouraged people from the diaspora to come and settle in the country. He would say, "Israel is acquired by alot of suffering and patience." He once said to an American tourist who was dubious about

settling in the country, "You are looking for ways of how to leave the country (one may not leave Israel according to the law only under certain conditions) and we are looking for means to come !"

Then a young Yeshiva Bachur from abroad asked whether one must keep two days Yom Tov if one has the intention of returning abroad. He answered :

"Is that an intention ! What Jew could intend to leave Israel !" Even during the turbulent times of religious clashes between the state and the Orthodox Jews, on issues such as new immigrants being taken to secular Kibbutzim and religious girls to the army, the Chazon Ish remained adamant that the command still was valid.

The Secret Visit to Jerusalem

Although the Chazon Ish restricted his visits to Jerusalem, there were some rare occasions that he spent some days there. In the year 1940, he attended his nephew's wedding in Givat Shaul. By the end of Shabbat, the rumour of his arrival had spread, and a current of admirers began to flow to this district in Jerusalem. Taxi ranks and bus services had to give additional vehicles and time in order to overcome the surge of people on their way to Givat Shaul. People of all kinds came — some curious, others in anticipation of a Bracha, and those who just came to give reverence to the Torah knowledge of a great Jew.

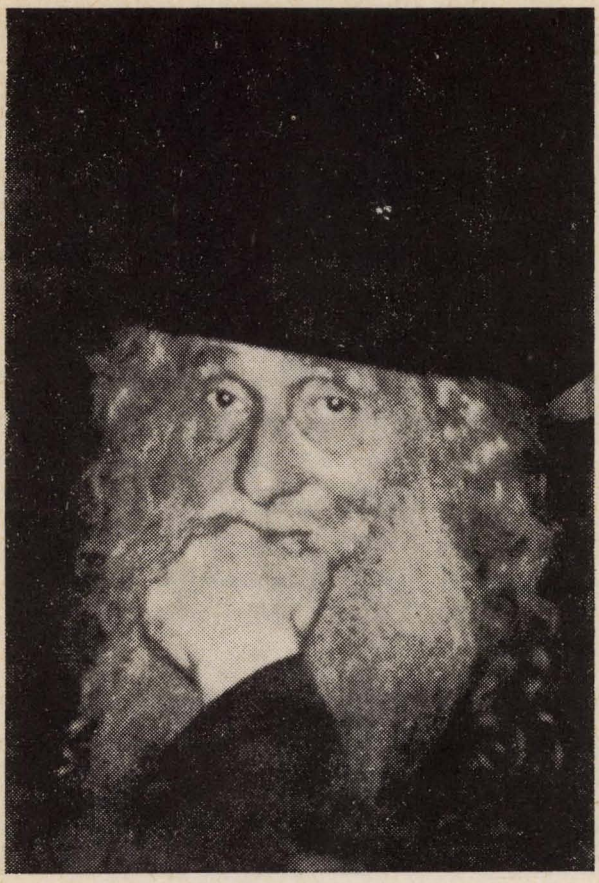
When the Rabbi of Mea Shearim, Rabbi Joseph Gershon Horowitz, told the Chazon Ish that, despite his ailing health, he was not prepared to miss this chance, the Chazon Ish replied wittily but humbly, "Nu, your reward will indeed be

a great one, for the proverb says, 'If a person intended to do a good deed and was prevented from doing so, the Torah considers it as though he had performed it'..."

On Sunday morning, he went out to the Wailing Wall. As we saw, upon his arrival in the Holy Land, the Chazon Ish never permitted his sentiments to overcome him and, although he had turbulent emotions, he elevated them at those very moments in performing the Halacha — before leaving home he took off his Tzitzit, and wrapped himself in his Tallit. (The tzitzit may need tearing upon seeing the ruins of the Holy City, whereas the Tallit is not considered a garment). He entered the Old City via the Jaffa Gate and immediately cut a tear in his garments (symbolizing mourning). Then he recited the verse in Isiah, "Zion has become a wilderness, and Jerusalem desolate."

Then he approached the Wall... Great excitement and feeling clearly showed itself in each step towards those giant stones, ending in a feverish weeping like that of a small child. His was a forceful and yet slight figure that was strikingly silhouetted against the Wall of his dreams, as though an intrinsic part of its massive structure. There he identified himself with his people, its history and his Maker, in the shadow of the ancient stones from which the Shechina has never departed.

After having prayed for everything possible, he toured the City and paid a particular visit to an old synagogue called Beth El. This was where the Kabbalist Rabbi, Shalom Sharabi, prayed many generations. Then he went down to the cellar where a company of Kabbalists used to go for isolation, many of them being among the greatest of Jewish



Rabbi Yisrael Alter the Present Rebbe of Gur

leaders. The Chazon Ish was particularly excited by the unique experience, as though he could hear their secret codes in the echoes of the hollow cavities and grasp the meanings of their mysticism.

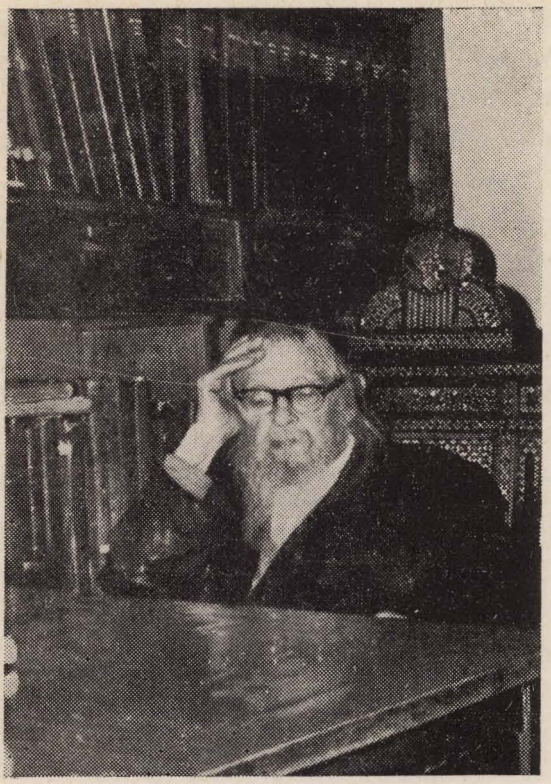
After that, he visited the Yeshivot — one in the district of Mea Shearim called "Torah Veyiro" and the Chevron Yeshiva. Then he called on the Gaon, Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer, whom he very much admired. Reb Isser Zalman was highly impressed by the Chazon Ish and was taken aback, especially by his flawless erudition in the treatise on "Sanctifying the Month" which includes intricate mathematical calculations. Someone once told Reb Isser Zalman that he was going to Bnei Brak, so he answered, "I envy you that you will be able to spend time near him, for in the next world, no-one will be able to approach him!"

When asked if one could recite the blessing of a genius over the Chazon Ish, Rabbi Melzer replied, "Of course."

A Sad Occasion

His second visit to Jerusalem, on the 19th Cheshvan, 1940, was to attend the funeral of his mother. He remained in his taxi, depressed and melancholy, and did not join the crowd on the march behind the body. Only when they arrived at the Mount of Olives, did he leave the taxi. Immediately after the burial, he returned home to Bnei Brak. Among those who came to comfort him in his mourning was the son of the Admor of Gur, Rabbi Israel Alter. They spent a long time speaking about the famous lineage of the family of the Chazon Ish.

The third occasion of his historic visits to Jerusalem



Rabbi Dov Weidenfeld, Rabbi of Tchibin

was again a sad one — he came to pay homage to Reb Moishe Bloi, the renowned Agudist leader, who had tragically passed away on board a ship on the way to Europe. He could not ignore the devoted manner in which Reb Moishe had procured the 'certificate' for his entry into Israel. In deep gratitude, he paced behind the coffin, together with the Rav of Ponevezh, Rabbi Kahanneman, in this way paying his respects to a great personality. He had even intended going to Lod to receive the coffin, but was prevented from doing so. He went by taxi to Jerusalem, and, when they arrived at Ramleh, they noticed some Arab hooligans starting to provoke them. When a shower of stones hailed down on their vehicle, the Chazon Ish hurried to open the door of the taxi and approached the Arabs. Surprisingly his slight contours and bent physique did not hide his dynamic inner force, and the hooligans turned tail and ran in fear.

That afternoon, the massed gathering prayed "mincha" in the Shaare Zedek Hospital. It was a magnificent scene to see the Eastern Wall adorned with so many saintly faces, great Gaonim and Chassidim, each praying in his own nuance, like a glorious mosaic of the People of Israel.

The Gaon of Tshibin

The Chazon Ish's first encounter with the Tshibiner Rov was at this funeral, where they both beheld each other without any verbal communication at all. After his return to Bnei Brak, he enquired after that aristocratic and saintly person and, when he learned who it was, he asked to be shown his "sepher" "Dovev Meyeshorim". Then he began



The Chazon Ish with the Rabbi of Ponevezh

to explore the book and even based some of his Halachic conclusions on this book.

The story goes that Erev Pesach, the Chazon Ish would sell all his sephorim, as there was the likelihood of there being some "chometz" in them. Only one sepher was thoroughly examined and then sufficed for the seven holy days. One year he asked for the sepher "Etz Chaim" by Reb Chaim Vital and, after he had discovered the Tshibiner Rov's book, asked for that to be examined for Pesach as well. When the Tshibiner Rov was told about this flattering fact, he replied modestly, "From this we have a proof that all year round he doesn't even look at it!"

Chapter IX

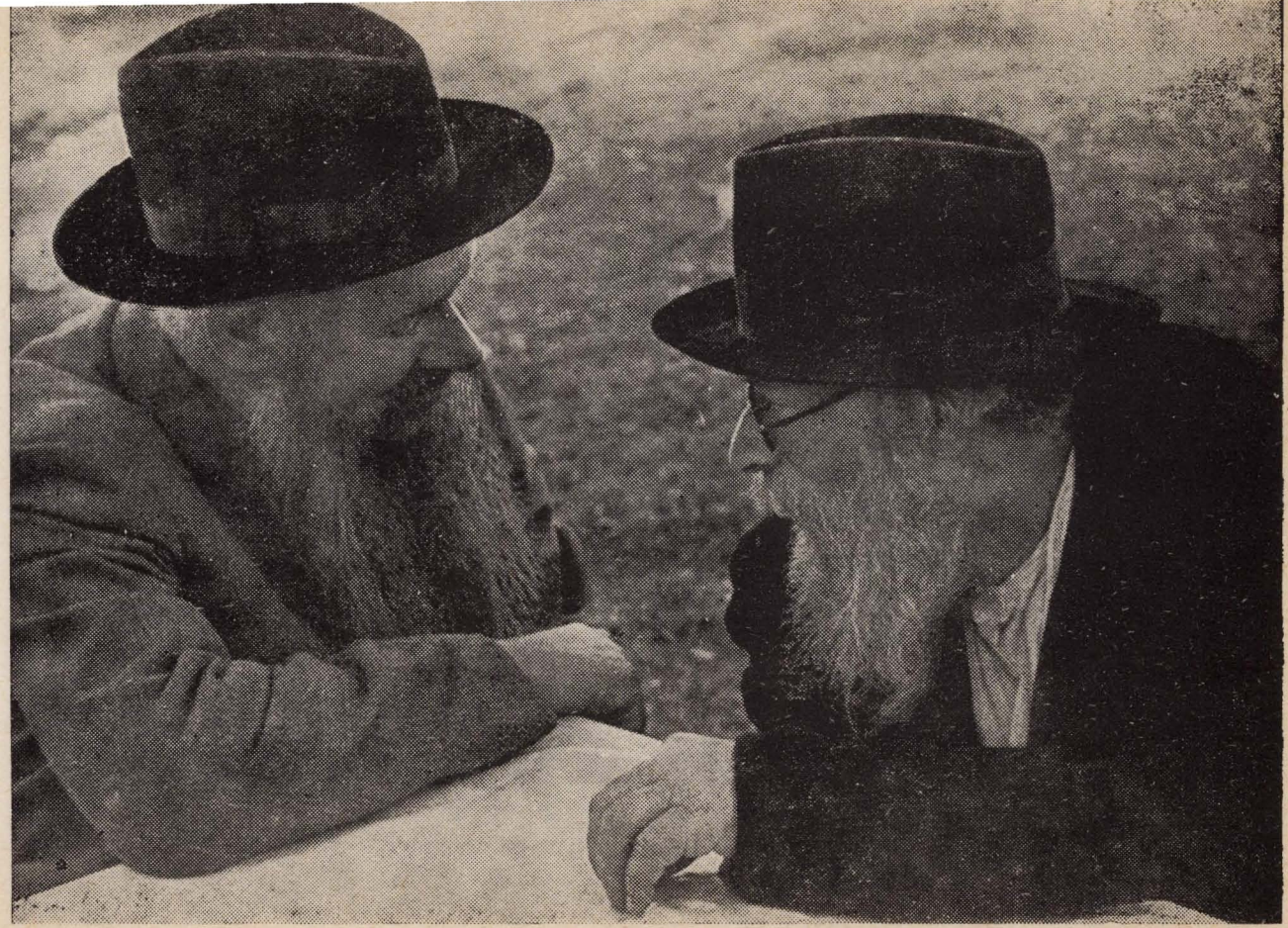
FROM VILNA TO BNEI BRAK

Rosh Hashanah in Bnei Brak

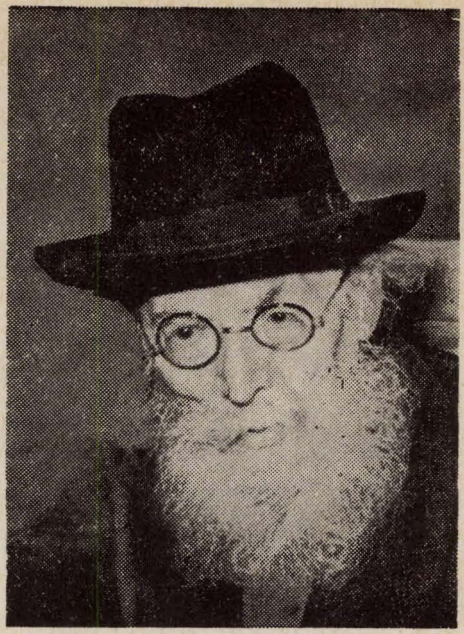
The first Day of Judgement in the Holy Land, the Chazon Ish spent in the Novardok Yeshiva, Bet Joseph. The day on which everything is awesome and new, was permeated with an added novelty and elation — the presence of the newcomer from Vilna. It was not like every year, for the inspiration of this saintly personality intensified the special connotation of the day.

After Shacharit the principal of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Shzigel, approached the Chazon Ish, and asked him to address the congregation on the subject of Repentence, but he refused on the pretext that he was not fit for the task. After constant entreaties, he agreed, on the condition that he would only say one Mishna and that, not in the synagogue but in an adjoining room.

In seconds the room was filled to capacity, and the Chazon Ish, who was an extremely shy person by nature, literally blushed at the sight of such masses. A silence fell on the crowd, and the speaker began to recite a well-known Mishna from Masechet Avot.



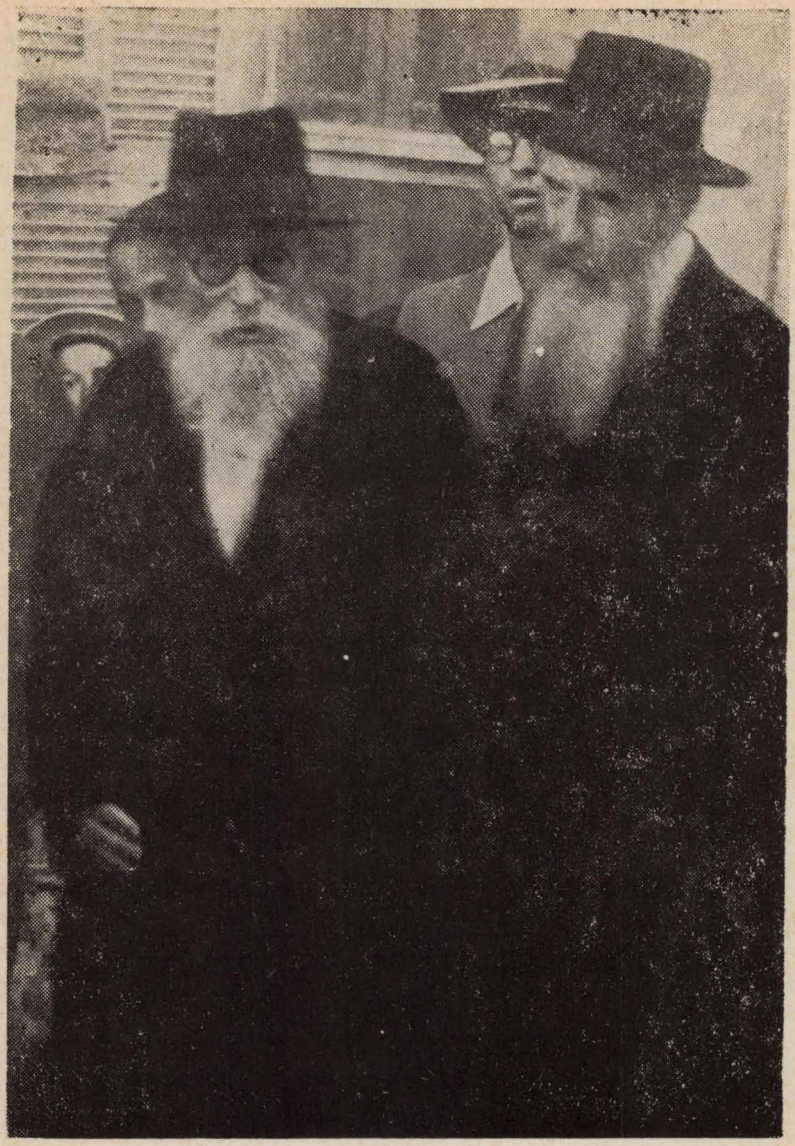
The Chazon Ish with Reb Yitzchak Gershenkorn



The Chazon Ish in Bnei Brak

"Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma said, 'I was once on my way when I met someone who greeted me and whom I greeted back. He asked, 'Where do you come from ?' and I replied, 'From a large town where many scholars live.' He answered, "Rabbi, consent to live with us in our town, and I shall give you thousands upon thousands of golden Dinars, precious stones and jewels.' I answered, 'Even if you give me all the gold, silver and jewels in the world, **I would only dwell in the place of Torah'.**"

He repeated these last words over and over, without elucidating nor analysing them, yet he succeeded in con-



The Chazon Ish accompanied by Rabbi Landau, the Rabbi of Bnei Brak



The Chazon Ish attending the Bar Mitzvah of Rabbi Landau's Son

vincing his audience that this policy was the irrefutable one. It was obvious to all that he presented his central wish to his Maker with those choice words. It was clear that all he asked for was that he would indeed materialise his ambition and create Bnei Brak, the sandy desolation, into an oasis of Torah.

A Turreted Wall

No-one ever knew why, but from the day that the Chazon Ish arrived in Bnei Brak, his life's ambition was to preserve it, and to stamp his personal seal on the new settlement. He was no longer the silent and passive Vilna inhabitant, but now a valiant soldier on the attack. He vigilantly blocked every sign of a crack in the spiritual wall around Bnei Brak to guard it from inhaling the treacherous winds blowing

from without. Then he set about building a religious fortress within it. He formed Yeshivot and Torah Institutions of all kinds to counteract the forceful elements which then existed in the country.

Problems on Farms

Milking of the cows caused a serious controversy, when it had to be done on Shabbat. There were three concessions which made provision for milking on Shabbat, if necessary. One was milking onto a food, but, of course, this was not practical and the farmers had no benefit at all from that. The other two alternatives were having a gentile do the job or milking onto the ground, thereby losing the milk. This was a very great provocation for them for in those days it was dangerous to employ an Arab and on many farms they did not heed the law, and saved the profits. When the Chazon Ish heard about one case, he called the culprit and tried, in a very amicable way, to persuade him to observe the Shabbat. The man rejected his arguments, and claimed that he was not able to lose any income by this. The Chazon Ish offered to pay him the loss he would incur on Shabbat and, even after this proposition, the man insisted on not pouring away the milk. This deeply grieved the Chazon Ish, and he wrote a famous proclamation to the people, with his own signature.

"For the Sabbath"

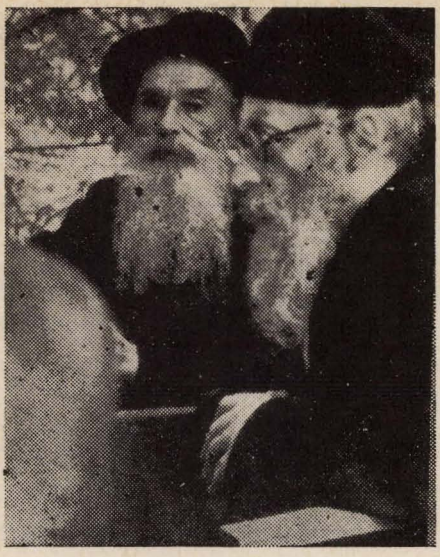
"If my soul is turbulent within me, I shall tell the reason and I shall thus be relieved. Out town, which rises high as a shining example among the towns of the new settlement, has been called "Jerusalem" for it preserves the flag of To-

rah, a fortification for religious Jewry. We must guard the Sabbath, which is the holy soul of the people and not let violators profane it. Suddenly we have weakened, and we are witnesses of the milking of cows on the Sabbath, not by strangers, neither irreligious Jews, but by our own brothers, our flesh and blood in our midst, people with frontlets on their eyes, fringes on their garments and scrolls on their doorposts. These are people who believe wholeheartedly that their lives and possessions belong to the Lord alone. Man cannot earn more than is allotted him by the Lord, even if he works more. Profit from milking on Sabbath in order to save the loss, is like trying to put out the fire by pouring paraffin on it.

"Those who sing the beautiful Sabbath songs, 'Who preserve the Sabbath according to the law from profaning it,' 'Moses was glad with the gift in his possession' — these very people profane statutes by doing an act which is forbidden by the Torah. As we have been clearly commanded, 'You shall not do any work,' 'On the seventh day you shall rest.'

"But Israel is not a widow. There are strong and courageous offspring of Abraham, the Patriarch, who are also provoked by this very problem, and yet, act according to the Law. Happy are they and proud are we who have such people among us, who are righteous and good. They are the ones who bring honour to our town, and who strengthen us to go on working.

"Once there are farmers who do not profit from milking on the Sabbath, then those who sin, are even more blame-



The Chazon Ish with Reb Zelig Shapira



The Chazon Ish Travelling with Reb Zelig

worthy for they do not learn nor take any heed. The poor oblige the poor and the rich oblige the rich.

"Even those who milk on the Sabbath for profit, do not do it out of rebellion and unfaithfulness, but are trapped by their evil inclinations, for their souls beg us to save them from this sin and from the evil which puts a snare at their feet. We must put force on them for, in fact, their inner soul wishes to be saved.

"I want to call the community's attention to abolish any stain which might exist in Bnei Brak concerning this item, for no-one would believe that in this holy town exist people who milk on Sabbath.

"Now go forth to your work, you zealous ones. Be strong, courageous and valiant. Do not rest until you have retrieved the Sabbath and the honour of this town as it was before.

"We bless all those who heed the Law on this matter, that their loss be returned and that they should be blessed with health and happiness according to their good and holy deeds.

Waiting for the final salvation of Israel,

Ish.

Sabbath Eve Ekev Bnei Brak."

The Chazon Ish viewed this issue with paramount severity, since it contained a clear transgression of "mid'Oraita". He corresponded with his colleague, Reb Chaim Ozer in Vilna, and they came to the conclusion that in such a case it was permitted to milk on the Sabbath only on the condition that the milk went to waste. He collaborated with the new Rabbi of Bnei Brak, Rabbi Landau, and together they exerted their utmost influence to persuade the religious farmers to ob-



The Rebbe of Satmar, Rabbi Y. Teitlebaum

serve the Sabbath with "Mesirut Nefesh", by not considering their personal gain but by succumbing to the Divine Heavenly Sovereignty.

When the Chazon Ish saw that his enterprise had borne fruit, that the dairy-men were indeed able to obey, he circulated another proclamation:

"OUR BROTHERS IN BNEI BRAK"

"We feel obliged to inform you that you deserve to be considered an unprecedented and loyal army serving faithfully its King. In observance of the Torah and its commandments you have prepared your lives to establish the fortress of Judaism and the tower of its Holy Religion. Happy are you who have merited this. Be blessed and continue to be active in the cause of the Torah.

"Now we turn to you in the quest of preserving your determination on the matter of milking on the Sabbath during these hard days: do not spoil your achievement by profaning the Holy Sabbath.

"We hereby specify the laws concerning the milking problem on the Sabbath:

a. Milking on Sabbath is a prohibition, stemming directly from the Torah and he who milks in large quantities, magnifies the prohibition with every drop.

b. It is permitted to milk on a piece of bread or onto cooked food. This is only valid if he does not strain the milk later into another vessel, but eats the foodstuff together with the milk. He who parts the milk from the food, and then drinks it separately like any other milk, is trans-



Dr. Yitzchak Breuer

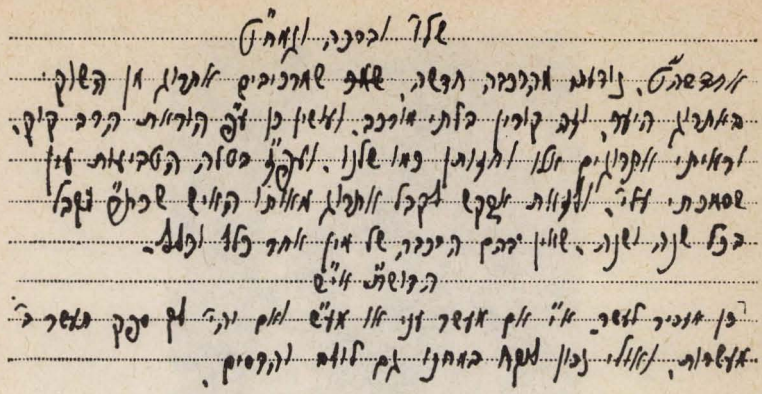
gressing the Law "Mideoraita" just as if he had milked in the normal way.

c. The most acceptable way of milking on the Sabbath, is by wasting it on the ground. This is an upright and straightforward solution and is liable for reward. Be courageous and arm yourselves in guarding the Sabbath, and think of the reward of the "mitzvah" against its material loss.

"We bless all those who obey, that their needs be fulfilled and their granaries enriched."

Arab or Heretic

In the course of this problem, an alternative arose which might have alleviated the gravity of it. They had the choice of taking Arab workers, whose work on Sabbath was



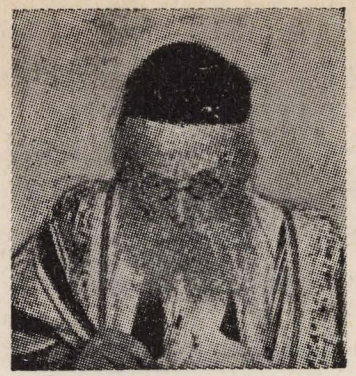
A letter of the Chazon Ish requesting an etrog

halachically permitted. The people had questions concerning this, and one person asked the Chazon Ish whether an Arab was preferable to a heretic for week-day work ?

The Chazon Ish's opinion on this controversy was very independently opposed to other Rabbis' conclusions, and he voiced his views unhesitatingly. His opinion was such that even a heretic, by the mere fact of his being a Jew, was preferable to an Arab even at the risk of financial loss :

"A town is obliged to make provision for every father to support his children. If a man had no means, then the town must provide means from charity, even in a case where the Beth Din knows for sure that those children will grow up irreligious. Helping someone earn his living stems from the Laws of Charity, and we have never found any source for there being preferences of one over another."

The Chazon Ish's approach towards irreligious people was unusually tolerant, claiming that they were like children who had been taken captive among gentiles. Since we do



The Chazon Ish examining an Etrog

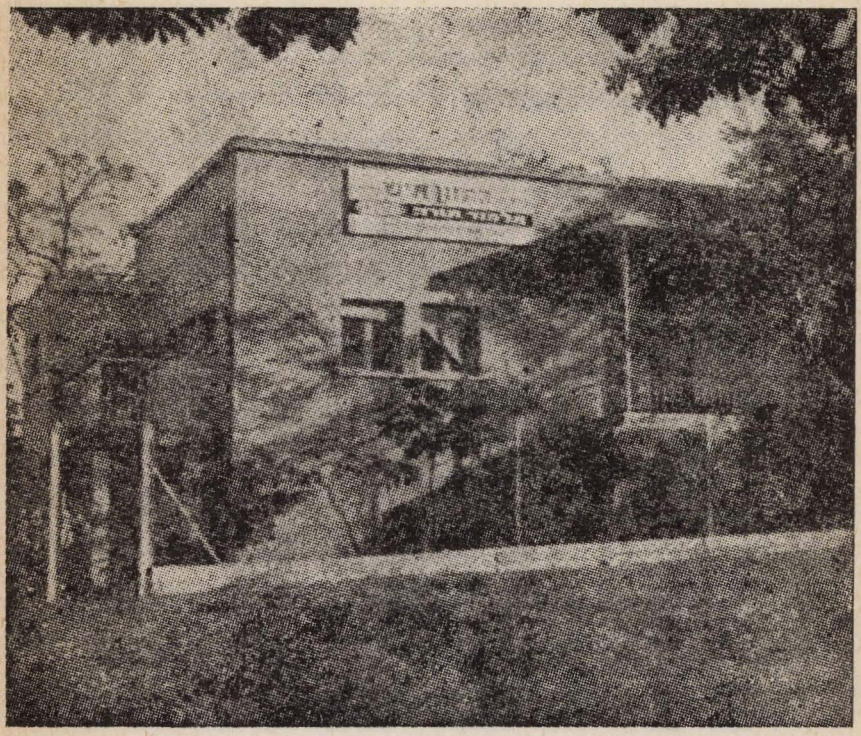
not know how to rebuke them, a good relationship to them is prior to any attempt of rebuke and, therefore, we are obliged to love them as fellow Jews.

His interpretation of the precept "eject the heretic and do not elevate him" was entirely original. He claimed that there was no such phenomenon as a true heretic nowadays, since only he-who witnesses the cogent Hand of Providence and miracles of the Almighty and defies them, can indeed be termed a heretic. In the times of yore, when people had a clear vision of Divine Supervision, only then, in such circumstances could a person be classified a heretic when he denied G-d's immortal and eternal existence. In such a time, the importance of rejecting the wicked was in order to save the world, since, if the heretics corrupted their generation, then it would be liable for punishment and with it the whole world.

In our times, when belief is enstranged from the masses of the people, there is no moral justification for rejecting the evil-doers for it would appear to them corrupt and violent and, therefore, achieve the opposite of what the legislation was meant to perform. Since our motive is to remedy something by rejecting the wicked, the law is not valid if this aim is not reached. We must try to captivate them by means of affection and to make every possible attempt to bring them close to ourselves.

The Problem of Electricity on Sabbath

There was no limit to the Chazon Ish's zealousness over the honour of the Sabbath, and he spared no effort in imposing his ardour on the people. His sorrow at the laxity of the observance of the Sabbath was intensified when he perceived that even in his own Bnei Brak community, there existed elements of "Chilul Shabbat". The actual crux of the matter was that the Electric Company employed scores of Jewish workers on the Sabbath itself, and the Chazon Ish was singleminded in his opinion on the use of this electricity. He proclaimed that it was forbidden to use electricity on Sabbath and that its production was equated to the original "extinguishing" and "kindling" mentioned in the Torah. His outspoken version of the Law was based on a dual assumption. Even if it were permitted hypothetically to use electricity on Sabbath, yet by the mere fact of using another's work on Sabbath, one is causing "Chilul Hashem". A person must feel grief at seeing G-d's Law violated and no Jew is allowed, for whatever reason, to work on Sabbath. This particular issue was one of the only precepts in which he



The Chazon Ish's home on Chazon Ish Street (now a school for children)

differed from his contemporaries, yet many of his admirers and students followed him loyally, and refrained from lighting and heating on the Sabbath. It is a strangely attractive sight one beholds in the streets of Bnei Brak on a Friday evening — oil-lamps flicker and the long shadows dance on the walls. Its light is somewhat uncanny, as though a symbol of the Chazon Ish still living in their midst. Despite the unpleasantness and discomfort involved, the people of Bnei Brak to this day indentify themselves with the soul of their great teacher, and light oil-lamps.

A poem was once written in honour of the Chazon Ish on this matter :

"Who says you left us no offspring
That barrenness was your plight ?
You left us blessings, fruits of joy
And plantations of delight.
No home uses electric light
On a dark Friday night
For you still live with us together
"And your memory is here forever.
The Torah which you lit as a fire
Will never expire !"

The Chazon Ish compared violating this principle to a person sitting and learning the Gemara, while a fellow Jew was sitting and lighting one match after another to illuminate the room; or to someone who enjoys a favour from his mother's murderer ! Those technicians, working on the electricity mains on the Sabbath, were murdering it, he claimed, and we, who use the light, are like people who see a town on fire, and light our cigarettes from its flames !

A letter of the Chazon Ish denouncing heretical literature used in religious schools

In consequence to this opinion, he applied certain precautionary measures to avoid any "Marit Ayin." On Kol Nidrei night, Reb Shmariahu Greiniman asked what he should do about praying in a synagogue which was only lit by electricity, to which the Chazon Ish replied that he should better pray at home. What happened if a child accidentally switched on the light ? He would black out all the windows so no-one should see.

Guardians of the Sabbath

He was a valiant general in the cause of the honour of the Sabbath, and fought relentlessly for its preservation. He delegated his men to stand on guard and they worked like lions, throwing their bodies on the roads to prevent vehicles from entering the town. Any form of zeal was pleasing to the Chazon Ish when it concerned the hallowing of the Sabbath. One Shabbat, the Chazon Ish was saying the "Shmone Esrei" prayer, when some of his disciples entered and told him bitterly of a certain Jew who would on no

account close his factory on Sabbath, and who was at that moment still working with his employees. When he heard that, the Chazon Ish, clad in his tallit, in the middle of prayer, went with his supporters to demonstrate outside the factory. They did not move away until the work ceased.

Water Mains

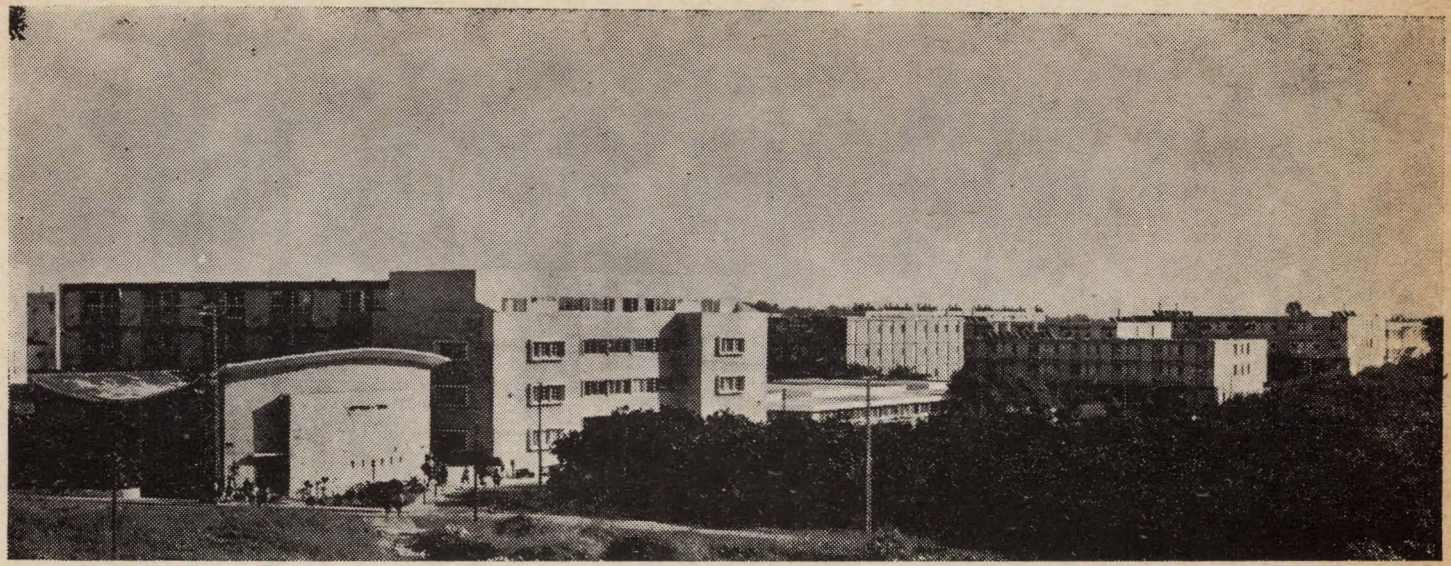
A similar problem arose concerning the usage of water on the Sabbath, since it was drawn and distributed by means of an electrical machine. The Chazon Ish did all in his power to obtain a local main, and he eventually succeeded through the pioneering efforts of Rabbi Itche Gershenkorn, who borrowed exhorbitant sums to put the Chazon Ish's wish into practice

With all his ardour and urgency for this issue, the Chazon Ish made it quite clear that his motives were not derived from the prohibitions of the Sabbath Laws, but on the grounds of "Chilul Hashem". Since he had finalised his verdict on the subject for these reasons, he, therefore, did not make any public announcement on the matter.

A Fine Difference

Despite the Chazon Ish's controversial and stringent views on the observance of the Sabbath, he was lenient when it came to a matter of "pikuah nefesh". He permitted travelling on the Sabbath for the purpose of saving another Jew's life.

Once, his brother, Rabbi Meir Kerelitz, asked him if he may send someone to Europe, on the Sabath to help fugitive Jews to flee and land safely in Israel. to which the

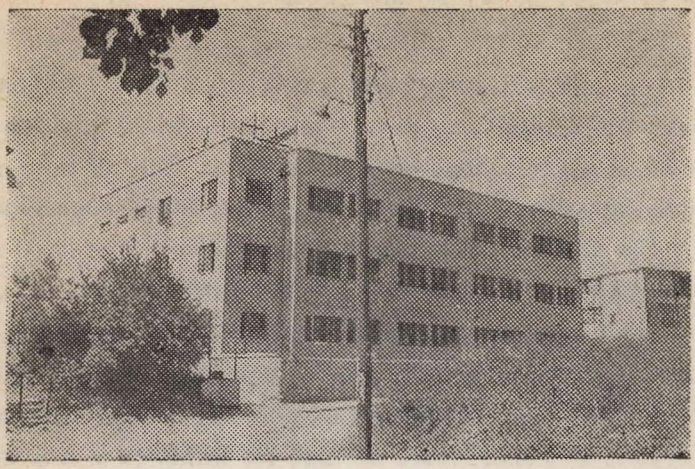


"Or Hachayim" Girl's College

Chazon Ish agreed. When another such messenger came to ask the same question, the Chazon Ish forbade the journey on the Sabbath. The man was stunned, but the Chazon Ish explained his standpoint: "I have once permitted travelling on the Sabbath, but if I repeat the allowance, the Jewish Agency authorities will automatically make all the other flights on the Sabbath, instead of organising their departures on other days. I would thereby be participating in 'annulling the Sabbath', which is diferent from "profaning" it. For the purpose of saving someone's life, one is permitted to profane the Sabbath, but on no account may one annul it!"

By a Miracle to Survival

It was one of those late nights, towards morning, soon after his arrival in Bnei Brak, that he crossed his balcony clad in a white sheet as he was often wont to do. It was his custom to prepare himself spiritually for the daily "Blessings over the Torah", by meditating in solitude, at a time when no-one and nothing could disturb him. That particular night, the official watchman patrolled the area where the Chazon Ish lived and, noticing a white silhouette, thought it to be an Arab terrorist. He called a number of times, but the Chazon Ish was so engrossed in his meditation, that he did not reply. Those were treacherous times, when terrorism threatened Jewish lives and, when suspicion of any night movement arose, one shot. And so the watchman loaded his gun and ... shot. G-d needed this soul to survive in order to build a town and to uphold the world and, therefore, the bullet whizzed by within inches of his head into the wall of his balcony.



Bet Yaakov Seminary in Bnei Brak

Caves and Wildernesses

The Rabbi of Satmar known for his anti-zionist views once asked the Chazon Ish :

"The Rambam stipulates that one must flee from a district of evildoers, and even settle in caves or wildernesses, rather than be influenced by them." The Chazon Ish replied :

"The Yeshivot are the caves and wildernesses of our generation !"

This was his very destiny — to build Yeshivot, and to instil Torah into the wilderness of the new colony. In accordance with his interpretation of the Rambam, he formed "wildernesses" for refuge. Last but not least, he made himself a wilderness — free and attainable for all those who needed him.

His Influence on the Local Council

The Chazon Ish had set himself a target and was to reach his aim with iron determination. Bnei Brak, a hitherto sand-covered desert was to be transformed into a living town similar to those he had seen in Lithuania with all their religious facets preserved. Therefore he set about supervising even the most technical aspects of this town to succeed in providing a stable basis for its future development.

He persuaded estate agents and builders not to sell apartments to irreligious people, thereby moulding this small town into a Torah nucleus with no dangerously secular elements to destroy it. Furthermore through his influence a law was passed that no building higher than four storeys may be built so that lifts causing problems of violation of the Sabbath would not be installed. And that every apartment must have a balcony with an open ceiling to be able to serve as a Sukka. The Chazon Ish pulled strings behind the scenes to avoid Bnei Brak's expansion beyond the "Black Highroad" in order to preserve the uniquely-religious atmosphere of the town. Similarly when the town's municipality received the suggestion of joining "Givat Shmuel" with its irreligious majority in the area of Bar Ilan University, they turned the proposition down; the Chazon Ish was the force which instigated this.When the irreligious organisations planned opening a cinema in the centre of Bnei Brak, the Chazon Ish did all in his power to abolish the scheme. Yet when it came to the question of accepting irreligious representatives to the municipal coalition he acted with diplomacy. He did not refuse their acceptance; on the contrary, he believed that if they joined the coalition, by being a minority they would

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נכבש בכי טוב ובברכה כערכו ביקרא דאוריתא.

ישיבת הנהלתנו תסול דנה ע"ד מצב בית ההנוך שלנו בפ"ת והיתה לנו לסעורר הסלפת כהדר"ב שליט"א בענין זה, והנה יראה כ"ם שליט"א בהעתקת הסכתב הרצו"ם את אשר הוחלט בנידון דירן, אולם נרשה לנו להוסיף כמה סלים כדי להסביר את הסצב אצלנו.

הקופה של בית יעקב אין לה אלא הכנסה חדשית קבועה הסתחלקת כרגיל בכל חורש לסניפים בכל סקסותיהם בארץ. סכום סובכל זה אינו משאיר אצלנו ריזרבות כספיות להשתמש בהם לצרכים סיוחדים, וסכיון שכך הרי כל סכום היוצא סן הקופה שלא לפי הסדר הרגיל הוא גורע סחשבונם של הסניפים השונים, ספני סעם פשוט זה קשה לנו סאד סאד להתענות לבקשת סניף פלוני או אלסוני להסציא לו סכום סיוחד, אפילו אם אנו סכירים בחוסר הסצב של הסניף הסבקש, כי סו"ם הר"ז בבחינת חב לאחרים. אסנם הרשינו לעצמו עד עתה לעזור לסניף זה או אחר בצורה של הלואה ע"ח תקציבנו לסניף זה בכתה הדשים לספרע; דבר זה לא הי' משנה את מצב הקופה אלא במידה לא גדולה. ברוך זו נתבנו כלפי פתח תקוה (בסשך השנה הנוכחית סדרנו להם מעסים אחדות הלואות שנכנו סן התקציבים החדשיים או מסקורות הכנסה אחרים שועברו לנו (כגון עזרת הסמשלה) ועדין יש לפ"ת עתה חוב אצלנו בסך 11.500 לא"י. בהתחשב עם בקשת כהדר"ב שליט"א לא להגיש עתה עזרה בצורת הלואה, וסחון ההכרח שקופתנו עתה בכלל ריקה, הקצבנו לפ"ת עתה תסיכה קבועה אחת בסך של עשר לא"י, וזהו הסכום הסספיק לי שיכולנו להוציא בשעה זו סן הקופה הריקה. והי"ת ירחיב את גבולנו ויחרש עלינו את השנה הבאה בהרוחה כללית לעם ישראל.

חותסים בכל הכבוד

[signature]

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A Letter of a Bet Yaakov Institution

not actively attack the religious amendments. And so it was. How wise and far-sighted the Chazon Ish's tactics proved to be.

His Fight for Religious Votes

The law concerning voting ever since the British Mandate ruled in the land was that only a permanent resident who paid tax was permitted to vote. The Chazon Ish in his burning ambition to turn Bnei Brak into a totally religious settlement, took an active role in finding means to multiply the religious votes. First he ordered that a letter in elegant style, written in English, be sent to the Mayor, asking whether Yeshiva Bachurim could be considered permanent residents, only that they refrained from paying tax through lack of means. This request was refused, and then the Chazon Ish collaborated with his colleague Reb Yaakov Halpern who financed a scheme whereby money was given every Yeshiva Bachur in order to pay for three month tax.

A young local came before the Chazon Ish and apologised for not having sufficient means to defray the cost of the tax, when the Chazon Ish retorted: "You must sell your Teffilin, and from the profit buy yourself the right to vote."

"Teffilin ? !" queried the young man and the Chazon Ish continued : "You will undoubtedly continue to lay Teffilin even if you have none of your own by borrowing from others, but if you lose voting rights there is no way of retrieving the loss."

To someone else he advised to go to vote before praying the Shacharit prayer, in case he might forget later. "I am sure you will not forget to pray," he said. And to an acquaint-

ance he wrote, "I believe that many laws of Torah and observance of Judaism are dependent upon religious votes."

His words had impressed his town and on the morning of polling day, crowds of religious Jews were seen at the voting stands, among them the renowned Gaon of Ponivezh, Rabbi Joseph Kahanemann, who repeatedly exclaimed "I am going to keep a command of the Torah, that of listening to the Chazon Ish."

The Approach of a Gaon

It was in one of the most severe struggles in the history of Bnei Brak over the power in the municipal council that the Chazon Ish conceded for certain reasons to a **special concession** to make a coalition with the Mizrachi movement, in that particular case only. Nevertheless he ordered the Agudist leaders to ask the advice of the Gaon of Tshibin in Jerusalem, and other Gedolim, on this subject.

The Rav of Tshibin hearing that there may be a coalition with Mizrachi refused to give his written consent.

Then the Chazon Ish asked Rabbi F. Steinberg, then a teacher in Tiferet Zion, to go to the Tshibiner Rav. He did not want the mission to be directly connected with himself but relied on his messenger to carry out the matter discreetly. When the Tshibiner Rav again refused his written consent even after Rabbi Steinberg had tried to convince him of the importance, only this time, of making a coalition, Rabbi Steinberg queried :

"I have a difficult question on the Chazon Ish I would like to ask the Gaon to explain me."

The Rav of Tshibin smiled.

"You can ask the Chazon Ish himself."

"I shall ask it here because the question only now came to my mind. I am a Maggid Shiur in a Yeshiva. By my coming here I caused loss of Torah learning to many people; not only that, but I came on a mission for "voting" and the Chazon Ish knew I was going. Why did he not reproach me for doing so ? And furthermore why did he bless me that I may succeed. Also, where is my success ?"

The Tshibiner Rav smiled and answered.

"If I lived in Bnei Brak I would also have voted for the coalition because it is vital for that particular time and place and especially if the Chazon Ish supports the scheme. But I cannot do this from afar from Jerusalem. If I write now that I support it, then twenty years later people might think that the Tshibiner Rav gave permission, for no real reason, to vote for Mizrachi.

"Your second question, 'What the blessing for success means ?' Your greatest success in your mission is that you have not caused me to fail in something unworthy."

When Rabbi Steinberg reported this dialogue to the Chazon Ish he exclaimed:

"I have always known that he is great but now even more so."

Chapter X

THE FATHER OF THE YESHIVOT

The erection of a new Yeshiva was the most precious accomplishment in the eyes of the Chazon Ish, and especially when he saw this take place in the Holy Land. He used to say, "A Yeshiva which falls into worthy hands leading it, is transformed into a fortress and a wall of fire in the cause of Torah and Mitzvah in Israel." He was zealously concerned about the development of these institutions and often expressed himself passionately, both in writing and orally, in the hope of inspiring his followers and followers-to-be. In fact, it could be said that no one else had ever succeeded to such an extent in intensifying, re-inforcing, glorifying and reviving the priceless ideals of the Yeshiva — a world where Torah exulted. He instigated a revolution in attitude, and gradually people began to understand the meaning and joy of the verse from Psalms, "One thing I ask for is to sit in the House of G-d all the days of my life." Parents were soon to comprehend that the innate desire to endow their children with the best of everything could express itself best by their enabling them to study Torah.

"The erection of a Yeshiva institution must always be executed with Mesirat Nefesh," was his principle and he al-

ways chose only those in whom unadulterated idealism burned. Three Yeshivot in Bnei Brak were founded directly by the Chazon Ish. Theywere Tiferet Zion, Bet Joseph on Mt. Rokach and Ponevezh. The latter Yeshiva, whose principal and director, the illustrious Gaon, Rabbi Joseph Kahaneman, was aided in its inception by the Chazon Ish; in fact the transaction contract for purchase of the site was signed in the Chazon Ish's home.

From Babylon to the Holy Land

A deep-seated joy sprang up in his heart upon seeing new Yeshivot developing in the Holy Land. After the terrible Holocaust had annihilated every Torah institution in Lithuania, Russia, Poland and Hungary, the Chazon Ish saw in their return to the Holy Land, arrival at a final destination after short rests in temporary stations. In this spirit he wrote a profound letter to Rabbi Zvi Markovitz, the son-in-law of the great Gaon Rabbi Shabtai Yogel (Rosh Yeshiva of Slonim in Lithuania and later in Ramat Gan). This letter was written shortly before his journey to America to raise funds on behalf of the Slonim Yeshiva. Here is a summary of the letter:

"Your work of participation in building Batei Midrash which were in Babylon and transferring them to the Holy Land, is of supreme importance. For hundreds of years have the Babylonian Yeshivot wandered from place to place and tried to pave their way to the Holy Land from where they were exiled. They were destroyed in Babylon and their ruins were rebuilt in strange lands, Spain, France and Germany. Their names have changed but not their souls.



The "Ponevezh Yeshiva" Bne Brak



The Chazon Ish in the "Chevron Yeshiva" with Rabbi Y. Sarne

This is the Torah which was exiled ten exiles and which built a home in Babylon, and when exiled from Babylon moved to Western countries. This is the Torah which now returns from desolate plains back to the coveted Land, given to our forefathers as an everlasting possession. This land was its habitation when he came from Sinai appearing in beams of light in the midst of Israel. It is pleasing to us to call the Yeshiva by the name 'Slonim', which name reminds us of our great efforts and courage in preserving the Covenant of the Torah in exile after which we have brought it back to its final rest and heritage. Its glory and shining beauty has not been dulled even in the gloom of exile. Muster your strength and courage and pitch the Slonim Yeshiva in the Judean mountains to magnify and glorify the Torah. Arm yourselves (by prayer) and fight for the cause of Torah in the Slonim Yeshiva in Ramat Gan.

I wish you great success in your journey to America; that you succeed in bringing people there to participate in this great Mitzva by giving help to build the Yeshiva.

Wed. 11th Tevet 1949 Bnei Brak

Ish.

The synagogues and Batei Midrash of Babylon will in the future be brought to the Holy Land. Regards to your father-in-law the great Gaon, a teacher in the Holy Yeshiva of Slonim. May he be strengthened to glorify the Torah in Israel."

Ponevezh

Ponevezh is the largest and most magnificent Yeshiva today in the Holy Land, and its fame glorifies it throughout the Jewish world. Although thousands of graduates carry the banner of their coveted institution throughout the Diaspora, yet few know of the subtle influence which the Chazon Ish had on its spiritual progress. Not only did he lend a helping hand to the Rabbi of Ponevezh in his zealous endeavours to make ends meet, but he also took an active interest in the actual spiritual development of the establishment although he never held any formal post there. He was always familiar with the current topics of study, knew well the teachers and lecturers, and their manner of interpretation and, last but not least, he encouraged the students to come to him, treating them like a compassionate father.

In an indirect and subtle manner, he constituted a basic influence upon the Yeshiva, which produced the prototype Torah student, serving as an example to every Torah establishment in the country. The Ponevezh Rabbi used to say,



The "Sharon" Yeshiva

"The Chazon Ish was the very essence of the Yeshiva, the soul of it." He added, "In Lithuania, my teacher and revered master was the Chofetz Chaim. I took his counsel on every matter as from the Shulchan Aruch, but from the day I came to the Holy Land, I accepted the same authority from the Chazon Ish and asked his advice on every problem." Rabbi Kahaneman of Ponevezh declared that even after the death of the Chazon Ish he would, in times of difficult decisions, think to himself, "What would the Chazon Ish say about this ? Surely still today he is giving us his advice !"

The Rabbi of Ponevezh, considered one of the Chazon Ish's chief admirers, defined his personality and brilliance: "One can occasionally object to certain Halachic conclusions of the Chazon Ish. We are allowed to do this, as one may even differ in opinion to earlier sages such as Rabbi Akiva Eger — both to their halachic opinions and to their ideas on Jewish thought. When, however, it comes to practical advice, even on secular subjects, I feel utterly inadequate before this most clever of men."

On the day of the cornerstone laying of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, the frail figure of the Chazon Ish could be seen climbing the steep mount in order to be present at the modest ceremony, which took place under a depressing canopy of terrible war memories and reminiscences of the holocaust. A small crowd gathered, the ceremony was opened with an emotional recitation of Psalms and as the Ponevezh Gaon set the stone, his eyes blurred with tears and his voice wept pathetically, moving the onlookers deeply. The ceremony was over and as the throng moved to leave, the Chazon Ish remarked, "If one embarks on an enterprise with brandy and delicacies, there is a chance one will succeed and a chance one might lose; but he who sows with tears, has a guarantee that through the purity of his tears he will surely succeed."

In the 1948 war, when the students were afraid to stay in the building of the Yeshiva, so high and obvious a target for shelling, they studied in the "Berman Orchard", on the outskirts of the town. At night the Chazon Ish would take students to sleep in his home and was prepared to put them up in any available space, whether in the corridors or even in the Bet Hamedrash, and put them at their ease for the night on benches and mattresses.

Each Simchat Torah, the Chazon Ish made it his habit to visit the Yeshiva and to participate in the dancing together with the students. Contrary to his usually withdrawn nature, he would permit himself to be lifted on a chair among the dancing throng, radiating the ecstasy he always manifested on the day of the rejoicing over the Torah. This day, the only one in the year when the Chazon Ish actually

appeared in the Yeshiva, was sufficient to leave a deep mark in the hearts of the boys, who could never forget the wondrous expression on his noble face.

Indeed Ponevezh was honoured with the firm imprint which the Chazon Ish had put on it.

Slabodka

At the Chazon Ish's advice, Rabbi Isaac Sher, spiritual mentor of the famed Slabodka Yeshivah in Lithuania decided to rekindle the extinguished flame of Slabodka on Mt. Rokach in Bnei Brak.

The Rabbi of Ponevezh told this interesting anecdote. "One day, while I was eating breakfast, the Chazon Ish appeared at the door. I wanted to interrupt my meal in order to hear what the Chazon Ish had to say, but he threatened that if I did so, he would leave there and then. After breakfast, I learned that Rabbi Isaac Sher had come to the Chazon Ish for advice where he should rebuild Slabodka. When the latter suggested Bnei Brak, Rabbi Sher replied that this may cause competition to the new Ponevezh Yeshiva. The Chazon Ish, therefore, wanted to know what my opinion was, and I answered, 'I wish that **all** the Yeshivot would come to Bnei Brak to make it a centre of Torah.' At this the Chazon Ish smiled and said, 'I had already told the questioner what you would answer'."

Once a young Rosh Yeshiva, who wished to open a Yeshiva in Bnei Brak came to the Chazon Ish and expressed his fear that it might cause competition to existing Yeshivot. His reply was, "If someone wishes to open a similar shop to his neighbour's in an outlying district, it might cause un-

favourable competition, but if he does this in a shopping centre, then he is fulfilling the purpose of the area. The same with Yeshivot. Bnei Brak is designated to be a centre of Torah."

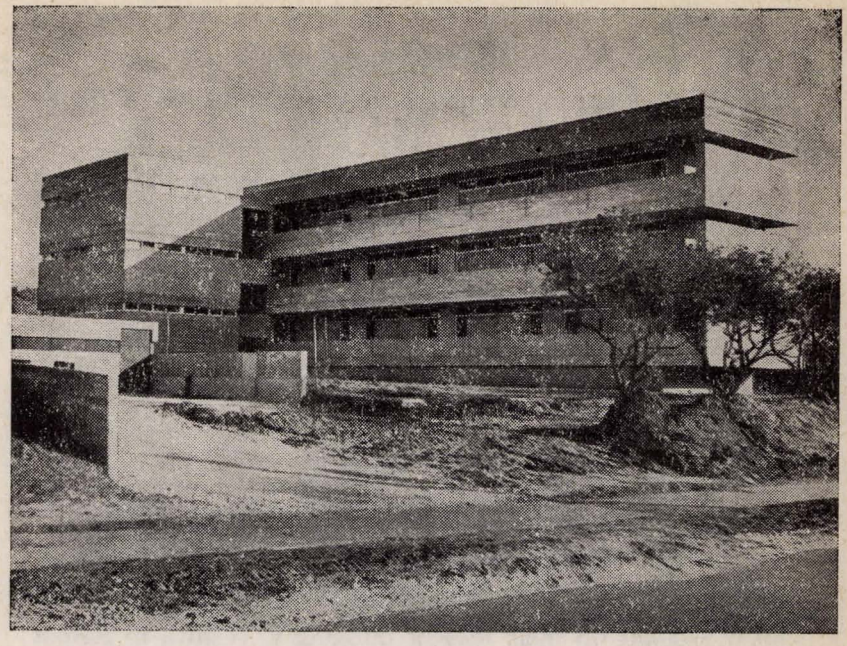
Not only Mitnagdim saw reason for taking the Chazon Ish's advice, but other streams of Jewish life in Bnei Brak too. Rabbi Chaim Meir Hager, the Admor of Viznitz, was in close contact with the Chazon Ish concerning his mission in erecting the Viznitz "town" and in its midst the Yeshiva. The Chazon Ish did not miss being present at its consecration ceremony.

Sharon Yeshiva

The Chazon Ish did not just give good advice to idealists asking his opinion, but emphasized his views by deeds. When Rabbi Benjamin Movshovitz and Rabbi Jacob Idelstein brought up their idea of building a Yeshiva in Ramat Hasharon (near Herzlia), he finalised their decision by handing them a donation of I.P. 25.—, and asked them to print receipt books from this money, in order to start an appeal to enable the Yeshiva to be founded.

This was only the beginning of his unflagging endeavours to maintain the Yeshiva. He would organise thousands of pounds to help the support of the Yeshiva, to erect a new building and to pay the staff. He would not rest nor give up in his ardent aim to see each Torah establishment grow. None of this activity was done for publicity or honour, but for one grand desire — to see G-d's Torah develop and flourish in every corner of the Holy Land.

The Chadera Yeshiva and Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in Kfar Saba, founded by Zeirei Agudat Israel, were also sup-



The Beer Yakov Yeshiva

ported by him. He encouraged the teachers and pupils with unflagging devotion as though it was of personal interest to him. Likewise, he dealt with the Lomze Yeshiva and Porat Yosseph Yeshiva in Jerusalem and would occasionally test the pupils in the Porat Yosseph Yeshiva in Rechovot. Only the northern corner of the country was neglected, so he hastened to erect a Yeshiva in Tiberias and recruited Rabbi Finkle, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, to help him cover half the budget as a regular donor.

Beer Yaakov Yeshiva

This Yeshiva was first directed by the Ezra Movement, but later passed into the hands of the renowned Rabbi Moshe

Shmuel Shapira as Rosh Yeshiva and Rabbi Volbe as spiritual director. One day Rabbi Volbe asked the Chazon Ish to encourage a better class of student to enter the Yeshiva for the purpose of raising its morale and spiritual status. The Chazon Ish replied, "Good boys are not in need of a Yeshiva, since a Yeshiva is like a hospital — if bad elements enter, one must fight so that they come out good."

This was a daring and individual opinion typical of the Chazon Ish never fearing to refute other ideas. Once a well-known sage suggested the establishment of a special Yeshiva for students of genius. His answer was curt. "One can never decide ahead if only "Brisk Rabbis" will emerge, since Rabbi Yitzhak Elchonon (later a brilliant sage) was never considered a genius!"

Similarly to the aforementioned Yeshivot, the Chazon Ish aided personally in any financial crisis and tried to recruit helping hands in their cause. There was a Karlin Chassid who lived in Beer Yaakov by the name of Reb Nathan Neta Holzman, who mustered every possible force and means to aid the growing needs of the Yeshiva. So great was his zeal to support it that he donated his own site to this institution and even gave part of the sum from which to build a hut, which for a long time served as a Bet Hamedrash. One day he met with the Chazon Ish, who blessed him with the warm blessing that he should live to see the building, which one day would crown his site. Fifteen years passed and Rabbi Holzman began to believe that as long as the old hut still stood, he would remain alive.

In 5724 (1964), the Wolfson Brothers from England began building an impressive edifice in place of the temporary

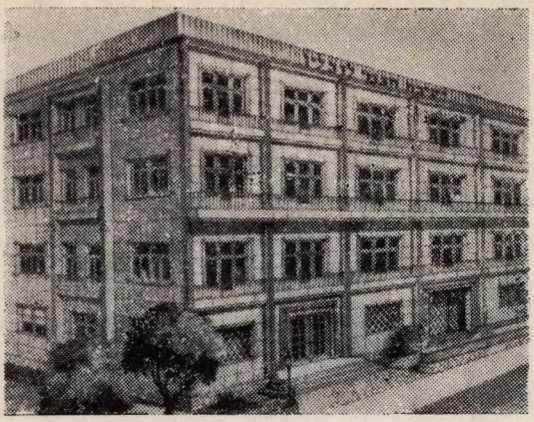
hut. The hall was already completed and the first prayer service took place on Rosh Hashannah 5725. Three days later, on Shabbat Shuvah Eve, Rabbi Holzman died.

Here is an anecdote which the Rosh Yeshiva of Beer Yaakov tellt. "It was on that fateful Friday, 14th Cheshvan, 5714 (1954), the day when the Chazon Ish left a deeply bereaved world behind him, that Rabbi Shapira visited him concerning matters of the Yeshiva. When he noticed that the Chazon Ish was fatigued, he suggested postponing their talks, but the Chazon Ish replied, "Some visits are tiring, others refresh me. This is one of the latter type."

Rabbi Vosner was one of the outstanding followers of Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin and today serves as a local Rabbi in Bnei Brak. He admired the Chazon Ish who strove personally to ordain him as Rabbi, and who gave him all the honours due to his post. Rabbi Vosner founded the Yeshiva "Chachmei Lublin" at the Chazon Ish's incessant instigation and with his direct financial help.

The extra-ordinary trait about the Chazon Ish was that he had no preference for any particular Torah institution and considered himself as belonging to them all. One day, a wealthy Jew turned to him for advice. He wanted to donate to the Chazon Ish's Yeshiva. The latter replied with a smile, "All the Yeshivot are mine."

Another story is related of a wealthy American Jew by the name of Abraham Meyers, who gave the Chazon Ish a sum of money, in support of "his" Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. The Chazon Ish asked him again as though he hadn't understood, "Pardon me, but which Yeshiva do you mean?" Whereupon he received the same answer, "I mean for the



The "Chachmei Lublin" Yeshiva, in Bne Brak

Chazon Ish's Yeshiva in Bnei Brak." With that he went on his way, and the Chazon Ish dispatched the money to Ponevezh, Slabodka, Chochmei Lublin, Vizhnitz, Novardok, Alexander. Kollel and Tiferet Zion with the relevant remark "Why ! they are all mine."

He showed fatherly concern over every event in connection with any Yeshiva, whether it was a communal or a private matter. He himself bothered over acquiring cement which was lacking, or adequate living quarters for the staff of any Yeshiva. In many of his letters we see obvious attention to sites, documents and transactions which were all equally close to his heart.

Last but not least he attended to personal educational problems as well and many are the occasions when the

Chazon Ish intervened between parents and children on behalf of their Yeshiva studies. There is one case of a boy whose parents objected to him continuing the single-minded Yeshiva curriculum and who put pressure on their son to qualify in other studies as well. The Chazon Ish wrote a very sharp reply to the boy to the effect that it was his staunch conviction and of other great leaders before, that simultaneous study of Torah with secular subjects, is inadvisable and liable to interfere with any hitherto spiritual progress. He suggested that a war be declared against any such idea and wished the lad success in fighting against this problem.

Alien Elements

When the Zeirei Agudas Israel Movement came with their proposition of founding a religious seminary for teachers in Herzlia, thus ensuring a reliable training for teachers in the "Chinuch Atzmai" schools, the Chazon Ish objected strongly. This meant foregoing plots of land which had already been donated by American Jews for this purpose. It meant abandoning large sums of money which were offered for this enterprise and only for that particular aim.

The Chazon Ish saw a threat to the original Yeshiva system, a fear of its ruin by the attraction of such a compromising institution. He feared that the notion of a seminary meant the inauguration of a new school of thought, and from a teachers' seminary would emerge a "Rabbi's Seminary", which would altogether eclipse the brilliance of the "Yeshiva".

The Young Aguda movement obeyed and retreated from their plan in Herzlia, although this meant paying a high

price. The Chazon Ish compensated them with his praise at their willingness to obey the authority of Torah and described their behaviour as "discipline fit for loyal soldiers."

Another similar case brought before him was the question of the Teachers' Seminary for men in Gateshead, North England. This seminary was scheduled for young men, who were not content with continuing only their Torah studies, but who planned to take matriculation and later a B.A. degree. At that time, Rabbi E. Dessler was the spiritual director of Ponevezh Yeshiva but, as he had spent a number of years in England, and had expounded views on Mussar to that town, its inhabitants still felt an instinctive bond with him and turned to his opinion on the matter. He, of course, wrote his objection to the project, but received a modified version of the original plan. It was to this effect: the pioneers of the project were prepared to dispense with the aforementioned curriculum but asked whether permission could be given to a small nucleus of students who had already reached a high standard in their secular training to qualify in their secular studies; whereas in the future, the establishment would be run on purely Torah lines and would not include university training.

On the second ammendment, Rabbi Dessler felt the need to ask the advice of the Chazon Ish. He put it this way:

"I do not wish to waste the time of the Chazon Ish on simple matters and therefore, refrained from asking him hitherto, but, as I am now in doubt, I have come for advice."

The reply was concise and to the point:

"To destroy even that which was begun, and which had been promised to these students (i.e. the degree)."

Rabbi Dessler continued :

"But this may cause financial losses and Chilul Ha-Shem."

The Chazon Ish retorted, "The organizers of this scheme can justify themselves on the fact that they were ordered to do so from Israel." Rabbi Dessler asked, "May I write this in the Chazon Ish's name ?" "Yes," was the answer, "write that I have ordered it !"

Yeshiva Problems

A number of questions cropped up in different parts of the world concerning controversies or problems in the realm of Yeshiva life. Of course, these queries were put before the Chazon Ish.

One example is of Rabbi Benjamin Pels (now Rabbi of Luzerne, Switzerland) who had previously directed a Yeshiva for Moroccan refugees. His query was whether he should continue with the Dinim Shiur according to the system of the Remo, as the Ashkenazi scholars ordained, or whether he must follow the Sephardi system according to Rabbi Joseph Karo.

The Chazon Ish replied that in his opinion, students follow the schooling of their teacher and since he had learned the system of the Remo, therefore, even though his students were Sephardim, if there was no choice it is permitted to teach according to the Remo.

Another problem concerned a London Yeshiva, that of Rabbi Moshe Schneider. His query was whether it was necessary to continue the special emergency prayers recited in times of danger. The Chazon Ish replied that "Avinu Mal-

keinu" might be omitted whereas Tehillim chapters should be continued.

The Qualities of a Rosh Yeshiva

While the Chazon Ish was in Bnei Brak, the first "Yeshiva Tichonit" i.e. a Yeshiva-cum-high school, was founded by a famous local Rabbi who had written books containing heretical ideas. The Chazon Ish was in every respect averse to this principal and even asked his followers to write sharp letters to the papers denouncing this new institution. His followers were perplexed by the Chazon Ish's dogmatic viewpoint, stressing that the staff in the Yeshiva were people of calibre and capable of teaching Torah satisfactorily. What then could be the danger if only the principal who had little contact with the students was a negative influence? The Chazon Ish claimed that however well the teachers taught, the students would never see the faults in their principal, which meant that the main obstacle remained.

Once, one of the great Lithuanian scholars immigrated with his family after narrowly escaping the horrors of the war. He was offered a post in one of these modern Yeshivot and served as a teacher, earning a good salary and holding an honourable post. His acquaintances began to gossip about this controversial situation and upon sensing the conflict, the Rabbi decided to ask the Chazon Ish's advice.

For a number of hours, the Chazon Ish explained his ideas on the subject and used every form of influence to convince him of his mistake. This was undoubtedly an extremely difficult decision to make as a whole family was dependent on it. The Rabbi heeded the Chazon Ish's sug-

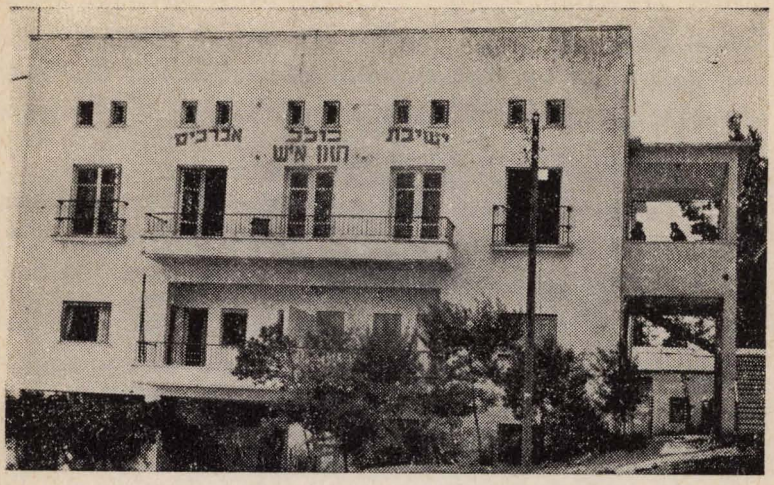
gestion and the next day notified the school of his resignation.

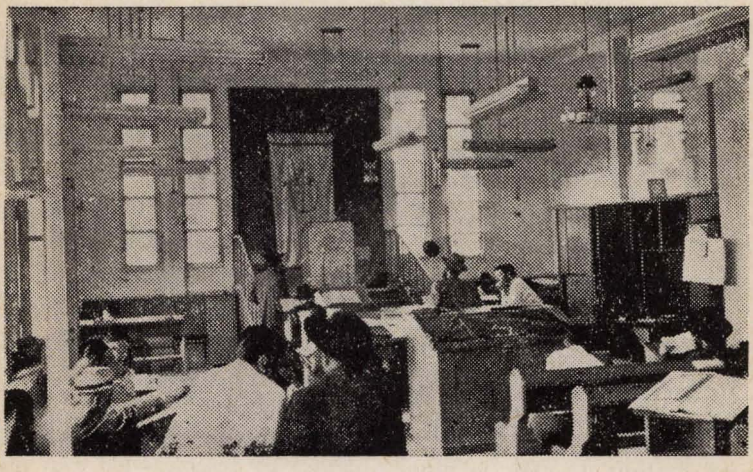
When this Rabbi once visited the Rabbi of Brisk, he received him enthusiastically and said, "Be glad that you have overcome this problem, and in return you will become a teacher in some famous Yeshiva." Today he is one of the greatest Torah exponents of the generation!

The Chazon Ish guided the atmosphere of Torah institutions by instilling into them certain fundamental ideas. He once said, "Inculcate into the hearts of the students the idea of 'personal Divine Providence'. Influence them that there is no such thing as chance in the world, that everything happens by Providence and therefore, one can pray for everything. In this way a person can succeeded in achieving any goal. The main thing is that they should know that the whole of the Torah is based on this little principle: 'In all your deeds, know Him'."

The Chazon Ish's assessment of a person's integrity and personality was motivated by unusual principles. For example, he once remarked about someone that, in his opinion, this man was a great person. "But his standards of learning are only mediocre," retorted his listener. The Chazon Ish gave this illuminating reply, "A person's greatness is not only measured by what people call 'standards of learning'. The most important criterion is a person's spiritual acquisitions. Some are great scholars and 'small people' while others are poor students but great people."

The Chazon Ish used to say, "Few are they who are really great Torah people in this generation — for they are only those who are prepared to tell the truth."





The "Kollel Chazon Ish" in Bnei Brak

Truth was the keyword for the Chazon Ish and nothing less sufficed. He claimed to be able to discern a person's Yirat Shamayim through his Halachic expositions. Offen when he was sent books on Halacha, he would place them on his shelves according to his opinion of their intrinsic importance and when asked how he could tell this from Halachic conclusions, he replied :

"Even if the actual conclusions are incorrect, one can sense if the aim of the author was to find the truth or only to dabble in intellectual problems."

He was not just content to exert his own influence and inspiration on the Torah world but spurred on other personalities to do the same. He begged Rabbi Eliahu Lopian, the famous graduate of the Kelm "Mussar House" of Reb Simcha Zissel, to continue actively in the framework of a Yeshiva, to give of his teachings and messages. Rabbi Lopian, because of weakness and old age, was hesitant, but the Chazon Ish assured him that the results would be rewarding and bountiful. He indeed served as one of the most outstanding Mashgichim in the Holy Land.

The Kollel

This is a word now understood throughout the world, though its message may not be so well comprehended. The Kollel idea in the Holy Land was inspired by the Chazon Ish, who saw in its realization a necessity for his particular generation. It had the dual purpose of training learned and gifted scholars who would in the future serve as the nation's Torah authorities and leaders by supplying them financial grants to enable them to continue their intensive

studies. Added to this, the Chazon Ish envisaged another vital aim, and that was to permit Yeshiva graduates to preserve their spiritual resources which they had painstakingly acquired during their studies in the Yeshiva. Danger lurked in the prospect of their leaving the confines of a Torah framework. Many young men, who went out in search of financial improvement, were drawn by the current trend to material acquisitions and soon abandoned and neglected their hard-earned spiritual values which were bartered for the cheap alternative of comfort.

The Kollel solution was a controversial and courageous step and after many attempts at forming a permanent institution, the "Kollel Chazon Ish" was formed.

With the introduction of this new establishment in Bnei Brak, which hitherto had not experienced the idea of a Kollel, the Chazon Ish saw the necessity to write a detailed letter, as follows :

"The study of Torah is different from secular studies which necessitate only a certain number of years in which to qualify for the desired vocation. Torah is only acquired if it is studied for unlimited time, and is toiled over for all one's life. Once Torah has enrooted itself into the heart of a young person, it will later intensify its impact and bear more and more results, developing and enriching that person till old age. Therefore, it is our belief that it was important for Yeshiva graduates to abandon their duty of earning a living and instead, continue their work at Torah studies and live Torah lives. It had always been the practice in days of yore that a nucleus of the Jewish population, the tribe of Levi, were isolated for the purpose of self-

perfection, holy tasks and sacred education. Rambam compares these young idealists of later times, those who "sit in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives" to the tribe of Levi, who previously were duty bound to fulfil this particular task.

The Yeshiva was the youth's conception of purity, sanctity and Holy study. It implanted a code of life which would be difficult to uproot and paved the way to spiritual ascent. Nevertheless, there was also the necessity of perpetuating this way after manhood and marriage. There was the need to provide peace of mind, tranquillity and spiritual isolation for the purpose of rearing the generation's guides, teachers and leaders. If the Jewish nation are in need of these, then it is understandable that they would see the necessity of facilitating their studies by helping to provide grants for them and their families in order that they may serve their people.

"The situation in the Holy Land is unfortunately such, that there is almost no recognition of this need. The concept of tradition and Orthodoxy is considered old-fashioned and therefore, the possibility of jobs in this field hardly exists. Therefore, in order that Torah and its teachings may flourish, and not be forgotten, it is necessary to maintain Kollel institutions."

The Idea Spreads

Who would have thought that this almost unheard of idea would ever take root, and turn into a mass life ambition ? Young men turned their steps to study Torah, in preference to financial improvement. All over the country

there now exist Kollel institutions, where young couples in pioneering spirit build their homes. The wives serve as staunch upholders of their husbands' ideals and provide the homes with income by teaching in the Bet Yaakov schools, thereby combining two holy tasks in one act.

This common ideal and new way of life has provided a unique and unprecedented atmosphere in the various settlements of the Holy Land. It is undoubtedly only due to the force of the Chazon Ish's personality that, today, Kollels have sprung up in town's far from religious centers such as Haifa, Ashdod and even Beer Sheva.

Chapter XI

TIFERET ZION YESHIVA

It was one of those oriental sunny days in 1938, when the Chazon Ish could be seen in the prefab. of Family Kaufman, resting on an iron bed, leaning his weak body forward on a walking stick. He was listening to a young man speaking bitterly yet determinedly. The young man, Rabbi Yaakov Shneidman, poured out his heart to the saintly scholar. "All my life I have wanted to dedicate my gifts to the dissemination of Torah in this country, but I am dubious whether one can find pupils here at all. Where are the children who wish to know the laws on impurity and purity ?"

The Chazon Ish was not well disposed towards pessimistic attitudes such as these and answered: "These words are only possible from weak believers for there is a clear promise in the Bible that 'Torah will not move away from your off-spring ever'." He persuaded Rabbi Shneidman to attack the problem from a positive angle, and to put the grievance right instead of just bemoaning it.

When Rabbi Shneidman offered his opinion, some time later, of the need to form a preparatory Yeshiva — the first of its kind in the town, the Chazon Ish's face lit up. He



The Directors of Tiferet Zion Yeshiva with Pupils and Teachers

began immediately to encourage him by planning the initial moves of gathering pupils, and by launching the Yeshiva in 1940, by announcing a solid promise of help in financial support of the institution.

The Chazon Ish did not make do with promises alone and handed to him on that occasion the first donation in support of the establishment. Then he asked Rabbi Yaakov Halpern to participate and he indeed agreed to maintain the needs of the Yeshiva for six successive months. The Chazon Ish also mobilized young men to give their full support to this campaign.

When Rabbi Shneidman came to inform him of its opening, there was no limit to his joy and he enquired about

every detail of its development, whether it was the syllabus of study or the choice of students. Day by day more benches were added to the Bet Hamedrash of the Yeshiva, and its progress was markedly noticeable.

The Hand Behind the Building

His efforts in procuring material support for the Yeshiva were untiring and enthusiastic. He mobilized some of his wealthy followers who, ignited by his fiery enthusiasm, applied their resources to the cause.

Rabbi Zelig Shapira was one of the pioneers of the Yeshiva, collecting funds and organizing much of its administration. The renowned architect, Rabbi Shmuel Tchortkov, and his wife, Rifka, were also among the friends of the Yeshiva, helping the students in a most fatherly way, thereby enabling many of its graduates to develop into famous scholars.

Already in the first year of its existence, the Chazon Ish voiced his opinion about erecting a building for the Yeshiva and forthwith collaborated with his right-hand man, Reb Yaakov Halpern, who donated the first sum needed for the foundation and the ground floor (which for many years was used as the students' dormitory). Rabbi Chizkiahu-Joseph Karelenstein also donated to the building of Tiferet Zion while Reb Yehuda Alexander Shtub from Jerusalem played a large role in the erection of the Yeshiva building.

"And They Were Sitting in Bnei Brak"

Here is an amusing anecdote which took place during the Chazon Ish's activity for Tiferet Zion. It was at that time that the Gaon, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, came to the Holy Land as a member of a Rabbinical delegation on behalf

of the "Agudat Israel" Party. The Chazon Ish and Reb Zalman had been close friends already in Europe and the joy on receiving Reb Zalman as a visitor in his own home in Bnei Brak was indescribable. They spoke for a long time and when the day grew to a close, the Chazon Ish entreated him to spend a Shabbat with him. "Although my home is small, and I have no room to accomodate you, I shall arrange for a place to sleep and you will at least dine at my table."

Reb Zalman promised and indeed agreed to come for a Shabbat. When he entered Bnei Brak, he noticed large posters put in the streets, "Reb Zalman Sorotzkin, Gaon of Lutzk, will deliver a sermon on Shabbat in the Great Synagogue." Reb Zalman understood immediately who had been responsible for this...

It was Friday night and everyone was sitting around the table. The Chazon Ish made conversation and innocently began to speak of a new building being erected in the town — the building of a Yeshiva, Tiferet Zion, which was the first Yeshiva Ketana in Bnei Brak. He related sadly that there were not sufficient funds to continue the completion of the building and that it was vital to arouse the Community to donate generously in order to finish the edifice. Then, with a smile, he added, "That was the reason for those posters you saw in the streets today."

"One doesn't refuse the wish of a great man," is how the saying goes and Reb Zalman adhered to the proverb. On the next morning, after Shacharit, Reb Zalman gave his sermon, which the Chazon Ish himself attended, standing next to him as a sign of full support. His sermon was most inspiring. He described his impressions on seeing

the streets of Bnei Brak called after the Tanaim, recalling the story in the Haggadah "Once they were sitting in Bnei Brak". Street names such as Rabbi Tarphon, Rabbi Akivah, etc., reminded him of those in the story, but it seemed as though these very names were being treated as in Sedom where the angels said, "We shall spend the night in the street." Is Bnei Brak going to leave their Tanaim, after whom the streets are called, in the very streets ? No ! no ! This cannot be ! Build a Yeshiva, make a dwelling place for Rabbi Tarphon and Rabbi Akiva, build a place where people will learn their Torah !"

Personal Supervision

The Chazon Ish gave his name to the Yeshiva and he himself wrote to various people that "Tiferet Zion" is under his personal auspices and would they support it. In one recommendation he wrote, "The Tiferet Zion Yeshiva in our town is famous and renowned throughout its surroundings for its quality, and something famous needs no proof."

The Chazon Ish felt personally responsible for the Yeshiva. Most of the money, whether from private sources or from public funds, was sent in his name. He forbade anyone to collect money in the Diaspora for this reason:

"Due to the fact that the Chazon Ish's name was printed on the letter-headings of the Yeshiva, people who did not know him might suspect him of earning from this money." The Chazon Ish acted similarly when he received money for charitable purposes from anyone he did not know, coming to him for a blessing or on behalf of someone ill. Fearing that the person might think that he took it for himself, he would say, "Please give the money to the Tiferet Zion Yeshiva."

A wealthy man, as he neared old age, wrote in his will that a certain building should be donated to the Tiferet Zion Yeshiva. Fearing that his wishes might not be heeded after his death, he asked the Chazon Ish if he should register the building.

The Chazon Ish advised him to leave it just in the will. He explained the reason for this advice afterwards, "I did not want to take away his feeling of ownership during his lifetime !"

As time went on, the material conditions of the Yeshiva deteriorated and came to a catastrophic crisis, to the extent that the Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Yaakov Shneidman, wished to resign. He put the situation before the Chazon Ish, who answered him with a parable.

"The Chofetz Chaim once sent Reb Shmuel Greineman to a cerain place in order to exhort the inhabitants to keep Shabbat Laws. As he stepped into the railway carriage, the door suddenly snapped shut and injured his ear, causing bleeding. The Chofetz Chaim said to him, concerning this, 'I envy you that you were injured in honour of Shabbat'."

Although this hint was enough, nevertheless the Chazon Ish set about encouraging the Rosh Yeshiva by procuring a large sum of money, which would relieve him of the terrible burden. It was a difficult task, but the Chazon Ish managed to raise the morale of the Roshei Yeshiva who suffered greatly from the poverty of the institution and who did their utmost not to show it.

An astounding anecdote was told by a former principal of the Yeshiva called Rabbi Avraham Horowitz, "I was sitting and learning in the Bet Hamedrash of the Chazon Ish, and

I had no source of income. Those were the times when food was sold in rations and only the vital necessities such as eggs, etc., were distributed according to ration cards. One day the Chazon Ish called me and offered me a job as principal of Tiferet Zion, with the words, 'There is not much money in the Yeshiva, only enough for a small salary, but what does one need money for today — only to buy extra food in the free market, when the rations don't suffice ? G-d will bless you with bounty from the rationed food, and you will have no need for more.' And this blessing indeed came true !"

The Traditional Examination

The experience of seeing the Chazon Ish at the end of every term, was one of the highlights in the Yeshiva atmosphere. They would listen alertly to the questions he put to them and they gave precise answers to please him.

He examined every class separately and listened intently to their answers, thus perceiving their standard and their spiritual state as well. He asked collective questions and noticed who answered hurriedly and who took time to think over his reply.

After the examination, they surrounded him excitedly and he smiled lovingly at them, pinching the clever ones on their cheeks, and with a slightly lowered head, his characteristic mannerism of modesty, he said, "Gut, gut" (very good). It was this simple but striking occasion which left a deep mark and profound impression upon each and every one of those students, who had the unique honour of being heard by, and of hearing the "Gadol Hador".

The criterion in his viewpoint on education was "To satisfy the wishes of the students" in order to intensify their spiritual development. For this reason he agreed to change the language of tuition from the traditional Yiddish to Hebrew in compliance with the preference of the Sabras, who were inundating the Yeshiva. The Chazon Ish himself agreed to test the students in Hebrew from then on. A boy tried with great difficulty, to answer in Yiddish when the Chazon Ish stopped him and said, "Answer in Hebrew; it will be easier for you."

Rabbi Horowitz tells this anecdote. "I accompanied the Chazon Ish to Tiferet Zion on one of those occasions of examinations and the financial situation of the Yeshiva was again meagre. The boys ate inferior food and resented this bitterly and wanted to go on strike. Also, the Roshei Yeshiva did not get wages for many months. 'What were we to do?' I asked. He answered, 'The children must eat well'. 'But where should we take money from to buy food?' I queried, and again the Chazon Ish repeated those words. 'The children mustn't suffer,' he replied.

"Before I left to accompany the Chazon Ish on his way to the Yeshiva his sister asked me to remind him to return in time for his mid-day meal, as his health was ailing. When the time came and I approached him with the subject, he replied, 'Is it Friday night tonight when one eats early?' and he continued testing his beloved pupils, from whom he derived so much pleasure. When the time came for him to leave, I wanted to order a taxi because he was already weak but he refused and went home on foot."

It was the last examination in his life-time in the year

1953, about six weeks before his death. This time it lasted longer — almost three hours — and when he concluded, he parted from each pupil with a tight hand-shake and good year wishes. One of the Roshei Yeshiva ordered a taxi and paid the driver at the Yeshiva's expense. A few days later, the Chazon Ish asked him how much he had paid and took out the money from his pocket. The Rosh Yeshiva protested and claimed that he had come on behalf of the institution, but the Chazon Ish would not have it and paid his fare himself.

He had a unique psychological understanding of their various personalities and characters. If he would find out about any individual suffering from social or home disturbances, he would find ways and means, at all costs, to remedy the trouble, and to clear their way of any hindrance in their spiritual development.

One youngster, particularly known for his assiduity, was an only child, and his parents wanted to take him out of the Yeshiva, claiming that his health was suffering from his ardent study. In fact they had other reasons for wanting to take him out of the Yeshiva — they were simply interested in giving him a secular education. Their son called them into the Chazon Ish to confer on the matter and, of course, the Chazon Ish persuaded them to the side of their son. He later became an outstanding scholar known for his greatness in piety and learning.

He had expert pedagogical ideas on education. One day a man complained about some youngsters in the Yeshiva who had played about noisily on a fast day. He was outraged at this unruly behaviour, but the Chazon Ish calmed him

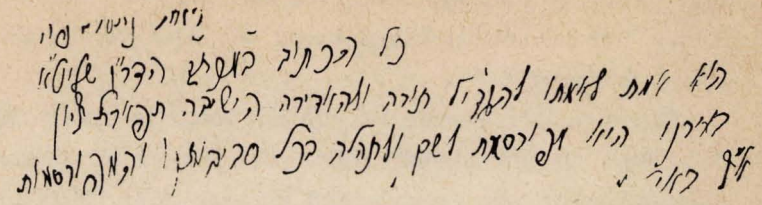
down with this parable, "Have you ever seen how bread is made? You eat freshly baked bread but have you an idea how it is kneaded ?"

Of course, the Chazon Ish did not mean to justify this behaviour; he immediately called the responsible teacher and with great tact, reprimanded him for their behaviour.

The Roshei Yeshiva once complained about a certain uncontrollable student and claimed that he was causing them great difficulties in their attempts at educating the boys. The Chazon Ish listened, thought a while and replied, "I don't care about what the teachers suffer — that is your duty ! If the other students are being affected, then one must expel him, for the boys mustn't suffer."

His viewpoint on education was adamant and clear. On one occasion, he was confronted with the problem of a very weak student. The question was if they should expel him on the grounds of his weakness. The Chazon Ish's reaction to this question was unhesitating. "Why do you think that this boy is a failure ? It's relative, only because the others are better than he is ... If you expel him on these grounds, then someone else will be the weakest. Thus according to your way of thinking, you can expel all your students in the course of time."

Two youngsters once arrived from a distant country and enrolled in the Tiferet Zion Yeshiva. They were refused for two reasons — first that their standard of learning was not high enough and secondly that there was no possibility for the Yeshiva to accommodate them. When the Chazon Ish heard this from the youngsters, who turned to him to help them, he called the Roshei Yeshiva and said, "Young boys



A Letter of the Chazon Ish on Behalf of Tiferet Zion Yeshiva

have made this tremendous effort to come from far to learn Torah and here there is no room for them!" They were accepted and the Chazon Ish sent the Yeshiva a substantial amount to pay for their board and lodging. They proved to be successful Torah scholars in the end.

His compassionate approach towards the students knocking on the gates of Torah was unprecedented. Like on other subjects, his viewpoint was always clear-cut and typically individual.

A Rosh Yeshiva once complained that he had to turn down a number of new enrolments, who beseeched him to enter his Yeshiva, because of inadequate means. The Chazon Ish's reply was curt and to the point, "Don't you know that when someone moves from one Yeshiva to another, he informs the post office of his change of address in order to receive his letters. So does G-d know the new address of such a pupil and can transfer sustenance to him wherever he is."

Another Rosh Yeshiva complained of just the opposite — that he had too few students in his Yeshiva. He also received a reassuring answer, for the Chazon Ish was never at loss for the right words of comfort.

Chapter XII

THE WORLD OF THE INDIVIDUAL

One lone Jewish child meant a universe to the Chazon Ish. He once wrote in a letter, "A youngster sitting assiduously at his Torah studies ravishes my heart, the memory of him fills my entire world and my soul is bound to his with unbreakable bonds."

Only a lofty and spiritual soul like his could feel so strongly the attachment of others to Torah — a child learning meant eternity.

A teacher once came to the Chazon Ish with a predicament. He wanted to leave teaching and instead become a diamond polisher. The Chazon Ish's answer depicted his viewpoint perfectly: "Haven't you been a diamond polisher till now ?"

He laid great emphasis on the individual and exerted even more strength, love and devotion to encouraging them, than towards general public Orthodox education. He ploughed untiringly to enable young saplings to be planted firmly in the ground of Torah study, and he spared no effort in encouraging their steady progress along the highroad of truth. Small wonder that we find incidences of correspondence

with unknown Torah students out of genuine happiness at their common interest with his. This is an excerpt from a letter: "Although I have never met you, my soul is bound to yours for I have heard that there was a time when you enjoyed your Torah studies." And with this same emotion, he grieved at any laxity in the study of the Talmud: "All my bones have weakened from sorrow." When he once saw a young Yeshiva student turn from his studies in preference to secular work, he defined it thus: "This means an exchange of Torah life for market life." He was broken-hearted and had to slowly force himself to overcome the pain it caused him.

By virtue of his ardour and profundity in the comprehension of the true meaning of Torah, he transmitted this attitude to any Jew he came across. He felt the need to be beneficient to everyone in his search and groping for the truth. Scores of letters have been preserved dealing with this subject. Some were written to Roshei Yeshiva in request to accept certain students on the grounds of their exceptional gifts. Others asked not to lower a student from his present class in order that he might not despair. He suggested in some cases that good friends be found for students and that the Roshei Yeshiva pay extra attention to their spiritual condition. He was interested in hundreds of individuals and with fatherly solitude, he catered to them all.

The Chazon Ish was compassionate and hated violence even in the most severe case of despair. "Does a dying man need to be thrown out of the hospital? Does his illness affect the other patients?" Even the most unruly and complicated student was not to be abandoned and expelled from the

Yeshiva. He believed, though, that since the student was causing a "Chilul Hashem", it was advisable to shorten his Peiot.

A Magid Shiur once complained about some of his students, who were giving him trouble and holding back the class. The Chazon Ish was furious at such a query, "Do you intend to abandon them altogether ?" At that he took a Gemarra and began to learn aloud, elucidating every word perfectly and patiently and then turned to him and said, "**This** is how one learns with students."

He called this communal love he had, "self-love" and concerned himself with the trials and tribulations of youngsters who were grappling with their stormy inclinations. He once wrote this impressive advice: "It appears to you that those who seek your attachment to Torah, wish to do you harm... I call to you: repent, man, repent, man, for tomorrow you will regret about that which today you desire." He once said to a youth: "If you study Torah hour after hour in succession, then every additional hour has the power of a double one. The second hour is not like the first anymore, but each successive hour multiplies the intensity of the former ones. If one has learned nine hours continuously, then the tenth has infinite power . . . It is easier to learn sixteen hours a day than six hours for this reason."

Whenever he travelled, he used the vehicle's stations for learning. Once the wheels grated to a halt and there was peace for a few minutes, he would draw out a Gemarra and learn. He was particular to drive his pupils to learn diligently, especially in times when there was a general laxity in Torah study, such as Friday afternoon when people were

busy with last minute preparations for Shabbat. He claimed that two Torah luminaries — Tur Zahav and Rabbi Akiva Eger — reached their brilliant standard and greatness by virtue of their care to learn at such times.

Career or Torah ?

A young student was perplexed as his mother wanted him to leave the realm of Torah study and find a career. The question was posed to the Chazon Ish and he scrutinised the youngster, donning his spectacles to do so. Then he reached for a Gemarra, opened it at the tractate "Taanit" and began reading the episode of Ilpha and Rabbi Yochanan who were absorbed in Torah study, but poverty and squalour oppressed them so they said to each other, "Let us deal in business to make a living." And they were once sitting beneath a wall when Rabbi Yochanan heard two angels talk and they said to one another, "Come let us break this wall over them and kill them for they have abandoned the life of the World to Come in preference to this transitory world's dealings."

A devoted father once came with a similar problem to the Chazon Ish; the same dilemna troubled him — shouldn't he rather teach his son some profession? The Chazon Ish answered to this effect, "My viewpoint on the subject is this — those who have the inclination to Torah and whose destiny in life has trained them towards that goal, should use that precious gift bestowed from Heaven, of sacrificing worldly and physical pleasures despite its hazards and difficulties. To such youngsters I proclaim the verse 'I'd rather leave every profession in the world, and teach my son only Torah.' "



Kibbutz "Chofetz Chayim"

Questions and Answers

Innumerable questions about Bnei Torah were posed to the Chazon Ish and we find repeatedly in each individual case how much wisdom and skill he mustered in answering them.

To a question of whether to stay another year in Yeshiva and by this jeopardising chances of entering a religious Kibbutz, the Chazon Ish answered: "Nothing in the world is valuable enough to pay for a years' Torah study, and there is no reason to leave Torah now because of speculation about what will be!"

Someone asked whether he should learn in a large Yeshiva rather than in small one. The Chazon Ish's answer was that this question depends upon the individual nature of a person. Some require active social life and for such people a big Yeshiva is better, others are prone to isolation and

withdrawal and for them of course a small Yeshiva is preferable.

On the other hand, he stipulated in a different case of someone who desired to learn entirely by himself, that this was not conducive to successful Torah progress. He explained that the purpose of Torah besides the intellectual study of it, is to conquer one's desires when necessary. Every time one vanquishes ones will, one paves the way to the spiritual construction of one's life. The Chazon Ish made it quite clear to his questioner. "My heart cannot believe that by being isolated from everyone you can acquire the true acquisition of Torah. It is quite obvious that society and friends will assist you."

When the Chazon Ish heard of anyone lax in his learning he would find him a partner to spur him on. If money was lacking he provided it, without making it known that he was behind the gesture.

This incident throws light upon the Chazon Ish's unique quality of caring for little things concerning individuals. It was late one evening when his nephew Reb Shemariahu Yosseph Karelitz came to him. He was surprised when the Chazon Ish made his way to the door and informed him of his wish to go to Petach Tikva, a neighbouring town. What was the hurry to go at such a time to Petach Tikva ? No questions were asked. They went down to the "Black High-road" leading to Petach Tikva and took a bus to the Lomze Yeshiva. At their destination, the Chazon Ish gave his escort a pound note and asked him to give it to a certain pupil learning in that Yeshiva.

Reb Shmariahu Yosseph could no longer restrain his

curiosity and asked the Chazon Ish why the pound note was to be delivered that night when a more convenient time might have been found.

He replied that in that Yeshiva there was a brilliant young Talmid Chochom, from a very poor family. The Chazon Ish wished to encourage him and would send him pocket money every Rosh Chodesh. That month he did not have the money immediately and several days had already passed. Fearing that the had might doubt his teachers' favour towards him, he preferred to dispatch it as soon as possible.

Many others were supported by the Chazon Ish. But he was discreet in his manner of distributing money and would find secret ways and means of delivering it through reliable sources.

The Chazon Ish felt directly responsible for Jewish children and believed that to create Talmidei Chachomim, one needed to be on the alert, and one had to educate them with devotion. He felt the urge to indoctrinate the generation with his philosophy. If mothers of sons felt his way, if they wished to see their sons become great men instead of part of the mob in the street, if they wanted to see their children champions and victorious over their evil inclinations writhing within them, then he, the Chazon Ish, was prepared to come to their help. And with this gallant determination he dipped his pen into black ink and wrote a special prayer for mothers, in his beautifully polished style, a prayer to be said when reaching "Shema Koleinu":

"May it be Thy will, oh L-rd . . . that Thou have compassion on my son . . . and turn his heart to love and fear Thy Name and cleave to Thy Holiness and remove from him any

obstacles from cleaving to Thy Holy Law and prepare the conditions which bring him to cleave to Thy Holy Law." He once said in this connection: "Mistaken is he who thinks that greatness in Torah is reserved only for the skilled brains. Much is dependent upon the entreaties of a mother for her sons."

Maternal Compassion

The Chazon Ish's sentiment to his fellow men were manifold and the inner spring of emotion within him gave maternal comfort to anyone who sought spiritual succour. He was not a Rosh Yeshiva, nor a Mashgiach, whose job it is to lend a sympathetic ear and offer a helping hand, yet the Chazon Ish by feeling the needs of his people, was to become an uncrowned Rosh Yeshiva of all Yeshivot. Young and old streamed to him, to pour out their hearts take his loving advice and to draw comfort.

There are countless anecdotes which illustrate this specific tenderness which the Chazon Ish felt towards people living a Torah life.

One day a strange problem was put before him. A mouse had fallen into a pot of food destined to feed the mouths of a whole Yeshiva. The chefs came to ask a "Shaale": is the food kosher or not ? The Chazon Ish, rather amazed, answered, "Even if the food were kosher according to the letter of the law, would you serve it to your children ?"

He felt very strongly about Yeshiva Bachurim looking after their health.

He once heard of a certain boy who was suffering from a throat disease and who did not have adequate attention in the Yeshiva. So the Chazon Ish bought a jar of honey,

took a taxi and went to visit the boy himself, thereby causing great excitement in the Yeshiva and indirectly bringing their attention to the sick student.

A Rosh Yeshiva by the name of Rabbi Dov Yaffe came to the Chazon Ish with a problem of a young student who had suddenly lost his interest in learning for no apparent reason. The Chazon Ish suggested that he learn completely alone, and also interest himself in certain Sephorim. When this did not help, the youth came to see the Chazon Ish himself and the latter scrutinised him carefully. Then on the basis of his exterior appearance, the Chazon Ish diagnosed that the deterioration in this lad's study and prayer was not due to a spiritual fault, but because of weak physical health. It was his conviction that often a person suffering from ill health might consequently suffer spiritually. Then he turned to the boy and told him to visit a certain doctor in order to get a good diet which would strengthen his constitution. The Chazon Ish's diagnosis proved correct in the end.

In accordance with this conviction, the Chazon Ish reprimanded students who neglected their health in their overconcientious endeavours to learn Talmud. He would even give orders to cease learning for a while, just for the purpose of refreshing the body. He recommended holidays in special rest-homes and emphasised the importance of a balanced nutritious diet.

He was expert in human biology. Reb Pinchas Biberfeld was surprised to witness this interesting case. A boy came to the Chazon Ish with stomach aches, and he asked the

lad to point out where exactly the pain was. The youth hesitated, not wanting to cause the Chazon Ish unnecessary waste of time but the Chazon Ish reassured him and said that he wanted to ascertain what was causing the pain: the abdomen, stomach, kidneys, liver or other organs.

On another occasion he put great effort into finding medical treatment for a Talmid Chochom unknown to him. His friends, seeing the Chazon Ish put himself out for someone he did not even know, thanked him for his pains. He replied, "What are the thanks for ? We are in a partnership !"

There is a story told of an orphan who was learning in Tiferet Zion not being able to aclimatise to the dormitory. The Chazon Ish took him to his home and tended him with loving-kindness. He cared for him so much that he even slept in the same room. He perceived in this lad the potential qualities of greatness and was determined to develop them and bring him up in ways of Torah spirituality.

Each night when the lad returned from the Yeshiva after a hard and tiring day, the Chazon Ish ordered him to sit again at the Gemara and to spend yet another few moments learning. This he did until he fell asleep, when the Chazon Ish stroked his cheek and ordered him to bed. He wanted to train him to learn "till his strength failed him", to carry this saying out literally.

Psychological Advice

Reflected in his numerous letters is a profound psychological perception of youth in general and Torah youth in particular. In encouraging young people in their struggle to find the truth and remain loyal to their Torah studies

he exploited various means of influence, depending upon the individual need and personality. Sometimes he saw importance in praising a young man's gifts and excellence in learning thus spurring him on to higher aspirations. In other cases he would touch on the emotional nature of a student, admonishing him gently not to upset his parents by neglecting his studies, and above all else to please him, the Chazon Ish, by giving him the happiest news he could possibly receive, that Torah study had become a source of pleasure to this young man.

People of all kinds came to him seeking advice about various psychological problems and were always helped by the solutions he offered, although he had never studied the modern sciences of pedagogy or psychology. Indeed he even mentioned many of the modern discoveries and schools of thought, only in a fleeting manner, as though they were obvious conclusions to him. His brilliance and profundity as a thinker brought him to understand the Jewish soul in its deepest form.

Someone once came to visit him and brought his child with him. The child was upset about something and began to cry. The Chazon Ish quickly comforted him and fulfilled the child's wish. When he noticed the father's confused expression he explained himself without being asked.

"I know that modern educationalists feel otherwise, preferring to be strict with children but they are not right. One must give a child a feeling of contentment without causing him bitterness."

In conversation with Rabbi Ahron Cohen, Rosh Yeshiva in Chevron, he once spoke about education. Rabbi Cohen

reminded him of Rabbi Israel Salanter's opinion that: "One can be good without Mussar, but one cannot change from bad to good without Mussar."

"I object to this opinion," argued the Chazon Ish. "One needs Mussar also to be good, but not necessarily by the use of special Mussar books. The Shass itself is full of stories which contain priceless Mussar lessons. Surely our prayers, which we recite three times daily contain much Mussar".

On another occasion he said:

"It is understandable, that in Yeshivot there is a special syllabus for Mussar learning, but on a private basis, it depends entirely upon the individual need. Some feel the necessity to learn Mussar from morning to night, whereas others not even one moment. This is how we are shown from the Gemarra. Sometimes we find whole pages with Agadata, teaching morals and ethics, and sometimes there isn't even one line.

He once quoted a Mishna from Pirkei Avot, verbatim. He recited it with turbulent expression, remarking afterwards:

"The words of this Mishna are so arousing, that commentaries only diminish its strength instead of intensifying it."

The Chazon Ish was convinced that sitting and learning Talmud answered all problems. It was his conviction that this alone sufficed to overcome one's evil inclination.

By learning Torah, a person identifies himself mentally with Moses on Mt. Sinai, and by contact with the Mishna, we come close to the Tanaim as though they were

actually alive. When a Yeshiva Bachur sits anywhere in the world learning Torah, he is as though sitting on a bench of the Yeshiva in Pombedita or in Rashi's house. He who bears in his thought, while learning, these splendid epochs of Torah and G-d's wisdom, sees the outside world and its pleasures as an abode of wretched and needy people.

The Chazon Ish had amazing insight into a person's innermost being and was able to perceive, even through a letter, the spiritual and hidden qualities of his correspondent. A person unknown to him, once wrote a letter and signed it "anonymous." The Chazon Ish answered: "I greet you with love, oh "unknown friend" according to the world's definition; but in fact this is not true, because the essence of human contact is spiritual."

Anyone who came into contact with the Chazon Ish was as though transparent to his perceptive eye, because he was able to discern his very soul.

Practical Remedies

The Chazon Ish's answer to a Mashgiach of a Yeshiva on the question of how to educate the Bachurim was this: "We get used to speaking about a person's faults when probing in Mussar. But searching faults in oneself and others, often arouses these failings to activity, for sometimes peoples' bad inclinations remain dormant within them. If you awaken them, they begin to work. It's like the parable from a chassidic book: "The Yetzer Harah is like an itch, if you scratch it you will make a boil."

There are times when you can influence a person to become better by showing him that you think he is better than he actually is. I personally have never been wrong

about my judgment of anyone but occasionally I purposely let him think that he is fooling me. Then when he sees that I knew all the time what he was really like, he gives up. How much more so if you anger him actively; he will not even try to do good!"

In the same way a person can influence himself to be better, if he searches his assets rather than dwelling upon his faults. By finding his advantages he develops pride, and by seeking his disadvantages he develops resignation and despair. A person is like a whole village of people, good ones and bad ones, and we can make the decision when to cause an argument within ourselves, but sometimes we take the wrong way, by looking for our bad sides.

This is a piece of reproof he gave a desciple who was lax in learning: "You must know what the Midrash Raba says: 'When G-d created the world He looked into the Torah and created it.' The truth of Torah is the only truth existing in all the world; why then don't you learn?"

He spoke calmly, soothingly and yet sternly to the same lad describing to him how great the joy of Torah study is. "The power which can elevate a person is procured by acquiring wisdom. The world is like a festively laid table. He who is clever, wants to enjoy of it but his desires and passions push aside his real wish to acquire wisdom. The one and only proven instrument to vanquish the powers of materialism is learning Torah. The pursuit of wordly pleasures and forbidden fruits is a deeply rooted selflove embedded in everyone from birth. One can never uproot it entirely for that would destroy a person's physical maintenance. The way to improve himself is not to abolish his

inherent inclinations but to sanctify them to holiness. A person need not proclaim day and night that he mustn't love himself; on the contrary he should love himself in a clever way, by affording himself the most costly of pleasures, wisdom and Torah knowledge. A person feels insignificant in front of the sea, whereas in front of Torah, which is bigger and mightier than the sea, he does not feel this way. For he grows with his perception; the more Torah knowledge he acquires, the greater he becomes himself because Torah purges a person's soul, and turns pride to humility, anger to patience and pursuit of desires to pursuit of self elevation."

The Key to Success in Torah

He laid great emphasis, when guiding young people to success in their Torah learning, upon matters of sanctity, faith and good qualities. In one of his letters he wrote: "It is desirable to find ways and means of acquiring assiduity in one's study. One should pray constantly for it because the true value of learning lies in continuity and constancy.

Continuous learning is the secret of holiness. Learning for one hour and stopping for an hour is nothing but nonexistence." He advised someone: "Direct your heart to joy, for through joy you will be bestowed with abundant wisdom from Heaven.

The Chazon Ish stated a number of times that the criterion of "Avodat Hashem" was happiness.

The Chazon Ish also advised his disciples not to neglect those habits which had the power to give purity to a person, such as washing one's hand properly according to the law,

being careful that the water covers the hand until the wrist. He claimed that purity was a cital utensil with which to contain Torah.

On the other hand the Chazon Ish was far from being stringent when problems of health arose. However strongly he felt about purity and sanctity in normal conditions yet if someone was ill and needed to drink large quantities of milk (which was at that time mixed with milk-powder, considered by the Rabbis as possibly not kosher) he allowed this milk to be drunken. In one such case he requested of the ill boy to refrain one day a week from drinking that milk.

Here is a collection of advice which the Chazon Ish wrote to one of his pupils:

A. One must try to refrain from eating delicacies, which is a degradation, hindering one's progress in learning.

B. One should pray regularly to be saved from the Evil Inclination and one can pray in any form as long as the prayer comes from the heart.

C. One must try never to do any act with the motivation of pride.

D. One should refrain from borrowing money.

E. One should study Maharsha (one of the commentaries on the Talmud) and try to deal with people modestly. For modesty is conducive to Torah knowledge.

The Chazon Ish paid special attention to any passage in prayer which mentioned something connected with Torah.

In the blessing of the new month one mentions twice the wish for life with Yirat Shamayim. Why is it repeated ? he once asked.

The answer is that between the first and second wish we mention 'life of Torah', thus hinting that there is no comparison between Yirat Shamayim without learning Torah and Yiras Shomayim with the words of Torah embedded in one's heart.

Resonant Strings

The Chazon Ish when speaking of "Faith" one day, made this illustrative parable.

"If a person is an unbeliever he will not understand Torah even if he has the sharpest of minds. The violinist can only produce resonant tones from violin strings, and not from rusty iron cords."

When young students came before the Chazon Ish complaining of disturbances in their faith he would advise them to wear a full size Tzitzit according to the Chazon Ish measure (which is larger than the customary size) and also warned them not to touch the covered parts of the body while learning. He would often say: "The disturbance is not due to excess knowledge but is the result of the absence of sanctity, therefore it's advisable to make special efforts in habits of purity and by this, doubts will vanish automatically." He was for this very reason particular that young men, even below the age of ten should wear long sleeves and long trousers so that they should not, while learning, touch limbs normally covered, which would cause deterioration of sanctity.

The Chazon Ish was much aware of the saying, "A Talmid Chacham who has a stain on his clothing deserves to die." He felt that if a Torah scholar was negligent about dirt on

his apparel, he manifested a general tendency of contempt over cleanliness, whereas if his clothes are worn and shabby due to wear, he is not to blame. On the other hand he despised the growing trend of following the fashion and would joke: "The Talmud says that a Talmid Chacham should take extra precaution over one Mitzva of his own choosing. Probably these fashion conscious boys chose the Mitzva of "A Talmid Chochom finding dirt on his apparel."

His demands on Bnei Torah concerning stringency over Mitzva observance were far more rigid than that of the general public. He used to say to his close disciples: "I cannot expect this from strangers coming and going, but to you 'Die Heimische' (close friends) let it be known that I cannot bear anyone coming to me if he uses the general electricty on Shabbat."

The Chazon Ish put extra demands upon those learning Torah. He considered them the "elite" and therefore expected from them higher aspirations. He pointed out that the Maharam of Lublin when speaking of Halachic questions used the expression, "the world asks". Now, most people in the world do not ask Halachic questions, so then what is the meaning of "the world asks ?" The answer is that those who do ask, namely Torah scholars, are considered "the world."

He felt strongly about young Torah scholars growing beards, claiming that shaving was a custom copied from the gentiles. It is an ancient Jewish custom to leave a beard, said the Chazon Ish.

This is an excerpt from the memoirs written by the Chazon Ish's nephew, Rabbi Shaul Barzam, on the Chazon

Ish's opinion: "One should grow a beard, not because it is forbidden to use a razor but because a Jewish garb must not be changed. One should be firm not to copy the gentiles... not to compromise... it is only a recent phenomenon... A few generations ago shaving the beard was considered a sign of drastic spiritual deterioration... A Rabbi did not wish to permit this of any of his congregants...

"Even though some claimed that shaving might help to attract irreligious people to religion, this never helped; on the contrary, those who shaved usually left religion and stayed with the mirror."

Generally speaking the Chazon Ish appealed to Bnei Torah to remain traditional in their exterior garb, but when this clashed with any other consideration he was prepared to be lenient on the issue. A young man was engaged to be married and his fiancée objected to his wearing the traditional long coat preferring a modern suit. The question came before the Chazon Ish and the latter invited him to accompany him on his daily walk. As they walked, the Chazon Ish pointed at the street and said: "Look, this road starts straight then meanders a little and continues straight ahead. When they paved the road they could not pave it straight since there were obstacles, and so it goes a little crooked, but when it was possible they paved it straight again. This refers to your present state of affairs; you must for a while deviate slightly from the straight road till you will be able to continue as before."

Encouraging Continuous Study

"Strengthen strengthen yourself in Torah, abandon the desire for idleness and enjoy the glory of Torah," This is

how he would encourage and spur people to intensify their interest and diligence in Torah. This is an excerpt of a letter which does not appear in the "Kovetz Igrot":

"I should like to fulfil your request particularly through strengthening your learning or, more correct, 'assiduity'.

"The idea of assiduity is not judged by the amount of time given but by the devotion of one's whole being to the one aim, of learning Torah. One hour of intense study and seriousness is worth more than many idle ones. Continuity of study is born from assiduity, but in order to reach assiduity one must wage a war between the mind and desirous elements within one."

Rabbi Abraham Wiener, a close disciple of the Chazon Ish, asked him how he could awaken the urge to learn assiduously. The Chazon Ish answered:

"I shall tell two anecdotes which will help you. One is the Gilgul (Dybbuk) You know the story of how the Chofetz Chayim drove out a Gilgul from someone's body in front of ten of his prize pupils (among them Reb Elchonon Wassermann, Rabbi Eliahu Dushnitzer and Rabbi Yosseph Kahanemann.) These pupils asked the Gilgul, what the Chofetz Chayim was most admired for in the realm of the Heavens, and it answered: "For his assiduity in Torah learning." This goes to teach that assiduity and continuity of Torah study is considered in Heaven most precious of all the Chofetz Chayim's attributes.

"The second story is about Rabbi Yoel Sirkish, known as the "Bach," who promised his son-in-law, known as the "Taz," in his "Tnaim" that he would receive a meat meal

every day. As time went on the Bach became poor and his daughter could only cook lung instead of proper meat.

'Much to everyone's amazement the Taz called his father-in-law to a court case, accusing him of anulling his promise of a daily meat meal. The verdict was that the accused was not guilty since lung is also counted as meat. But how could the Taz explain his reason for calling his father-in-law to a court case on such strange grounds ? His reasoning was that the first time he ate the lung, he was disturbed in his study for one split second and he knew that a prosecution certainly was in progress against the family of the Bach in Heaven for having caused a second's waste of learning. The Taz wanted to prove by Law that lung is also meat and the only way of doing it was by making a court case. When the Bet Din decided that lung was meat, the promise which the Bach had made was still effective and the prosecution from Heaven was withdrawn. These two stories emphasise the extreme importance which G-d in Heaven places on Torah learning and the priceless value of even one moment to its devotion."

The Chazon Ish was denied sons of his own, yet felt a passionate paternal feeling for his brethern. Young and old, religious and irreligious were considered by him his closest family and he was looked upon as the nation's father. In reaching self-perfection, he hearkened to an inner calling and saw himself duty-bound to bring every single individual of the Jewish people to Torah, and its blessed service.

APPENDIX

The Chazon Ish's Family

Brothers

Rabbi Meir Karelitz

Rabbi Itzale Karelitz

Rabbi Moshe Karelitz

Brothers-in-law

Rabbi S. E. Kahan

Rabbi S. Greineman

Rabbi A. Sviatitski

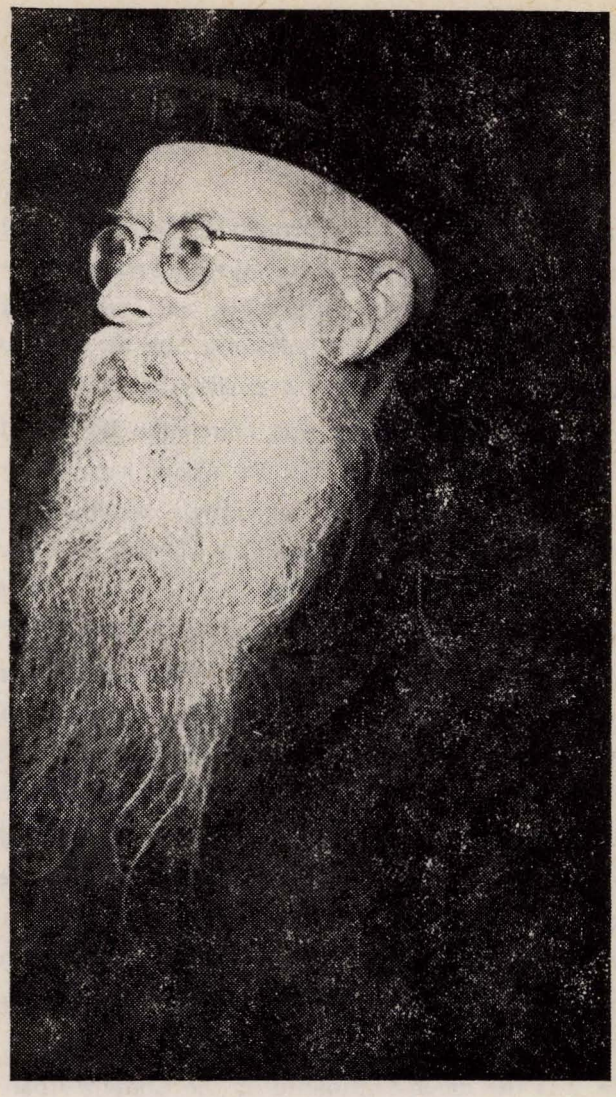
Rabbi N. M. Karelitz

Rabbi Y. I. Kannieffski

RABBI MEIR KARELITZ

Reb Meir was the first-born of the Karelitz family. He too was a gifted scholar and received his education first from his father and then in Smargon. He was modest and fled from honour, only to find it pursuing him as he retreated. For this reason he never took a position as Rabbi or Rosh Yeshiva, and only when he was compelled by Reb Chaim Ozer or the Chofetz Chaim, did he accept such a post. He spent most of his years in social activity serving the whole of the Jewish nation in the Diaspora. He was a man of few words and the Chazon Ish wittily used to define his characteristic as a "family fault". He would weigh each word carefully till he uttered his opinion. He wrote many Torah expositions and was qualified for Smicha by the author of "Shaarei Deiah". When he married the daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Cohen, author of "Cheshek Shlomo", he moved to Vilna. Although loathe to take an official position, he was forced to become Rabbi of a suburb near Vilna, when his father-in-law died. His activity was not limited to his community alone, but he took part in every burning problem of the day, and had contact with many surrounding communities.

He was the chief confidante of the Chofetz Chaim and Reb Chaim Ozer, being their most powerful agent in dealing with any public concern. Whether it was settling an un-



Rabbi Meir Karelitz

pleasant controversy, or intervening with the government on behalf of the Jews in that country, always Reb Meir Karelitz was called to execute any such difficult mission.

At that time a decree was passed by the Polish authorities against allowing private schools to be established, and this included "chadarim." Great danger loomed ahead for the future of the Jewish nation, for, without their schools, the Torah was likely to be forgotten. Reb Meir was the iron force behind the activity to annul this decree. The first thing he did in this emergency was to found secret schools. Then he organized mammoth assemblies, in which the Gedolei Hador participated. After one of these meetings, a delegation headed by the Chofetz Chaim, went to the Polish Prime Minister, Professor Bertel, and laid their cause before him. They received promises and assurances, but since these did not materialise so quickly, Reb Meir was sent to Poland to pursue this cause until the decree was annulled.

In 1930, Reb Meir was asked to serve as the Rabbi of Karlin-Pinsk. He went to Radin to ask the Chofetz Chaim his opinion. At first he did not agree, but then he said, "This is a difficult question and in such a case, I must take advice from someone greater than myself. Any day the Moshiah will be here and then I shall be able to ask Eliahu Hanavi." When he noticed Reb Meir smiling, a frown appeared on his face and he retorted, "You have doubts about what I have just said? Then know that I am perfectly serious."

Later he became Rabbi of Lacovitz with a condition that the Chofetz Chaim had made — he would be entitled at any time, to be available for urgent public activity. Whenever he was seen walking in the corridors of the Aguda of-

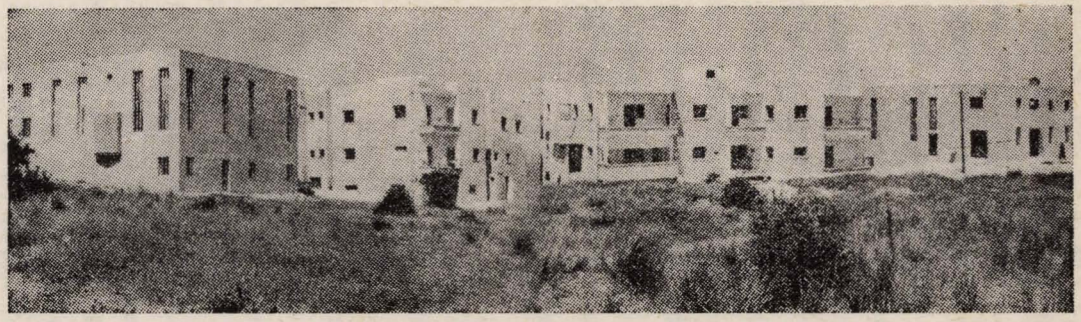
fices, people knew that there must be some serious crisis which he had come to solve. Indeed in the winter of 1936, a ban on kosher shchita hovered in the bleak air. Reb Meir was sent by Reb Chaim Ozer to Warsaw, where he stayed for three full months, in his endeavour to have the ban annulled. During this time the family was worried as he



Rabbi Shlomo Cohen the "Cheshek Shlomoh"

never wrote, which was not his usual way. Later he explained his behaviour thus: "If I would have thought of my wife and children, then I would never have succeeded in my mission."

After the Shchita crisis, Reb Chaim Ozer sent Reb Meir to Israel and America to found the famous "Vaad Hayeshivot" (Yeshivot Committee). When he returned to Poland, the Government accused him of slandering the Polish state



Bet Meir Yeshiva

in connection with the Shchita problem, which had been so difficult to solve. When he saw that despite every possible intervention, he was in danger, he left Lithuania and came to Israel. As he had left a large and valuable library behind him, he sent a considerable sum of money to a friend in order to ship the books to Israel. As soon as he heard of the Jewish refugees who had fled from the Nazis to Poland, he immediately cabled to his friend to use the money to distribute among the refugees. His library perished together with his closest ones in the Nazi holocaust.

Reb Meir Karelitz continued his way of life in Israel. He again headed the Aguda, founded the "Vaad Hayeshivot", and was the backbone of religious Jewry in every respect. He died in 1955 on the 15th Adar, leaving behind him a rich heritage of deeds and a noble family who till today continue in the path their father had paved.

RABBI ITZALE KARELITZ

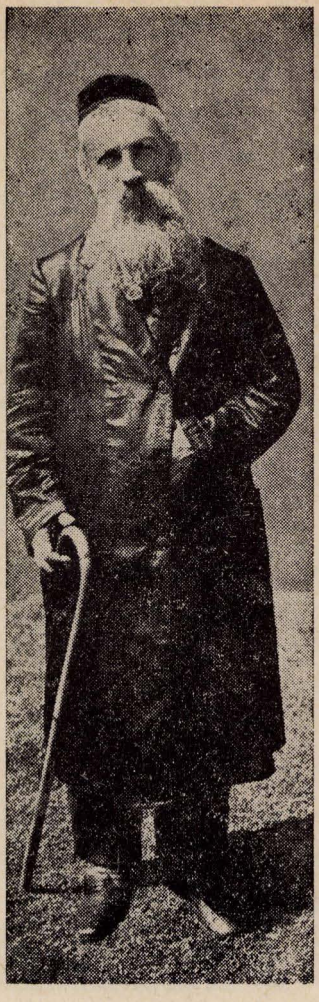
He was the third son of the Karelitz family, and added to the glory of its name. He was a saintly person who appeared to people more spirit than body. His life consisted literally of nothing but Torah learning and Avodat Hashem. Like his brother, the Chazon Ish, he went into solitude with his books and sat and learned in the Batei Midrash, almost never ceasing his study. This was detrimental to his health and he suffered physically all his life. He married the daughter of the Dayan of Norva (near Bialistok), and after his marriage he devoted himself even more to his learning and

left home for long periods, striving to enrich his piety and sanctity by immersing himself in pure waters of Torah and denying himself any wordly indulgences.

Everyone revered him, and even the gentiles stood up when he appeared. He was noble and good tempered and exceedingly modest. He was a good speaker and drew crowds by his rhetoric and profundity. Even though he was frail and weak, his voice was strong like that of a lion.

The people of Kossova had an unusual faith in him. Once a townsman decided to move to Israel without telling anyone and made transactions with landowners. When he had ended all his preparations, he came to take leave of Reb Itzale. The latter than said to him, "I have heard of people buying lottery tickets for one ruble in the hope of winning hundreds, but I have never heard of a person buying anything for hundreds of rubles with the chance of winning maybe less than one." At that the man cancelled his immigration, and learned, after some time, that all those who belonged to his group of immigrants to Israel had experienced losses and troubles, and many even died.

Reb Itzale often dreamed of going to Israel, but he felt the calling to remain with his brethren in Lithuania, to be their stronghold in every sphere. How could he leave Lithuania where the cold winds of spiritual destruction wrenched apart the remains of this exiled nation? How could he leave Kossova whose inhabitants had now become orphans after losing their beloved Rabbi, Reb Shmaria Joseph. So he fulfilled every need of theirs, founded Yeshivot, intensified Torah study everywhere and raised their low morale with loving and saintly devotion. He lived in dire



Rabbi Itzale Karelitz

poverty all his life and never had any source of income from his Torah study.

Of all his attributes, one was most prominent and he himself would put it in these words, "A Jew must make Kiddush every day, that is Kiddush Hashem." This indeed was his chief ambition in life — to sanctify G-d's name, in life and in death, in health and in sickness, in riches and in poverty.

In 1942, one morning as he stood reciting Shacharit, he was shot by the Nazis. When the trucks came to collect the bodies, his wife, Keila, and his daughter jumped in to be with him. They were buried in the same grave.

RABBI MOSHE KARELITZ

The Chazon Ish called his youngest brother "King of Suffering". All his life he endured pain and sorrow of every possible kind. He was, however, able to take it in his stride and bore courageously all his tragedies knowing that if he was given them, he must live with them. His personal and family problems, although intense, never dragged him into depression, but purified and refined his lofty soul.

He too, learned first with his father and then went to Slobodka. There he was greatly impressed by the Sabba, Rabbi Natan Zvi Finkel. All the Karelitz family laid prime stress on Yirat Shomayim and that was the secret of their success. Reb Moshe, too, spent his life in Avodat Hashem.

He married the daughter of the Rabbi of Punari, Rabbi Pesach Pinper. Then, after his death, Reb Moshe took over



Rabbi Moishe Karelitz

the Rabbinical post of that town. He was like his brother in his devotion to all his congregants, rich and poor alike, and was ready at any time to care for their needs.

Once after a serious pogrom in the Ukraine the Agudat Yisrael made an appeal all over Poland and Lithuania to finance parcels of food and clothing for the remaining refugees. When Reb Moshe came to his congregation to appeal for this purpose, it was Shabbat. He dramatically demanded from his people to go home there and then to bring him the money as "Pikuach Nefesh" (danger of life) can surpass Muktze (things which are forbidden to be touched on Shabbat). The people did as their Rabbi commanded. When this incident became known to other communities, many Rabbis denounced Reb Moshe for this, claiming that he had no reason to profane the Shabbat. Consequently to this heated discussion, the Chazon Ish wrote a special Tshuva (reply) to this matter clarifying the whole misconception, but which, for certain reasons, he never published.

His gifts as a teacher attracted many disciples, who abided by his every word and who remained close to him through thick and thin. When he saw that he was so influential in the educational field, he decided to open a new Yeshiva in Vilna where he would expound his specific school of thought. The number of disciples grew from day to day, but Reb Chaim Ozer, who also had a Yeshiva in that town, was ill-disposed to the continuation of Reb Moshe's. He believed that if there would be a competitive institution to his, they would both be doomed to failure. One Shabbat as Reb Moshe was sitting and learning, surrounded by his pupils, he received a note from Reb Chaim Ozer. He glanced

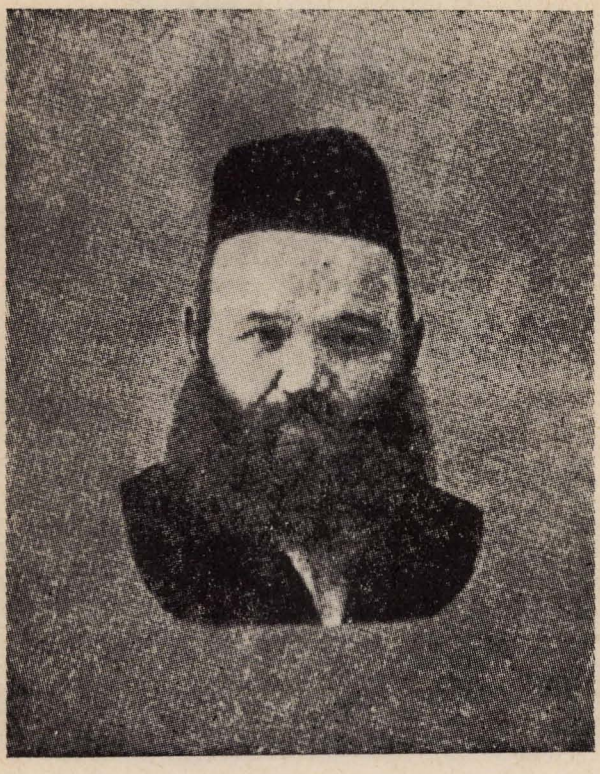
at its contents, shut his Gemarra, and gave his pupils the sign to disperse without uttering a word. This incident showed great strength of character, his dream and ambition had been shattered in one second and he didn't react negatively at all.

The monthly "Knesset Yisrael", which appeared in Vilna, he edited. The only one book which he wrote was "Or Chadash" on "Shaare Tshuve".

His trials and tribulations came to their climax in the war under the Nazis, when he too found his death.

RABBI SHMUEL ELIAHU KAHAN

He was the first son-in-law of the Karelitz Family. He stemmed from Dokar, from a Lubavitz Hassidic family. He showed signs of being a gifted student and received his early education in his hometown, Dokar, from private tutors. Then he went to Minsk but the standard there wasn't high enough for him, so he continued in Shaklov. Shaklov was a sister Yeshiva to Slabodka. A group of young pioneers from Slabodka of Reb Natan Zvi Finkel, opened this new Yeshiva which later grew to 200 students. The Rosh Yeshiva was the local Rabbi and the Mashgiach was Rabbi Sandominski, a post which was later taken over by the Sabba's prize pupil, Rabbi Abraham Noach Palei. Thus Reb Shmuel Eliahu Kahan imbibed the true Lithuanian methods of study with the notions of Mussar added to the enthusiasm of Chassidim.



Rabbi Shmuel Eliahu Kahan



Rabbi Issar Zalman Meltzer

From Shuklov he went to Slabodka where he learned assiduously, never finding time to visit home. By chance, he once met the Chazon Ish who was highly impressed by him and who entreated him to come to his town to learn with him. Then he married Bdana, the sister of the Chazon Ish, in their home in Kossova. He became Rabbi of Krugleh.

He did not have an easy life and one of his greatest trials was that he had no children. The reverence which his congregants gave him, compensated this anguish somewhat. He served his people till his last days, when he was taken from them by the Nazis.

RABBI SHMUEL GREINEMAN

He was born in the year 1880, and died in 1948. He was a man of every possible accomplishment, whose chief task in life lay in "Self-sacrifice for the Jewish nation". At a tender age he lost his mother and then he came as an orphan to Vilna, alone, with just the barest means of existence. He studied with Reb Meir Karelitz and the latter soon saw his qualities and so took him as a fitting suitor for his sister.

Rabbi Shmuel was one of the closest confidantes of the Chofetz Chaim and Reb Chaim Ozer. Together with his brother-in-law, Reb Meir, he founded the religious schools network — a paramount enterprise for Judaism. He helped with Reb Chaim Ozer's "Committee in aid of Religious Institutions" and took upon himself most of the burden of the "Vaad Hayeshivot". He was also the secretary of the famous Mir Yeshiva. It was he who saw the necessity of publishing a religious paper "Dos Wort", in which he himself wrote the leading articles. He was the ambassador of the Torah world, representing the Gedolei Hador in the outside world.

Besides all these accomplishments, he was chiefly responsible for publishing his brother-in-law's books — "Chazon Ish". When he came to settle in Israel, the first thing he did was to perpetuate his work in the educational field and set up a network of religious schools. He was active in every form of religious public activity and there was a time when there were 36 institutions under his direction. He often travelled to America to raise funds for both the schools and Vaad Hayeshivot. One of his great disappointments was Agu-



Rabbi Shmuel Greineman

dat Yisrael's refusal to his request to print a non-political religious paper under their auspices.

Besides his own family, he supported three others of the family, the Chazon Ish, who lived in dire poverty once he came to Israel; Reb Nachum Meir Karelitz and Rabbi Kanieffski. He used to say, "When I cease from doing business for a while to learn for myself, I feel I am causing Bitul Torah Derabim (a waste of other people's learning)."

These obligations, drove him to go out into the wide world and settle in America. There he became the principal of the Yeshiva Tferet Jerusalem, where he combined learning, teaching and administration. From here he could fulfil his aim of sustaining his family. There are countless stories told of his greatness in Chessed both for the public as well as hundreds of individuals. Their home became the central address for needy people and many were those who came from other countries, particularly Israel, for medical treatment and who were automatically directed to Reb Shmuel Greineman's home. He and his wife did everything in their power to alleviate them of their troubles and cared for them in all respects.

He was a staunch supporter of Agudat Israel, for which he worked even while officiating as Rosh Yeshiva. He wrote the famous "Chofetz Chaim on the Torah" and was the ideal person to have taken upon himself to depict the true personality of the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim himself used to say, "If only I had the golden pen of Reb Shmuel."

Another of his outstanding enterprises was the establishment of the Kollel Chazon Ish, to which he devoted much of his time and energy and which he supported mater-

ially. He had great insight and foresaw a rapid deterioration of Torah learning after the death of the Chazon Ish. He felt it his vocation to reinforce the existing strongholds so that there should be no reason for any laxity in Torah study in the future. Thus he went to Europe and America regularly to raise funds for both Chinuch Atzmai (religious schools network) and the fund to support Kollel Chazon Ish.

He once held his audience spellbound with this story. "There once was a man who would wake up at night and play havoc with the house throwing things around and breaking everything. Then he would go back to sleep and wake up in the morning not knowing what he had done during the night. When his wife consulted the doctor, he said, "Don't disturb him in his fits because then you will make things even worse." One night she saw him go towards the children's room with a knife in his hand. She could no longer restrain herself and snatched the knife from his hands. I remembered this story when I saw the sleep-walkers of our generation, how they get up at nights violating and defiling everything holy and pure and then going back to bed, waking in the morning as though nothing had happened. Even when we saw them profaning all the laws attached to Judaism which terrified us, we refrained from reacting, not to arouse their passion and revenge. Now they are brandishing their swords over the children. This we cannot tolerate and must act!"

He fought till the end of his life for status of equality between religious and irreligious education and denounced the attitude of the State towards the religious party. He was active in Israel for almost ten years. He was buried near

the Chazon Ish and left a proud heritage, having the merit to see in his children some of the leaders of this generation.

RABBI ABBA SVIATITSKI

He was the third son-in-law of Rabbi Shmariahu Joseph Karelitz and replaced him as Rabbi of Kossova after his death.

He was born in Herlobi, where his father, Reb Gershon, was Rabbi. He was one of the first scholars to learn in the Kollel of Kovna which was founded by Rabbi Israel of Salant, the father of the Mussar Movement. He received Smicha from Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan of Kovna, considered the most outstanding sage of the time. He then served as Rabbi of Brojenka, and, at times, would also preach in the neighbouring Lithuanian villages. When he died at a ripe old age, his son, Reb Abba took his place.

Loyal to the teachings of his ethical teacher, Reb Israel Salanter, he strove to lofty spiritual aspirations and Chassidism in his behaviour. He was ever careful over his speech, never to slander or pollute his language and his prime interest was in his Torah studies.

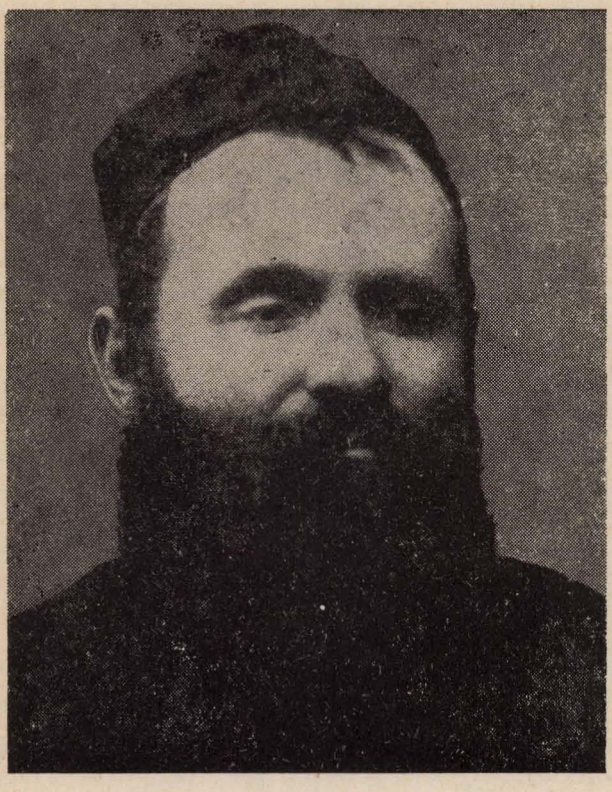
First he learned from his father and then he went to study in Lydda. As he was too near home, he went to Grodna. He had an exceptional brain and excelled in solving mathematical problems, so much so that the high-school pupils from Grodna used to come to him for help with their homework. Reb Abba was soon disturbed by their studies and left Grodna for Sokolka, a small village whose Rabbi, Reb

Isaac Halevi Shuster, befriended him and made him welcome.

It was he, Reb Isaac Halevi, who suggested to Rabbi Karelitz to give his daughter's hand in marriage to this young scholar. At first he took his father's position as Rabbi of Rozonka, after his death, and later he was chosen Rabbi of Kossova instead of his father-in-law. His integrity was so highly estimated that on the petition concerning the vote of the Vilna Rabbi, his name was first to appear.

He was ordained Rabbi of Tiktin, where he again captured the hearts of his constituents. They had prepared a festive and ceremonious inauguration and were amazed when they saw him arrive two days earlier than arranged, in order to avoid the pomp and ceremony. When he heard that the townsfolk were planning to buy him a new fur coat, he strongly objected to the project. "There are more important things in Tiktin on which to spend the money. I only go from my home to the Bet Hamedrash and back again, and for that route I am not in need of fur." He asked them to change his spacious apartment for a more modest one. He also asked them to reduce his salary.

He was part of his people, living in harmony and unison with them. They loved and treasured him and he gave them any advice or help needed. He lived with them and died with them when in 1941, he was taken with his brethren by the Nazis.



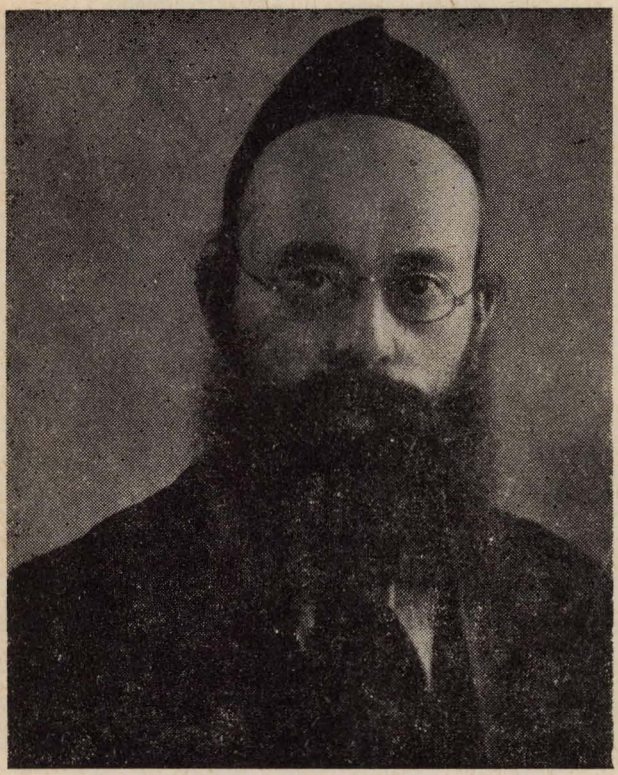
Rabbi Abba Sviatitski

RABBI NACHUM MEIR KARELITZ

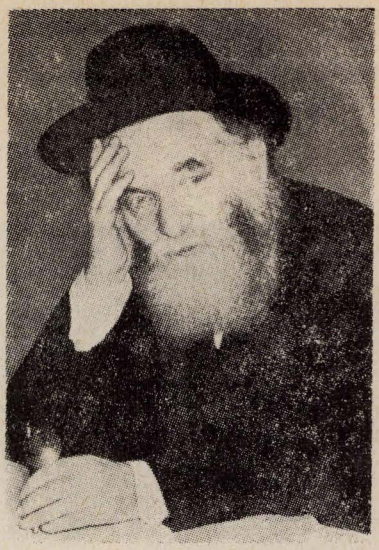
Reb Nachum Meir Karelitz was born in 1889 in the Russian village Hordok near Minsk. His father was a renowned scholar and died when he was very young. His mother was from noble stock and as she had been brought up all her life in true Torah spirit, she knew how to take the responsibility for her son and gave him to her brother, Reb Shlomo Golobenzitz, to educate. He was a Rosh Yeshiva in Minsk and devoted much of his time to his sister's son. One day another orphan came to Minsk. He had lost both his mother and his father and was known as a renowned genius. He was none other than Reb Aharon Kotler. The two very soon became friends and studied together sharing their mutual trials and tribulations and, above all, their common love for the study of Torah.

1905 was the peak of the Socialist Revolution. The Jews of Minsk had good reason to fear the snares of its agitators. They cast their nets at every possibility of catching victims and concentrated on the clever and gifted Torah students. They enticed them by offering external studies in secular fields which would go hand in hand with their Torah learning. Thus they succeeded in drawing many from the confines of the Yeshiva and soon their poisonous glares were to be directed at the two known gaonim of Minsk, Reb Aharon Kotler and Reb Nachum Meir Karelitz. As they had a perceptive awareness of their enticers' intentions, they left for Slabodka.

The two developed differently. While Reb Aharon was making his way successfully, and was rapidly becoming a



Rabbi Nachum Meir Karelitz



Rabbi Aharon Kotler

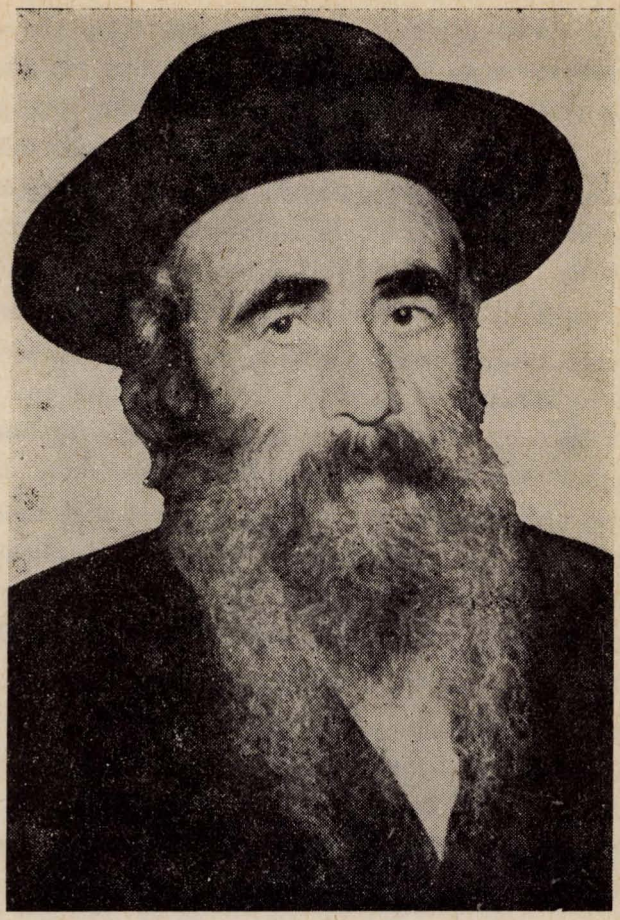
celebrity, Reb Nachum Meir remained incognito, as he wanted to be. Although he gleaned much of his self-development in Slabodka, he soon left for Volozhin and learned under Rabbi Raphael Shapira, the son-in-law of the Natziv. Then he went to Kelm where he became very attached to Rabbi Eliahu Eliezer Dessler. He stayed in Kelm for two years and then went back to Slabodka, back to the most secluded corner he could find. In the throes of the war, he went with the evacuated Slabodka outside the borders of Russia. When they returned to Lithuania, he went to study in Radin. There the Chofetz Chaim discovered his unusual humility combined with the sparkle of genius influenced by Slabodka. He was very much in favour of taking this young man for his youngest daughter, Fayge, but the Rabbi of Kossova preceeded him, and Reb Nachum married Batia Karelitz. He then

changed his name to that of his father-in-law's to enable him to get a Polish visa which was difficult, since he had been a Russian citizen.

After his marriage, he returned to his vocation of study and was wont to be absent from home for long periods. He learned in Mir and sought only to remain in this atmosphere of study incognito. His aspirations were not wholly fulfilled as his wife was an ailing woman and could not bear the burden of their livelihood. He, therefore, became Rabbi in Maishagola. He hoped, in this small village, where there seemed to be few disturbances, to find maximum peace to learn. His wife became even more sick and he was compelled to accomodote himself in the household and even tended the baby. Only at dusk did he find time for learning at which he sat till the morning. People who came during the day, often caught him peeling potatoes and suchlike, and would hurry back the way they came in order not to put the Rabbi to shame. Those who discerned the flicker of a smile at the corners of his mouth, were put at ease and saw that he wasn't in the slightest bit embarrassed.

His greatest characteristic was humility. He never published any of his works; and, when attending Rabbinical meetings, would make as though he knew nothing of what they were saying. After he came to Israel, he aided in the erection of religious schools, helped families out of their troubles, but never allowed his deeds to be known to the public. He became the Rosh Hakollel of the Chazon Ish Kollel and Rabbi of the Heilligman Synagogue in Bnei Brak.

He died in 1959 from a blood disease and is buried near the Chazon Ish in Zichron Meir.



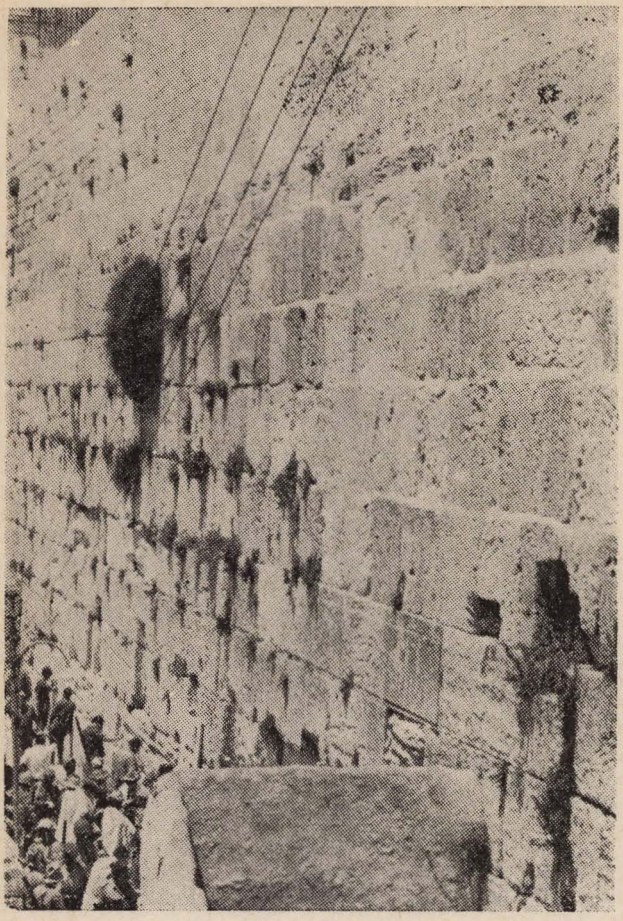
Rabbi Jacob Israel Kaniefeski "Steipler"

RABBI JACOB ISRAEL KANIEFFSKI — THE "STEIPLER"

"A genius in simplicity" is how the fifth brother-in-law of the Chazon Ish is described. He was born and bred in Hornosteiple, a small Ukrainian village, by whose name he is known to this day, as he was the genius of that town. During the days of the First World War, he learned in Novardok and was one of its prize pupils. The cruel Communists gave no peace and recruited even them to the army, where he served in full adherence to the Torah. In 1922, the whole Yeshiva fled from Russia at the advice of the Chofetz Chaim and settled in Poland, where the Steipler continued his studies in Bialistok. In 1925 he published his first book, "Shaarei Tvunah". When the Chazon Ish saw his book, he enquired about him and found that he was a suitable young man for his sister, Miriam. After his marriage, he served as a Rosh Yeshiva in Pinsk in the Yeshiva Bet Joseph, founded by Reb Yitzchak Valdstein.

When he came to Israel, he became Rosh Yeshiva of Bet Joseph in Bnei Brak and later Rosh Kollel of the Chazon Ish Kollel. His magnum opus is his book "Kehilat Yaakov", which has already many volumes. He also wrote two volumes of Mussar, "Chayei Olam" and other essays concerning the practical application of the Halacha as the Chazon Ish interpreted it.

Although he never sought fame or public activity of any kind, when the Chazon Ish died, he was crowned, unofficially, his successor, and people the world over, consider him one of the foremost Torah authorities of this generation.



The Wailing Wall