

THE SHEVA KEHILLOS

Memories of Torah life in the Western Hungarian Oberland Communities



H. Frischman

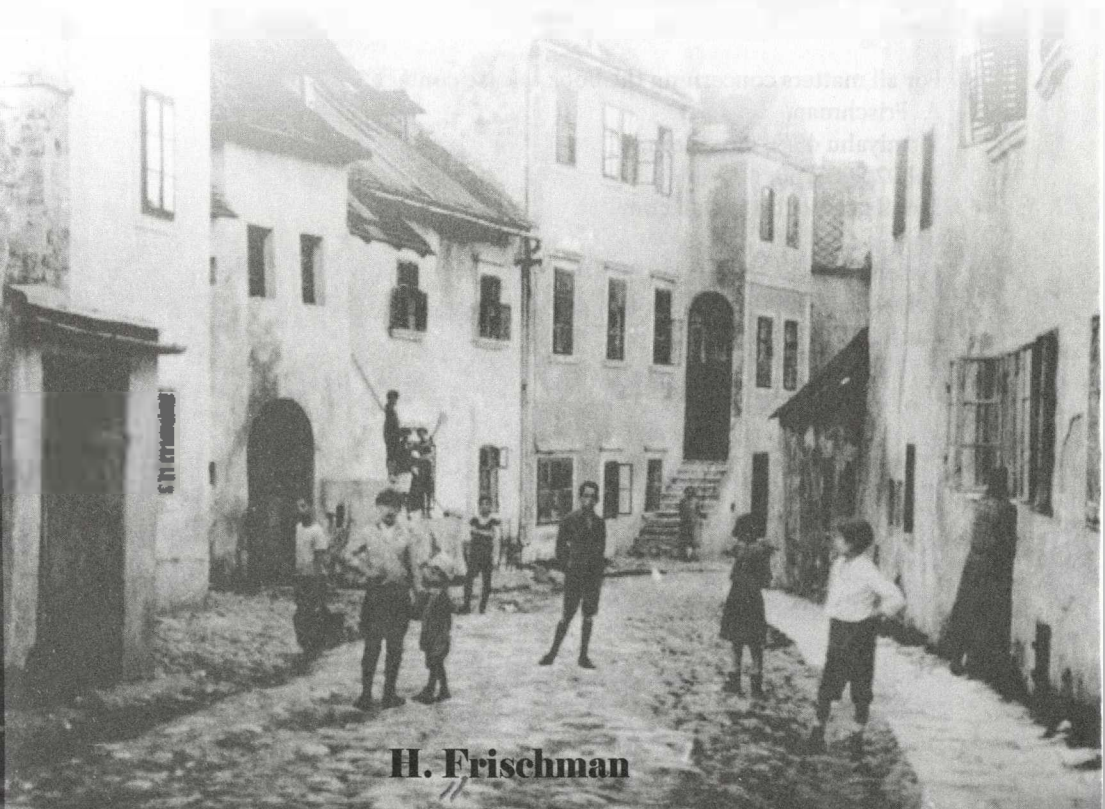
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2025



H. Frischman

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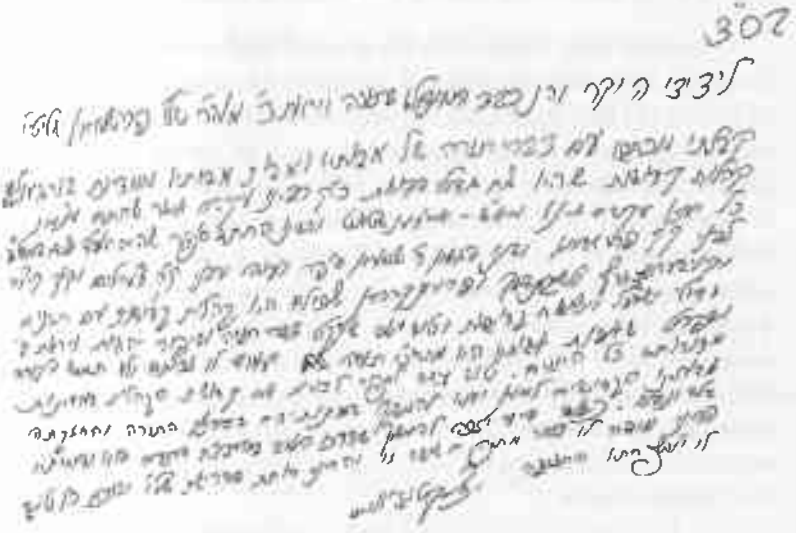
For all matters concerning the book, please contact
A. Frischman,
Yirmiyahu 48/9, Jerusalem,
Tel 02 5003760,
Email kehillos11@gmail.com
or
Hasefer UK
Tel 44 161 7403013
Fax 44 161 7214649

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2025

RABBI I. T. WEISS
CHIEF RABBI
OF JERUSALEM
RECHOV OIVAT MOSHE 2
P.O.B. 50049 JERUSALEM, E. ISRAEL

יצחק טובי' ווייס
רב זאביד
לכל סקהלות האשכנזים
פמיהיק ירושלם תובביא



Approbation for the Hebrew edition, which included chiddushei Torah of Rav Moshe Konig, zt"l, translated on the following page with his permission.

RABBI I. T. WEISS
CHIEF RABBI
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יצחק טובי' וויים
רב ואב"ד
לכל מקהלות האשכנזים
פעיה"ק ירושלם תוכב"א

To my dear, honorable friend, Rav Sholem Frischman, *shlit"a*,

I received your letter with the *divrei Torah* of your ancestors from the holy communities of Burgenland, which were home to [many of] that generation's *gedolim*. Of those were Rabbeinu Akiva Eiger, who always signed his name as Akiva Güns from Eisenstadt; Rabbeinu the Chasam Sofer, who was the *av beis din* in Mattersdorf, before serving in Pressburg; his son, Rav Shimon Sofer; as well as the *rabbanim* of Tzehlem, Kitzee, Kobersdorf, Lakenbach and Frauenkirchen. These towns were all holy communities, with *gedolei Yisrael* as *rabbanim*, and with *yeshivos kedoshos*. How wonderful it is that you compiled *divrei Torah* and stories about *Yiddishkeit* and *yiras Hashem*, especially since your ancestors were disseminators of Torah there. May your ancestors' merit stand by you, and may the Torah never leave your descendants.

You did well by documenting the sanctity of our holy ancestors' communities so that the future generations will follow in their ways, disseminating Torah and supporting it, with heart and soul. May you, my honored friend — and your descendants — merit continuing in your wonderful path of disseminating Torah. I thank you for this important gift.

Signed with warm wishes and a blessing of all that is good for you and your distinguished family,

Yitzchak Tuvia Weiss

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Introduction

This work is the fulfillment of the Torah's directive (*Devarim* 32:7), "*Zechor yemos olam, binu shenos dor va-dor* — Remember days of yore; contemplate the years of one generation and another."

Depictions of the old-time shtetl not only evoke nostalgia among Jewish readers, but also induce aspirations to emulate the piety and devotion of the *ehrliche Yidden* of yesteryear. These righteous individuals led simple and unsophisticated lives, steeped in Torah and mitzvos, and strictly adhered to every one of the 613 commandments amid various difficulties and tribulations. These are the people whose example we strive to follow.

The communities of Eastern Europe were structured in the following manner: every one the pious villagers — from the greatest Torah scholar to the simplest laborer — united in one single community. There was one central shul, and everyone davened together. Every aspect in these *kehillos* was run in accordance with halachah and with strong emphasis on Jewish custom, all carried out under the auspices of the *rav*, who was treated with tremendous reverence by every member of his community.

This book is an attempt to provide readers with a taste of life in the shtetl, some historical details and facets of the communities of Western Hungary, and of the lives of the prominent *rabbanim* who were the community leaders.

In order to maintain readability and avoid having the book evolve into an encyclopedia, it was necessary to base the narrative on an entity and select an individual around whose life the story would be

told. Rather then choose an imaginary character, it was preferable to base the story on the life of an authentic personality, one who actually existed and lived during a tumultuous era for Klal Yisrael. A rational choice for this was to base the narrative upon the life history of one of my ancestors, a great *talmid chachom*.

While growing up, I heard much from my grandparents about their lifetime before the war. They both grew up in the Sheva Kehillos — my grandfather in Tzehlem and grandmother in Kobersdorf. They had fond memories of those times and would often reminiscence about "the good old days." Specifically my grandmother would proudly talk about a scholarly grandfather of hers, Rav Moshe König (usually pronounced "Keinig"), the *dayan* of the village. Recently, she has been expressing her strong feelings that it is time to do something to honor his memory. Therefore the family extended tremendous effort to locate and refurbish his *kever*, and additionally to collect his *chiddushim* and compile them in a *sefer*. Searching for his *chiddushim* — and additional research — has resulted in the creation of this book, which we hope fulfills the Torah's dictum, "*zechor yemos olam*."

The current work is based on my grandmother's memories — the countless interviews with her provided many details of the story. Furthermore, she spearheaded and financed the research. As such, I chose to have the book written as her narrative, and to conclude with some of her experiences during the Holocaust.

May the memory of the pious people mentioned in this volume provide inspiration for all readers. May reading about their noble characteristics motivate us to emulate their ways, and may the mitzvos engendered serve as a merit to their descendants and to all of Klal Yisrael.

Foreword

From a young age, I knew to be proud of the fact that I was the granddaughter of the illustrious Rav Moshe Konig, who served as a *dayan* in the village of Kobersdorf, one of the *sheva kehillos* in Burgenland, Austria. We were told that he delivered many *shiurim*, and people from all over the district would come to listen. I actually never knew him, since he passed away before I was born. But I used to frequently visit my grandmother, his Rebbetzin.

I have very fond memories of the time I spent with her. She was a great *tzaddekes*. She fiercely guarded the memory of her righteous husband. Many shelves of *sefarim* lined the walls of the room in which he sat and learned, and the room remained untouched after his passing.

I recall once going up into the attic and finding a large bundle of letters in envelopes with stamps from many different locales. I thought it would make a good stamp collection, but when I mentioned it to my grandmother, she scolded me for tampering, explaining that those were from the many letters, *shailos* and *divrei Torah* sent to my grandfather from *rabbanim* all over the country.

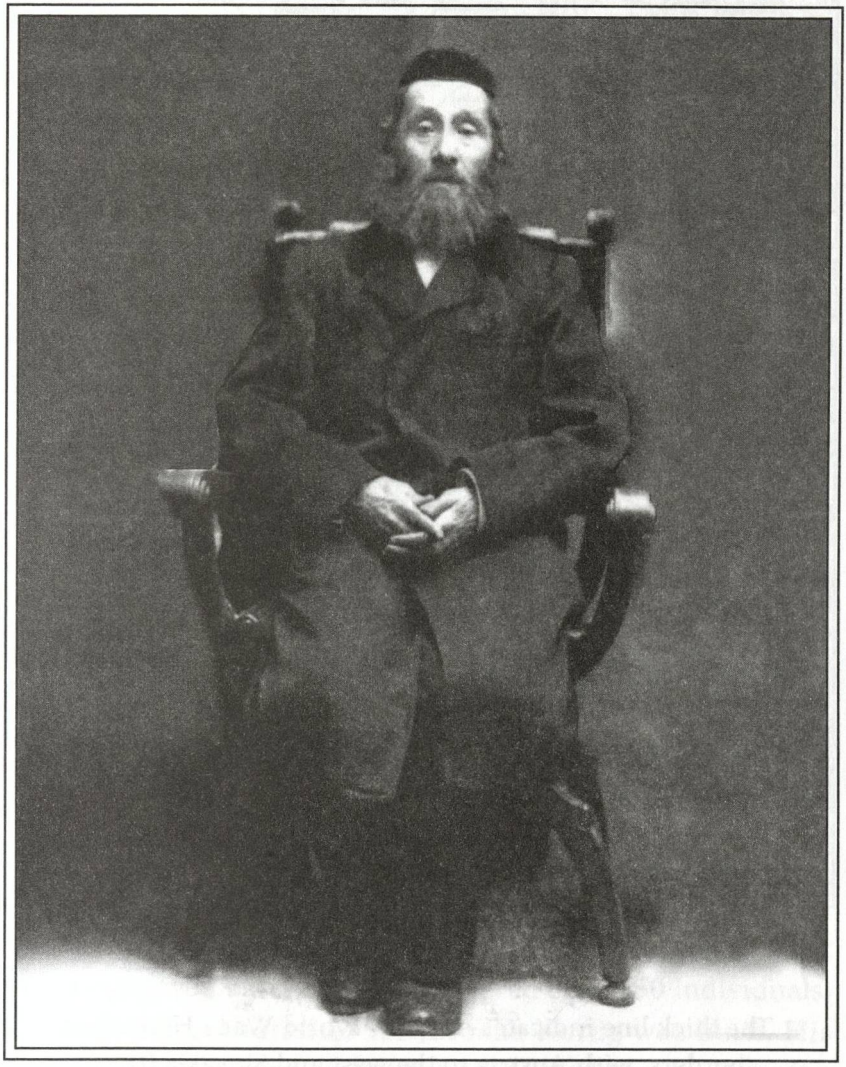
Recently, on the occasion of Rav Moshe's hundredth *yahrtzeit*, the family has undertaken to commemorate his memory. For years, we had no idea where his *kever* was, but with noticeable *hashgachah pratis*, his *kever* has been located and refurbished. Amazingly, on the day of his *yahrzeit*, his father's *kever* was also found in the cemetery in Vienna. Furthermore, many of his manuscripts have recently been discovered, and we hope, with the help of Hashem, to compile them and print a *sefer* of his *chiddushim*.

It is discernable from his writings that he was a tremendous *talmid chacham*, well-versed in all the segments of the Torah. Additionally, there are many letters of his printed in the Torah journals of his time, in which he reveals a vast scope of knowledge, not only in Shas and *Rishonim*, but also in a multitude of *sefarim* of later authors. This is aside from his own *chiddushim*, which encompass all areas of the Torah.

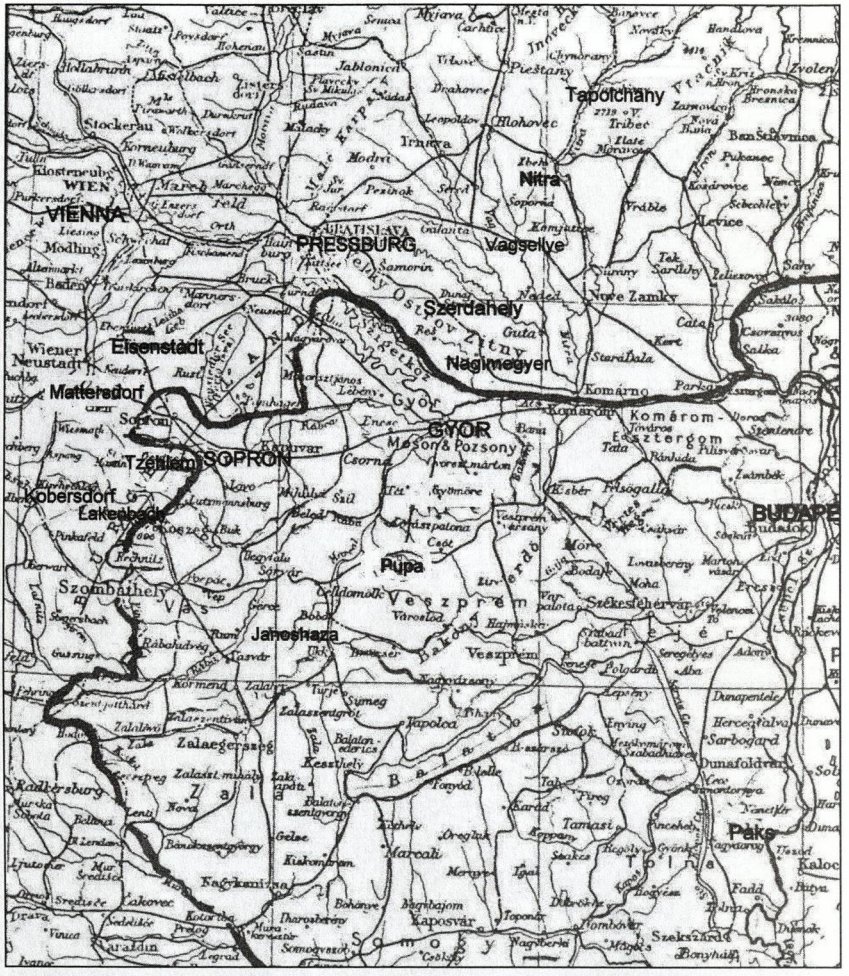
We have, *b'siyatta d'Shemaya*, accumulated a great deal of information on his life and times. This includes many details concerning Hungarian Jewry of his era, which shed some light on the struggles and triumphs of Orthodox Jewry from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the decimation of the communities during World War II.

I will end with much thanks to Hashem for all the kindness He has shown us over the years. After emerging from the ashes of the Holocaust, following the years of suffering in Auschwitz, and later in the Allendorf labor camp, I came to England as a penniless refugee. I merited, together with my husband Rav Yosef *z"l*, who passed away on 7 Cheshvan 2012, to bring up a family of *ehrliche Yidden* going in the way of their pious forebears. I beseech Hashem to continue showing us His kindness and that I continue to see *nachas* from all my descendants.

H. Frischman
London, 5775



Rav Moshe Halevy Konig zt"l



Map of Western Hungary

The thick line indicates the post-World War I Hungarian borders, with Austria to the west and Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia) to the north. Towns and villages mentioned in this book are marked in bold, and translated where applicable.

1 Village of Childhood

Nagy-Megyer

My family's roots lie in Nagy-Megyer, a small town then in western Hungary. It is situated approximately seventy kilometers from Bratislava (Pressburg), although since the end of World War I, the area has changed hands a number of times. Following the war, it was annexed to Czechoslovakia, and then in 1938 was returned to Hungary. At present, the town, called Velky-Meder, is part of Slovakia and is situated near the Hungarian border.

A small group of Jews came to settle in Nagy-Megyer in the late eighteenth century. The Jewish community was not very large, even at its climax numbered only 550 individuals. In 1843, my grandfather Rav Moshe Konig was born. His father, R' Asher, was one of the leaders of the community. Incidentally, this is also where I was born many years later, in 1926.

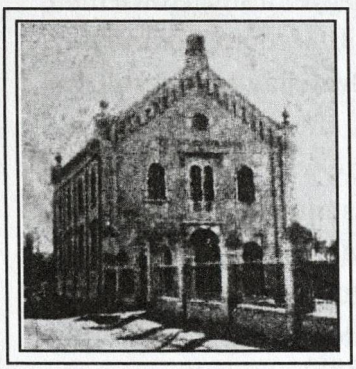
Initially the town's Jewish residency didn't exist as a proper organized community. For *kehillah* amenities, the Jews had to rely on the nearby community of Dunajka-Streda, known in Yiddish as Szerdahely. Szerdahely was a large, fully established

community, which held under its auspices the Jews of some fifty villages and hamlets in the region.

Forming the Kehillah

Eventually in the 1820s, the inhabitants of Nagy-Megyer established a community of their own. In 1832 they appointed a local *talmid chachom*, Rav Dovid Hersh Levinger, to the official position of *rav*, in which to guide the community and lead them. Rav Dovid was a great *talmid chachom*, and there exists written correspondence between him and the Chasam Sofer.

At the outset, the community experienced some difficulties. The townspeople were not very well-off and they couldn't even afford a decent salary to pay the Rav for his services. We see this in a letter from that period penned by Rav Levinger which demonstrates his dire straits. The year was 1844, when an assembly of the Orthodox community leaders of Hungary was called to take place in Paks. Rav Levinger was invited but didn't attend the conference; however he sent a letter apologizing for his absence, explaining that he simply was unable to afford the fare for the journey from Nagy-Megyer to Paks.



The shul in Nagy-Megyer

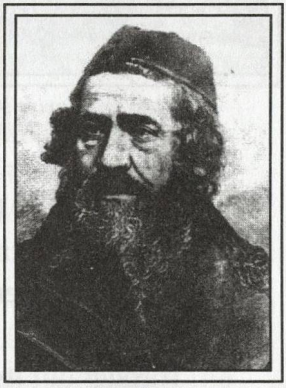
As time went on, a number of the town's Jews attained financial security; some were successful in commerce and others through industrial enterprises which they set up. With this the community began to thrive and the necessary amenities were instituted. They were able to establish a Talmud Torah, as well as a *shechitah* house and a *chevrah kaddisha*. Also, a

number of welfare societies were instituted to assist the poor and to visit and provide aid for the sick.

Most of the town's Jews resided in the center of the town and many of the businesses were under Jewish ownership. With time the Jewish community gained a place of prominence in the town and the Jews were considered an integral element of the population in general.

The Rabbinate

In 1858 Rav Yosef Dov Ber Lok (1814-1880) was appointed as Chief Rabbi in Nagy-Megyer. His studies had begun at a young age when he went to learn in Pressburg under the Chasam Sofer. He was privileged to continue his studies under the Ksav Sofer — who gave him *semichah*, rabbinical ordination. After his marriage, he served as *dayan* in Tzehlem and then as *rav* of Kaposvár, until his appointment to lead the community of Nagy-Megyer where he served for over twenty years, until his passing.



Rav of Nagy-Megyer, Rav Yosef Dov Lok

Rav Yosef Dov was respected universally by Jews and non-Jews alike. He extended much effort to instill his *kehillah* with correct values and to teach them the Torah way of life. The community flourished significantly during his tenure. It was in this time that a magnificent shul building was erected, built through the generosity of a wealthy member of the community named R' Aharon Cohen. This philanthropist was a *talmid chacham* as well and had tremendous respect for Jewish values. The building was used until the decimation of the *kehillah* in 1944.

Upon Rav Lok's passing, his son-in-law Rav Yehoshua Heschel Weiss took over the rabbinate and served for forty years, until his passing in 1920. His position was then taken over by his son-in-law Rav Shmuel Shatin who served there until 1938.



Business enterprise in Nagy-Megyer, owned by A. Cohen

The Jewish community members were meticulous in their adherence to *mitzvos* and *chessed*, they were known for the appropriate *kavod* with which they acted toward the Torah and *chachomim*, and they strove to instill these values in their children. Incidentally, over the years, there were a number of great *talmidei chachomim* who took up residence there, which positively impacted the atmosphere in the town.

Throughout its existence, there was only the single Orthodox community in the town and everything within it was run according to the Torah. This continued so up until the decimation of the *kehillah* during World War II.

2 The Konig Family

R' Asher Konig

A pious and learned Jew, R' Asher Konig, lived in Nagy-Megyer. Though he didn't hold an official position, he was a highly respected member of the community and well-known for his Torah learning and his piety.

Particularly in the *kehillah*'s early years, before it became fully functional, he devoted himself to assist the locals in their Yiddishkeit and applied himself to disseminate and teach the laws of the Torah. Not only did R' Asher teach and advise the townspeople, he was also the address for residents of outlying villages in the vicinity, who would often turn to him for guidance on how to run their affairs according to halachah. When necessary, he would refer the issue for the judgment of one the of generation's leaders.

Consequently, he developed a relationship with a number of *gedolim*, in particular with the great *gaon* Rav Yehudah Assod, the *rav* of nearby Szerdahely. Their warm relationship is apparent by the way Rav Yehudah addresses him in his letters: "My dear and beloved friend R' Asher."

R' Asher would readily avail himself to assist the *rabbanim* in serving their communities; one example of this was concerning

a serious predicament that occurred in the nearby town of Komaron. Many of the locals aligned themselves with the Neologist sect — a stream of the Reform movement. The *rav* in Komaron at the time, who was a great *talmid chachom*, had to contend with rebelliousness from these people, who sought to undermine his influence and instead insert their amendments into the Torah way of life.

Certain breaches had been sighted in the behavior of a *shochet* from that town, and R' Asher became involved. After R' Asher resolved this concern, Rav Yehudah requested that R' Asher be available to assist the *rav* specifically in monitoring the *shechitah* and to be on the lookout for any infringement on the part of the *shochtim*.

R' Asher would also readily put himself to the assistance of the *rav* of his hometown, Rav Yosef Dov Lok. Even though R' Asher and the *rav* were about the same age, and R' Asher was a person of status in his own right, he accorded the due respect to the *rav*, and was always available to heed any request the *rav* put forth.

In the year 1872, there was a terrible famine in faraway Persia. Persian Jewry suffered immensely, and Jewish communities all over the world rallied to create a charity fund on their behalf. In a letter Rav Yosef Dov Lok penned, he enumerates the activities for this cause undertaken by the *askanim*. He commends R' Asher Konig, along with another two distinguished community members, for the work they did to establish this fund, ending his letter with the words "so that others would see these accomplishments and emulate their deeds."

The Family Members

In 1836, R' Asher's wife Sarah gave birth to their son, Meir Zvi. Unfortunately, they didn't merit bringing him up together, as Sarah passed away shortly after his birth, leaving R' Asher a widower with an infant to take care of.

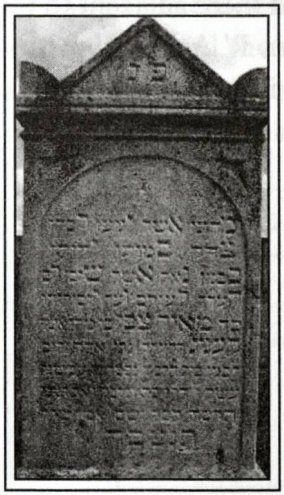
A short while later, R' Asher married his second wife, Perel, and together they had three children. In 1843, their son Rav Moshe was born. They had another son Avraham Chaim, and later, in 1853, their daughter Leah was born.

Years later, in about 1880, R' Asher left Nagy-Megyer and moved to Vienna. There as before, he gained renown for his piety and for his scholarship as he spent his days learning and teaching Torah to students. He passed away on 24 Cheshvan, 1890 and was buried in the Vienna cemetery.



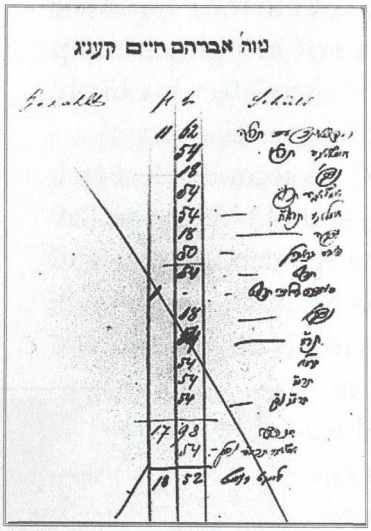
Kever of R' Asher Konig in Vienna

His oldest son Meir Zvi remained in Nagy-Megyer for the rest of his life, eventually prospering in business. He owned a flour mill and became extremely wealthy. The tremendous respect R' Asher had exhibited for *rabbanim* left a positive impression on his children, and his son Meir Zvi emulated his ways. He utilized his wealth to enhance the honor of the Torah and its scholars by supporting many significant causes.


Kever of Meir Zvi Konig

Prominent amongst his endeavors was a huge contribution — one thousand gulden — which he donated

toward building a respectable home for the *rav* of the town. This deed was eternally remembered by the townspeople, and after his death they had the detail of this donation inscribed on his *matzeivah*.



Page in Kobersdorf pinkas listing yearly dues paid by R' Avraham Chaim Konig

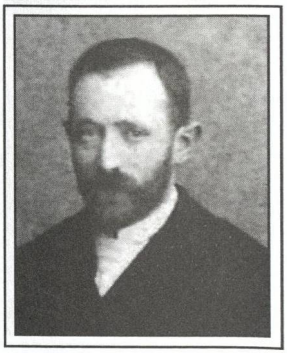
Over the years, he also gave his brother, Rav Moshe, financial assistance, especially when it came time to marry off his children. On Chanukah 1908, Meir Zvi passed away.

The other brother, Avraham Chaim, married a Gerstl from Kobersdorf and settled there, near his brother Rav Moshe. Unfortunately he didn't merit a long life and passed away at a young age in 1888.

Leah Konig married Dovid Adler and lived in Vienna. She lived there until her death on 17 Elul 1915, and is buried there adjacent to the *kever* of her father, R' Asher. Her husband Dovid died in 1932 and was laid to rest alongside her. They had a son and two daughters. The son, Dov (known by the family as Bertchie), was born in 1886. He was named after Leah's grandfather, R' Asher's father. He lived in Vienna until during World War I when he was drafted to serve



Kever of Dovid and Leah Adler



Dovid Adler

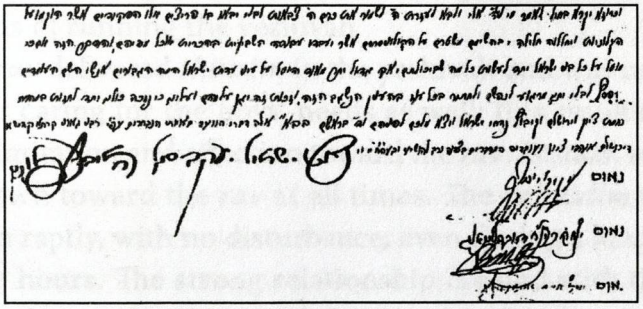
in the Austrian army. Sometime between the two wars, he immigrated to Eretz Yisrael and lived in Yerushalayim until his death in 1978. Sadly, he had no children.

Rav Yitzchak Konig

Rav Asher had a brother Rav Yitzchak, known to the family as Rav Itzik. He was a great *talmid chachom*, with *chiddushim* of his quoted by contemporary authors in their *sefarim*, and had a relationship with a number of Hungarian Jewry's leaders. Sometime around 1860 he settled in Mezo-túr, a Hungarian village, serving there as the village *shochet*.

Later, at the end of the 1870s, Rav Yitzchak emigrated to Eretz Yisrael, and settled in Yerushalayim. While there, he utilized his previously forged connections to assist the inhabitants of the Holy Land. We see his prestige in a letter sent by the *rabbanim* of Yerushalayim, cosigned by Rav Yitzchak and Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, among others, which they penned to Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer requesting of him to arrange assistance toward the upkeep of *shemittah*.

During his lifetime he was held in high esteem by the residents of Yerushalayim which is noted by the text on his



Signature of Rav Yitzchak Konig alongside Jerusalem Rabbis

kever. Rav Yitzchak passed away in 1914 and is buried on Har Hazeisim. Over the years his nephew Rav Moshe Konig maintained contact with him as we see him being mentioned in Rav Moshe's writings.

Rav Moshe's Younger Years

It was in this atmosphere, steeped in Torah and *yiras Shamayim* that Rav Moshe grew up. His great achievements in Torah were acquired through the incredible diligence with which he exerted himself in his Torah learning.

Rav Moshe himself referred in his old age to the diligence of his younger years, in a letter he wrote to a *rav* who had expressed his amazement of Rav Moshe's Torah knowledge, and had addressed him with the title "*Gaon*." Rav Moshe humbly responded, "You are mistaken in crowning me with the title *gaon*; I have nothing to show for myself. All I am is a simple scholar with some mastery in Torah knowledge, achieved through having exerted myself in my learning in the years of my youth."

3 The Yeshivah System

Rav Moshe acquired his way of learning from the great teachers under whom he merited to study. He spent a number of years, during his youth and beyond, learning in the yeshivahs of some of the greatest luminaries of his era.

The Town Rav as Rosh Yeshivah

During this time it was the responsibility of the town *rav* — in addition to his other rabbinical obligations — to run all aspects of the yeshivah. Indeed, he considered the running of the yeshivah to be his main priority. Hence we see in the letters responding to other *rabbanim* apologies for the delay in the reply due to the *rav* being occupied with the demands of running the yeshivah.

The *rav* delivered *shiurim* in the yeshivah and was responsible for caring for the boys' needs as well; this resulted in a deep admiration and affection toward the *rav*. Utmost respect was shown toward the *rav* at all times. The *talmidim* would all listen raptly, with no disturbance, even during a long *shiur* of three hours. The strong relationship created with the *rav* continued long after they had left the yeshivah, as we see even

later on in life it was common for students to define themselves as "the *talmid* of Rav so-and-so."

Many outlying towns and villages were too small to create their own yeshivahs, so the young boys of these villages would travel to the prominent yeshivahs in the larger towns. Basically, there were two types of yeshivahs: 1) yeshivahs with a high level of learning, geared for the more mature students in order to prepare them for the Rabbinate; 2) yeshivahs aimed for younger students, not necessarily to mold them into Torah leaders, but rather to guide the youngsters toward leading a Torah way of life.

The Bachurim's Living Conditions

Unlike yeshivahs today, there was no central yeshivah building, and every *bachur* was responsible for arranging his own lodgings and meals. Usually a group of four or five boys would join together and rent out a room to sleep in. The *rav* would keep track of the boys' accommodations, taking an interest in their welfare.

So great was the concern of the *rav* for their wellbeing, that even the greatest Torah leaders would assume this responsibility and would personally pay visits to the *bachurim's* lodgings to take note of their conduct. It is recounted that the great Rav Mordechai Banet of Nikolsberg would make these rounds in person, and if, for example, he would notice a boy sleeping in a position contrary to halachah, he would immediately awaken him to correct this. Similar routine is recounted about the Chasam Sofer during his years teaching and leading his yeshivah in Mattersdorf. Moreover, when encountering a *bachur* toiling over his learning during the late hours of the night, the *rav* would display his great satisfaction.

Generally, the yeshivahs didn't have a designated *beis midrash*, so the studies as well as the *rav*'s *shiurim* would take place in the local shul. In addition to this, there were no dining rooms, and the boys would have to find meals in the homes of local *ba'alei batim*. This arrangement, called "*essen-teg*," was not always so simple. Bashful *bachurim* who lacked the fortitude to approach people with the request for dining would frequently go hungry.

There was also the problem with some *baalei batim* who didn't willingly open their homes for the *bachurim* and would do so reluctantly, only to fulfill their obligation to the *rav*. This would result in paltry scraps of food being shared with the *bachurim*, resulting in many hard feelings on both sides.

A story is told about a *bachur* who was eating a Shabbos meal with a local family. The family served him a meager portion which he accepted graciously. During the meal, he overheard one of the little children asking the mother excitedly, "I want the apple strudel, when are you serving it?" The mother whispered back, "Shh, when the *bachur* goes, we'll bring it out." The *bachur* concluded his meal and left. A few moments later he returned to the house, knocked on the door, apologizing that he had left his handkerchief behind. He entered the home and witnessed the family heartily relishing the apple strudel, and the host, somewhat embarrassed, apologized to the boy for forgetting to offer him a piece, to which the *bachur* quipped, "Apology accepted, but I, by the way, didn't forget my handkerchief!"

Sometimes the *bachur* felt that the spiritual level of the home was not up to his standards, and in such cases the *rav* would have to act as the "sounding board." He had to listen to each *bachur's* grievances and decide how to respond to each situation. A *bachur* learning in the Szerdahely yeshivah once came to complain to the *rav*, Rav Yehudah Assod, about the

family he had been assigned. He told the *rav* that he had seen the host eating on the Seventeenth of Tammuz, a fast day, and he refused to eat there anymore. Rav Yehudah patiently heard him out and then retorted, "Okay, so from now on, you should indeed not eat in their house on the Seventeenth of Tammuz."

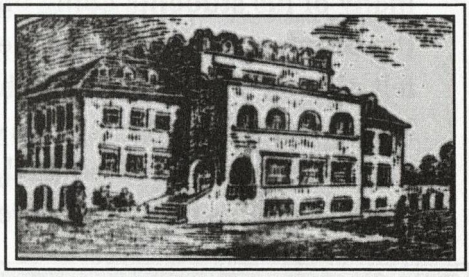
In general these stories were few and far between, as the *baalei batim* usually considered it a privilege to host the *bachurim*, whose presence would enhance the atmosphere in their homes.

Nagy-Megyer was one of the smaller villagers which didn't have a yeshivah of its own, so Rav Moshe left home at a young age to learn out of town. Over the years he had the merit to learn in a number of the most famous yeshivahs of Hungary and to hear Torah from some of the greatest *geonim* of his time.

4 The Great Yeshivah of Pressburg

As a young bachur, Rav Moshe's parents sent him to learn in the famed yeshivah in Pressburg, under the guidance of the holy *gaon*, Rav Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer *zt"l*, author of the *Ksav Sofer*.

The yeshivah in Pressburg was one of the oldest — and undeniably the most distinguished — yeshivahs in central Europe. The yeshivah was actually established many years prior to the Chasam Sofer's tenure as *rav* of Pressburg. Already as early as 1730, there existed a small yeshivah in town, and then later in the 1760s it gained prominence, under the guidance of Rav Meir B'rabi and afterward under Rav Meshulem Igra.

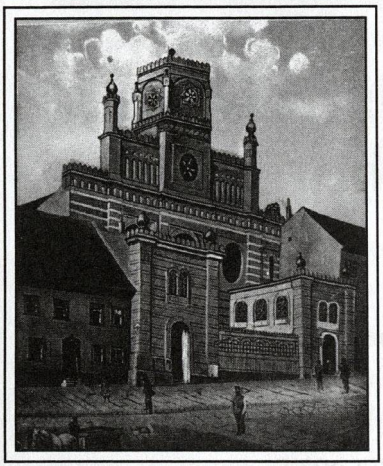


The yeshivah building in Pressburg

The Yeshivah Under the Chasam Sofer

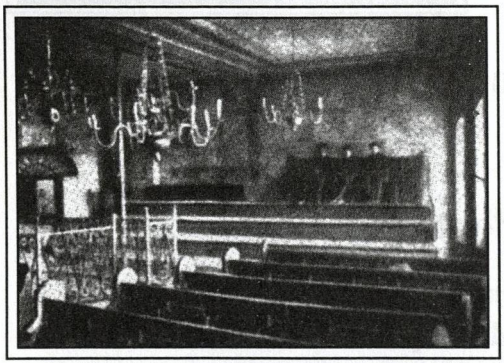
The yeshivah's golden era though, was no doubt its years under the leadership of the Chasam Sofer. In 1806, the Chasam Sofer left his position as *rav* of

Mattersdorf in preference for the Rabbinate in Pressburg. Apparently he was drawn to accept that position due to the understanding that in Pressburg he would have the facility to teach Torah to a larger group of students. In the Chasam Sofer's rabbinical contract, the community leaders of Pressburg committed to support a yeshivah for both local and out-of-town *bachurim*. The Chasam Sofer viewed this as an opportunity to increase the dissemination of Torah.



Shul of the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg

Under his leadership, the yeshivah flourished tremendously and grew in leaps and bounds, over the years producing a large number of great *talmidei chachomim*, with many of his students going on to lead communities all over the country. Consequently, the Chasam Sofer's influence was felt all over the country and he was recognized as leader of Hungarian Jewry. The method of learning and teaching which he had set forth was emulated by many of the Hungarian yeshivahs and his teachings were studied far and wide.



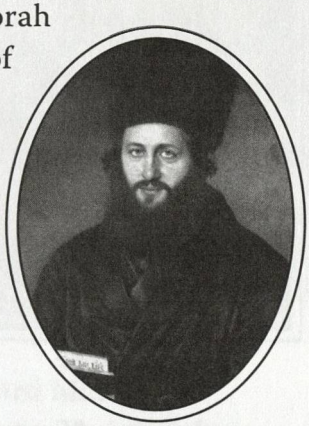
Shiur room in the Pressburg yeshivah

The local government officials recognized the yeshivah as an institution for advanced studies, and affirmed that the service provided by the yeshivah was in the best interests of the country's citizens. Thus all *bachurim* who studied in the yeshivah for

an extended period were granted an exemption from conscription to the armed forces.

The Chasam Sofer led the community and headed the yeshivah for thirty-three years, until his passing on the 25 Tishrei 1839. With his demise, a great void was felt by the Torah and yeshivah world.

Prior to his passing, he had instructed his descendants and his students to ensure that the sound of Torah should not diminish from within the walls of the yeshivah. The community leaders diligently acceded his will, and appointed his son the Ksav Sofer to fill the position of his illustrious father as *rav* of Pressburg and to head the yeshivah. Although at that point he was still a young man, they willingly accepted upon themselves his authority without qualms, and related to him with due reverence, as befitting the son of his saintly father and with him being a proficient scholar in his own right. As a matter of fact, before his passing, the Chasam Sofer had already appointed his son, the Ksav Sofer, to give a weekly *shiur* in the yeshivah.



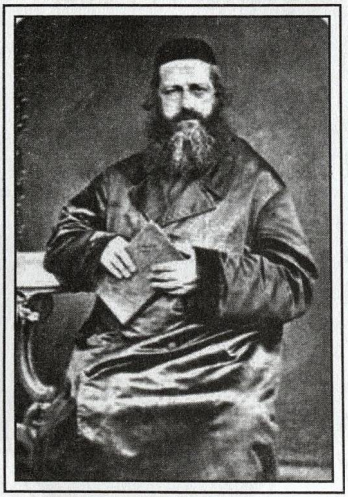
The Ksav Sofer as a young man

The Ksav Sofer Leads

When the Ksav Sofer took over the position at the helm of the yeshivah, the student body numbered hundreds of *bachurim*, all steeped in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. During his tenure, the yeshivah flourished, and *bachurim* continued to flock from far and wide to learn under his tutelage. Just like in his father's days the holy

atmosphere of the yeshivah continued under the leadership of the Ksav Sofer.

Rav Moshe Yosef Hoffman, *dayan* in Pupa, was a student of the Ksav Sofer. In his memoirs, he aptly describes his impressions the first time he entered the yeshivah's study hall, and relates how the holy atmosphere and the extremely high spiritual level was palpable to all. He notes that the Ksav Sofer would supervise every aspect of the yeshivah, concerning himself greatly with the level of learning of every single one of his students. As a result, anyone learning in the yeshivah made great strides in Torah and in *yiras Shamayim*. He ends his narrative, exclaiming, "Fortunate is the one who had the merit to learn in his yeshivah, to serve him and to kiss his hands."



The Ksav Sofer

Rav Moshe's Relationship with the Ksav Sofer

Just like the many parents of diligent boys from all over the country who vied for the merit to have their sons learn in the great yeshivah of Pressburg, so too R' Asher Konig sent his young son Moshe away from home to study under the Ksav Sofer.

Even long after Rav Moshe left the yeshivah, he always considered himself a student of the Ksav Sofer, referring back to the days he learned under him. He continued learning from the Ksav Sofer by toiling over his *sefarim*. As a matter of fact,

the family still possesses Rav Moshe's personal copy of the *sefer Ksav Sofer* on Torah — with many hand-written notes of his in the margins.In his writings, Rav Moshe would frequently quote the works of his great *rebbi*, the Ksav Sofer, and would discuss his words as a *talmid* before his *rebbi*. When quoting from his *rebbi's* sefer in his own *chiddushim*, Rav Moshe would introduce the quote as follows: "These are the words of my master, my *rebbi*; I, his student, state in the notes as follows."



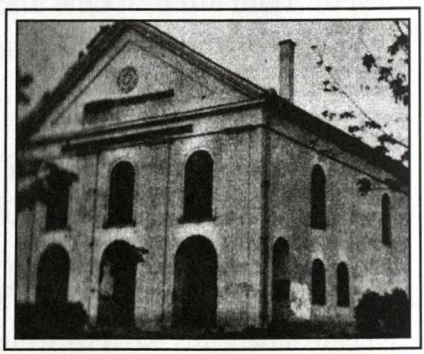
Kever of the Ksav Sofer

Likewise there are many times in his writings that he relates similarly to the words of his *rebbi*, showing his tremendous admiration and affection toward him.

5 In Szerdahely Under Rav Yehudah Assod

After learning in the yeshivah of Pressburg, Rav Moshe also spent a number of years learning in the yeshivah of the holy *gaon* Rav Yehudah Assod in Szerdahely.

The community of Szerdahely was one of prominence among the towns and villages of the region. It was one of the more ancient communities of Hungary, and as early as 1739, the local Jews were granted certain rights by the ruling nobility to run their affairs autonomously. A tract of land was allocated for the use of the Jewish community, on which they built their shul and designated a spot for a cemetery. The community with its facilities served not only the residents of Szerdahely, but also close to fifty other small towns and villages in the vicinity, whose population had subservience to the Rabbinate of Szerdahely and turned to them for their religious services.



The old shul in Szerdahely

Rav Yehudah Assod

Rav Yehudah Assod was one of the greatest *geonim* of Hungary, and during his leadership the community flourished tremendously. So revered was he by the *rabbanim* from all over the country and beyond that even the greatest authorities of the time, such as the Chasam Sofer and Rav Shlomo Kluger from Brod, would turn to him for his opinion.



Rav Yehudah Assod

His greatness was apparent already in his youth while learning in the yeshivah of the great Rav Mordechai Banet in Nikolsberg. Aside from serving as rav of Nikolsberg and head of the yeshivah there, Rav Mordechai was also the Chief Rabbi of the whole land of Mahren (today, Czech Republic). However, his many communal obligations notwithstanding, Rav Mordechai ran the yeshivah and invested great effort for the benefit of his students, developing tremendous *talmidei chachomim* toiling in Torah with purity. Consequently, many of his *talmidim* went on to hold leadership positions across Europe. Rav Mordechai saw brilliance and great potential in his *talmid* Rav Yehudah Assod and despite his young age, he appointed him to teach a group of fifty students of the yeshivah.



Rav Mordechai Banet

In 1826, while still a young man, Rav Yehudah was appointed as *dayan* in Szerdahely. After serving in this position

for a number of years, he left Szerdahely and went on to serve as *rav* in a number of other communities. Later, in 1852, he returned and was appointed as Chief Rabbi and *rosh yeshivah* of Szerdahely. He was soon recognized as a leader of Hungarian Jewry and he took control during the conflicts for the upkeep of authentic Yiddishkeit in the country.

Around this time, the Orthodox communities of Hungary were faced with a difficulty. The Neologists had been working on persuading Kaiser Franz Josef to patronise their beliefs, which if successful would result in harsh decrees against the religious communities under his rule. The Orthodox Jews in their distress assembled a delegation of *rabbanim* to plead with the Kaiser; Rav Yehudah was appointed to lead this group. Indeed, the delegation made a favorable impression on the Kaiser and he acceded to their entreaty to withdraw from the anti-religious motives. At the conclusion of the meeting, he requested that the rabbis bestow upon him their blessing — and all eyes turned to Rav Yehudah, indicating that he was most worthy to grant a blessing. Respectfully Rav Yehudah consented, blessing the Kaiser that he merit living and continuing ruling for many years to come. Indeed his blessing bore fruit, and not only did the Kaiser lived to a ripe old age, he also held onto his reign for many years (1848 – 1916).

However, amid all of his responsibilities, Rav Yehudah's main objective was to teach Torah to his students in his yeshivah. *Bachurim* from all over the country were attracted to his greatness and flocked from all over to come and learn from him. They gained from him immensely and many great *talmidei chachomim* emerged from his yeshivah.

Rav Moshe's Relationship with Rav Yehudah

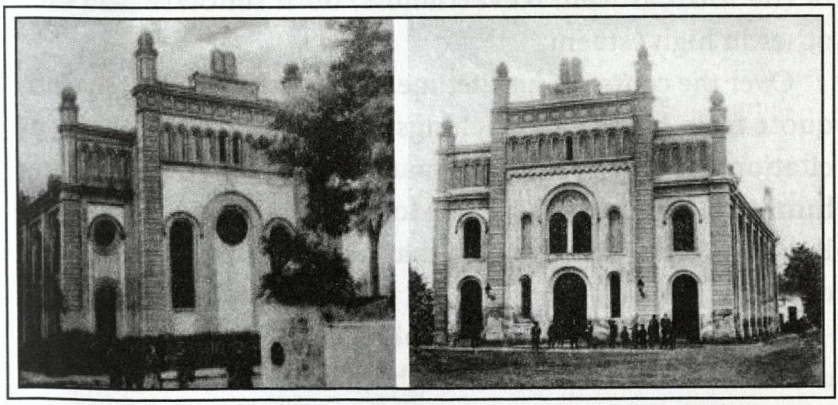
For Rav Moshe it was an obvious choice to learn there, as his father R' Asher was closely acquainted with Rav Yehudah. As a matter of fact, in a letter Rav Yehudah sent to R' Asher, he mentions Rav Moshe's presence in his yeshivah: "To my beloved friend the *tzaddik* R' Asher Konig, I received your letter via your son, my dear student."



Kever of Rav Yehudah Assod

Rav Moshe spent a notable amount of time studying in the yeshivah there and he partook in Rav Yehudah's daily *shiur*. From the way he mentions Rav Yehudah in his writings, one can discern the high esteem the students had for Rav Yehudah, how they would tremble before him, in awe of his Torah greatness and of his holiness.

In addition to the Torah he heard from Rav Yehudah, he also learned from his outlook in subjects pertaining to halachah, as well as from his *yiras Shamayim*.



Szerdahely's large Orthodox shul. View from rear and front.

Many years later, in a written correspondence Rav Moshe had with another *rav* many years later, on the topic of Jewish men shaving their beard, Rav Moshe took great care when replying. He wrote that he acknowledged and supported those who were more lenient, even though he personally held the opinion that one may not tamper with one's beard. He proved this with an anecdote that had occurred while learning under Rav Assod. One day, the *rav* brought in a picture taken from a Kabbalah *sefer* depicting the correct way one's beard is supposed to appear in order to fulfill all kabbalistic requirements. Rav Assod mentioned that he was envious of the town's *dayan*, Rav Volf Bondi (Banda), whose beard fit the picture exactly. At that point, Rav Moshe writes, he was still young, and as his beard hadn't grown fully yet, it did not yet meet all the requirements, and he felt a small twinge of pain over this.

Rav Moshe was acquainted with Rav Volf and recognized him as a great *talmid chachom* and *tzaddik*. As a matter of fact, in the community there was talk that Rav Volf should become *rav* of town. When his teacher Chasam Sofer heard this, he advised him to keep a low profile and not stand in the way of Rav Yehudah, whom he felt would be a more befitting candidate as he was *tzaddik* and *talmid chacham*, and a native of the town as well. Nevertheless, both scholars held each other in high esteem.

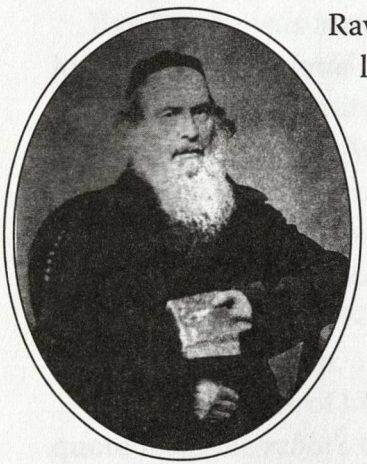
Over the course of his lifetime, Rav Moshe would frequently quote from his *rebbi*'s teachings. It is evident from the many citations, as well as from the manner with which he mentions him, that not only was Rav Moshe incredibly proficient in Rav Yehudah's writings, but that he was in tremendous awe of him as well.

There are a number of examples where he mentions a *chiddush* that he himself had thought of or a *shailah* he had, and later found it discussed in the writings of his *rebbi*, Mahari

Assod. He describes the elation he felt upon seeing that he had merited producing a thought discussed by his holy *rebbi*, and writes, "My heart filled with joy when after much searching, I found that my master my *rebbi* the holy *gaon* Mahari Assod discusses the subject I had written about. I request of the readers to take a glimpse at his words which are sweeter than honey."

6 Rav Avraham Shag

Of all of the great luminaries by whom Rav Moshe had studied, he considered his main teacher, his *rebbi muvhak*, to be the great *gaon* Rav Avraham Zwebner *zt"l*, known as Rav Avraham Shag.



Rav Avraham Shag

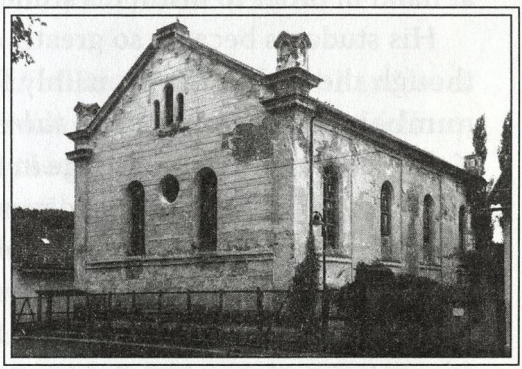
Rav Avraham served as the *rav* of the village of Kobersdorf, one of the Sheva Kehillos in the Burgenland district, (present-day Austria), and taught Torah to his students at the local yeshivah. The student-body was comprised of local *bachurim* as well as many other *bachurim* who flocked from far and wide to learn Torah from him.

In his youth, Rav Avraham studied under the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg. The Chasam Sofer was exceptionally fond of his student Rav Avraham, due to his brilliance in Torah and his piety; he was of the select few who merited eating his daily meals in the Chasam Sofer's home. He once stated that a *talmid chachom* of Rav Avraham's caliber cannot be found as far as twenty miles surrounding Pressburg.

Rav Avraham's greatness was clearly perceptible and his brilliance was recognized by whomever he became acquainted with. Once, the Chasam Sofer attended a meeting with his father-in-law the great *gaon* Rabbi Akiva Eiger, accompanied by his student Rav Avrohom. Sitting together, they conversed in Torah, and Rav Akiva Eiger noted and was duly impressed by the brilliance of his son-in-law's student. He later commented on this to the Chasam Sofer, telling him, "I see you have correctly identified who is worthy of your admiration."

In 1827, when Rav Avraham was twenty-five years of age, he settled in a village named Shattledorf to serve as *rav* of the Jewish community and headed the yeshivah there for over twenty years.

In 1852, he was appointed to serve as *rav* of Kobersdorf and head the local small yeshivah, where he would deliver his *shiurim* in the town's shul. A small group of *bachurim* learned in Kobersdorf; they had been there during the previous *rav*, Rav Dovid Alt-Eibnitz's tenure. The town's leaders wanted to encourage the growth of the yeshivah, and they undertook to support additional, out-of-town *bachurim*. This was stipulated in the contract presented to Rav Avraham.



The shul in Kobersdorf as it appears today

Indeed from the day that Rav Avraham took over the position of *rav* and onwards, the yeshivah saw considerable growth. Initially there were his previous *talmidim* who followed him from Shattledorf, however many more flocked from far and wide to learn Torah from him.

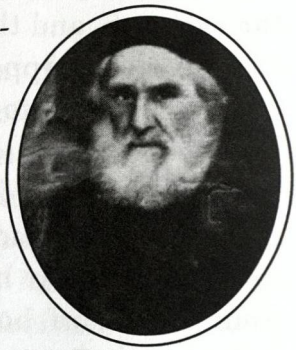
It didn't take long for Rav Avraham to be recognized as one of the leaders of Hungarian Jewry. In addition to his local obligations, he stood at the forefront in the battle of Hungarian Jewry against those attempting to undermine the observance of the Torah and wishing to indoctrinate their negative influences upon all the Jews of the land.

Over time, he gained fame all over the country for his greatness in Torah and for his holiness. He was revered by the masses, and hundreds of people would come to him in times of their distress to receive his blessing. Indeed many merited to see their salvation through his *tefillos*.

He invested great effort in teaching Torah to his students. The daily *shiur* he gave, would sometimes last for as long as four hours. Prior to the actual *shiur*, he would learn with the *bachurim* from a *mussar sefer* and expound on the subject at hand in order to instill his students with *yiras Shamayim*.

His students became so greatly attached to him that even though the yeshivah was mainly for unmarried students, a number of Rav Avraham's *talmidim* chose to settle in Kobersdorf after their marriage in order to continue learning Torah from him. They would daven with Rav Avraham in the town's main shul and accompany him on his walks, following his every move and drinking his every word with thirst.

The *bachurim* had much to gain from their association with him by witnessing the exemplary devotion with which he applied himself to the Torah and mitzvos. Rav Avraham once traveled — accompanied by his students — from Vienna to Kobersdorf. Along the way he suddenly became very thirsty, so his students — who were always ready to serve him — promptly went to seek some water.



Rav Aharon Singer

Meanwhile the carriage reached a stop and an acquaintance of his, Rav Aharon Singer, a *dayan* in Mattersdorf, boarded the carriage. As often occurs when two great personalities meet, they began discussing subjects of Torah in depth. In the meantime, the students returned with water, but didn't dare interrupt the intense discussion. When the carriage approached the next stop, Rav Aharon Singer disembarked, and Rav Avraham's students finally offered their *rebbi* the water. He surprised them, however, saying that it was no longer necessary. His thirst had been quenched with the words of Torah, as Chazal teach us, "Torah is compared to water."

A Close Talmid – Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld

A well-known *talmid* of Rav Avraham was Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, who settled in Kobersdorf following his marriage to the daughter of R' Shlomo Zeltzer, an affluent resident of the village. Rav Yosef Chaim began attending Rav Avraham's *shiurim* and became exceptionally attached to his *rebbi*, refusing under any circumstances to distance himself from him. When Rav Yosef Chaim had been married for about six months, his father-in-law moved away from the village. He conditioned continued financial support of the young couple if they would move along with him, too. Rav Yosef Chaim opted to forgo his support and preferred to stay in Kobersdorf in order to continue learning under Rav Avraham. To earn a livelihood he began teaching Torah to young children.

Rav Avraham Leaves Europe

Rav Avraham successfully led the community of Kobersdorf and stood at the helm of its yeshivah for twenty years. Upon reaching the age of seventy, he began to fulfill his lifelong dream and made plans to leave the shores of Europe and settle in Eretz Yisrael. On 9 Iyar 1873, he set out on his journey for the holy land.

Upon hearing of his planned departure several of his *talmidim* felt themselves unable to part from their *rebbi*, and thus chose to follow him to Eretz Yisrael in order to continue basking in his light. Notable among these was Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, who joined his *rebbi* on his journey and settled with him in Yerushalayim. Concerned that his *rebbi* would not have fresh kosher meat on the voyage, Rav Yosef Chaim taught himself *shechitah* so that he'd be able to slaughter poultry for his *rebbi* on the journey. Rav Yosef Chaim went on to serve as the *rav* of the Old Yishuv of Yerushalayim in Eretz Yisrael.



Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld

In Yerushalayim, as before, Rav Avraham taught his students and led them in serving Hashem. Though there was no lack of holy people in Yerushalayim, Rav Avraham was immediately recognized by the city's elders for his greatness and his holiness.

The following incident with Rav Hersh Michel Shapiro is testimony to the reverence Jerusalem's elders had for Rav Avraham. Rav Hersh Michel was a young *avreich*, and unfortunately, all his children passed away in infancy. In his distress, he approached Rav Meir Auerbach, the Kalisher Rav, requesting a *berachah*. Rav Meir responded, "Now that we have in our midst

Hashem's holy servant, Rav Avraham Shag, he is the obvious address to which to turn." Rav Hersh Michel accepted his advice and turned to Rav Avraham for help. Shortly thereafter, following the guidance Rav Avraham gave him, he merited his salvation.



Kever of Rav Avraham Shag

Rav Avraham lived out his final years in the holy city of Yerushalayim in holiness and purity. He passed away on 29 Adar 1836 and is buried on Har Hazeisim.

Rav Moshe Remains a Close Talmid

When Rav Avraham relocated to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Moshe decided to remain in Hungary, yet nevertheless in his heart he never parted from his *rebbi* and considered himself his student until the end of his days. Rav Moshe would frequently quote words of Torah which he had heard from Rav Avraham, and would publicize his insights in Torah journals published at that time. Also when encountering a subject which he had studied under his *rebbi*, he would nostalgically recall what he had heard from him at the time and record his words in writing.

Rav Moshe recounts an instance during the time he was learning under Rav Avraham, when he encountered a difficulty in his studies and presented the query to his *rebbi*. Rav Avraham immediately arose, took out his written *chiddushim* on *Maseches Chullin*, and showed his beloved student a discussion on that specific question. Rav Moshe records the delight which he felt that he merited coming up with a thought discussed by his holy *rebbi*. He goes on to recount

that several days later he approached his *rebbi* and suggested an answer to the question. This answer found favor in Rav Avraham's eyes and he praised Rav Moshe immensely.

Aside from the Torah he learned from his *rebbi*, he verified particulars in Jewish custom while in his *rebbe*'s company by observing his conduct and following his actions. One of these instances involved the *minhag* of when to recite a blessing on fruit trees. One day in the middle of the month of Adar, Rav Moshe accompanied his *rebbi* on a walk. As the prevalent custom is to recite the blessing on fruit trees in Nissan, Rav Moshe was surprised when they passed by a blossoming tree and Rav Avraham stopped to recite the *berachah*. Rav Avraham noted his *talmid*'s confusion, and a discussion commenced on this subject regarding the opinions of the various authorities on the topic.

7 Rav Moshe's Yeshivah Years

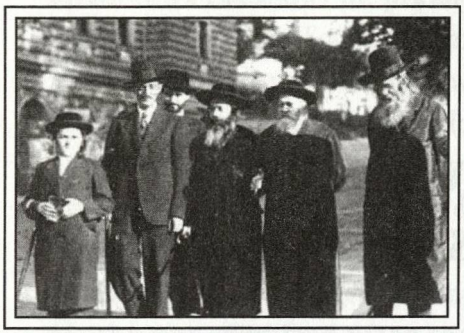
Spending a good number of years learning under the great luminaries of his time served to mold Rav Moshe into a budding *talmid chachom*. Through learning Torah from these teachers, and combined with his capabilities and his diligence, Rav Moshe matured tremendously in terms of Torah knowledge and piety.

Indeed the three aforementioned Rabbis were his main teachers from whom he learned most of his Torah. But he utilized his yeshivah years and gained much wisdom from other great personalities with whom he would initiate contact in the regions where his yeshivahs were situated.

A Connection with the Rav of Galanta

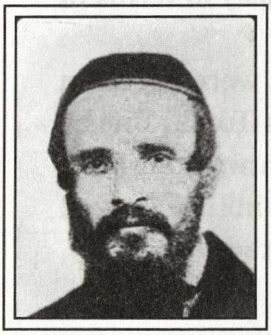
In addition to his main teachers, Rav Moshe also learned Torah from the Rav of Galanta. Galanta is famous for some of its distinguished *rabbanim*. One well-known *rav* was Rav Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky, who served the community before relocating to Yerushalayim to lead the *Kehillah* there.

After him, Rav Yehoshua Buxbaum was appointed to serve as *rav* in his place.



From center, l. to r.: Rav Y. Buxbaum with Rav Dushinky of Galanta. The Rav of Shuran is at the far right

Earlier, from 1857 to 1873, Rav Aharon Eliezer Pashkusz, son of R' Bunim Pashkusz, served as *rav* of Galanta. Rav Aharon Eliezer would periodically visit his hometown, Szerdahely, after assuming his position in Galanta. He eventually resettled there permanently after his resignation from his rabbinic position. Rav Moshe used to attend his *shiurim* — a long discourse from Rav Aharon Eliezer expounding upon a complicated *sugya* in Shas is recorded in one of Rav Moshe's notebooks. The titles which Rav Moshe writes preceding his name reflect the high esteem his students had for him.



Rav Eliezer Pashkusz

In his writings from over the years, Rav Moshe often refers to other great people with whom he had made acquaintance. One example is Rav Volf Bondi, also known as Rav Volf Bonihad, the *av beis din* in Szerdahely from 1843 until his death, 27 Cheshvan 1863. Rav Moshe writes of his acquaintance with him and describes him as being very learned and a great *tzaddik*.

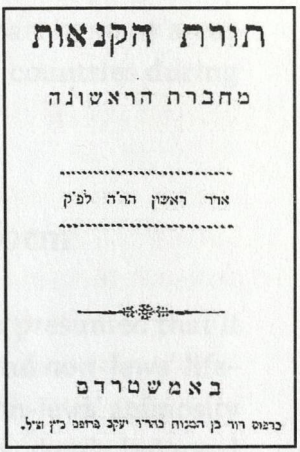
Due to the fact that Rav Moshe spent many years learning in the famous yeshivahs he merited to become acquainted with *bachurim* from distant locations who would then share what they had heard from their own teachers. In this way Rav Moshe would hear *chiddushim* from various great luminaries of his

time that lived in distant towns; this enabled him to quote in his writings *chidushim* that he had accumulated.

However there was more to be gained from studying under the great luminaries of the time, as in addition to teaching Torah, they would also apply themselves to instill *yiras Shamayim* in their students, and endeavored to shape their outlook in matters concerning world Jewry during that era. This greatly benefited the students, preparing them to lead a lifetime of Torah and piety and safeguarding them from falling prey to the alien winds, blowing during that era.

Rav Moshe's three abovementioned *rebbi*s: the Ksav Sofer, Rav Yehudah Assod and Rav Avraham Shag were all equal in their unyielding attitude toward the modernists who attempted to promote modifications to the Torah way. These three masters were leaders in the efforts of Orthodox Jewry to support the upkeep of the Torah ideals in the manner passed down through the generations, and they fought vehemently against any attempts at changing and modernizing.

In 1844, the reformists held a congress in Bronszweig, Germany, where they spouted their evil scheme. All of Germany's Orthodox rabbis united in opposition, and a pamphlet, *Toras HaKano'uss*, was published condemning the congress. The three abovementioned *rabbanim*, as well as other Hungarian *rabbanim*, sent letters of support to their German brethren in their struggle against the Reform movement; these letters were included in this pamphlet. This indicates their uncompromising stance on these issues and the severity with which they regarded the matter, influencing them to battle the Reform even beyond the borders of their own country.


תורת הקנאות

מחברת הראשונה

אדר ראשון הר"ה לפ"ק

באמשטרדם

כרשום דור בן המנוח נהדר יעקב פרופס כיץ ז"ל.

Consequently, after spending a number of years studying under these great masters, a student would be influenced by their pure stance on matters of religion and would emerge with unadulterated views on all vital issues. Indeed Rav Moshe would always cling steadfastly to the principles which he had gleaned from his *rebbis*. Over the years, he expended much effort to preserve the adherence to the Torah in its time-honored fashion. This was no trivial matter, for, as mentioned, when Rav Moshe was young, it was a considerably turbulent time for Hungarian Jewry concerning adherence to issues of religion within the communities. Only a person who cleaved assiduously to the true Torah leaders could be confident that he would not be influenced by the negative winds blowing throughout the country.

8 Orthodox Versus Reform

In order to understand the struggles endured by Hungarian religious Jewry during those years, mainly from 1840 to 1869, some background history is required.

The Turks ruled over Hungary from 1526 until the Austrian conquest in the latter half of the seventeenth century. With rise of the Austrian Empire, known as the House of Habsburg, many Jews left the country to flee persecution. Those who stayed were greatly demoralized by the countless edicts and decrees enacted by the rulers, which denied the Jews many privileges and prohibited them from taking part in many areas of commerce. A number of other European countries during that period persecuted Jews similarly.

The Founding of the Reform

Unfortunately, there were those who presumed that if the distinction between the Jews' and non-Jews' lifestyle were to be broken down, the non-Jews' animosity toward the Jews would diminish. They mistakenly believed that if they'd study foreign subjects and change their mode of

dress, among other adverse modifications, then they would be granted similar rights to those of other citizens.

This concept originally took root in Berlin, when Moses Mendelsohn encouraged Jewish students to study science and modern culture as an alternative to untainted Torah study. He amassed a following and they referred to themselves as "Enlightened Jews." Although they did learn Torah, they treated it as just another intellectual subject, a means to sharpen the mind. They adapted many mitzvos according to their own superficial perception, and discarded numerous long-standing customs. And so the seeds of Reform Jewry were sown.

Over the years, their terrible modifications became more apparent. They applied numerous adjustments to the siddur and changed the language of the prayers to German. They also built themselves temples in the style of churches and inappropriately had an organ playing in accompaniment to the prayers. In time their behavior became increasingly comparable to that of the non-Jews, and ultimately a large percentage of them intermarried; their descendents lost to the Jewish nation forever.

Sadly, the ideas of those Enlightened Jews began spreading beyond the borders of Germany. In Hungary as well, people adopted the notion of adding studies of science and culture to the curriculum, asserting that a Jew has to adapt himself to the times. There, they called themselves the Neologists. Though their conduct wasn't exactly identical to the German Reformists, and they didn't do away with the Torah entirely as the Reform had done, they were nonetheless perceived as a great threat to Judaism.

The crisis was intensified due to a number of self-appointed *rabbanim* who although were well-versed in the Talmud nevertheless followed modern ideology, causing much confusion among the common folk.

The Chasam Sofer Fights the Reform



The Chasam Sofer

As long as the Chasam Sofer was alive, Hungarian Jewry was somewhat safeguarded against these sects — no one dared challenge him. He fought the modernists with all his power, via his speeches, his pen and other means as well. If he was unsuccessful through conventional methods, he would turn to heaven for assistance in thwarting the Reform in their misdeeds. On one Tishah b'Av, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, a group of agitators specifically organized a public banquet in blatant disregard of this day of mourning. In line with the reasoning of the Reform to "live with the times," they considered yearning for the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash to be outdated. Upon hearing of their plans, the Chasam Sofer lashed out forcefully against them, but to no avail. The Reformists disregarded the protests of the Torah leaders, and their banquet took place to the dismay of all G-d-fearing Jews. Indeed, heavenly retribution was not long in coming. Every one of the participants died an untimely death — none of them lived out the year.

Throughout his life the Chasam Sofer toiled determinedly to influence the masses to persistently cling to the ways of the Torah, and he continuously taught that adhering to the modern way of life is prohibited by the Torah. His famous motto was "*Chadash assur min HaTorah*." His influence was strongly felt throughout the country, and indeed, during his time no one dared call himself "rabbi" if he wasn't truly befitting of the title. As a result, the modernists' influence was relatively marginal.

Sadly, however, in 1839, when the light of Israel was

extinguished with the passing of the Chasam Sofer, Reform Jewry began rearing its ugly head. There were many instances of unscrupulous individuals using money or connections to gain positions of influence in Jewish communities across Hungary. They would then try to use their authority to revolutionize the mode of function within the communities and to instill discrepancies in matters of importance to Orthodoxy. This caused much strife and disorder within the communities and was the source of much aggravation to pious Jews for whom the Torah way was dear and valued.



The Chasam Sofer's kever

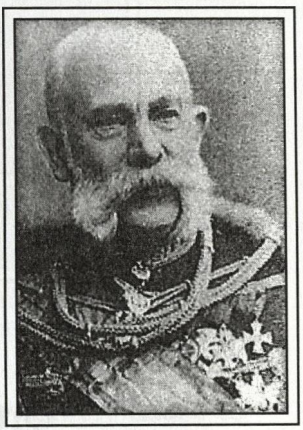
In 1844, seeing that the situation was getting out of hand, an assembly was called in order to seek ways to counteract the influence of the Reform. The gathering took place in Paks; a large number of Orthodox rabbis were in attendance. Unfortunately this meeting didn't bring any relief. One of the rabbis there had modern leanings and began espousing his ideas during the meeting, so the other *rabbanim* left the room in protest. Thus the assembly concluded without any positive outcome.

As the years progressed, the situation continued to deteriorate. There were several pious *rabbanim* who suffered untold aggravation from those within their communities who had modern leanings, as they would harass the *rav* in their unrelenting efforts to undermine his authority. Moreover, the Neologists appeared a number of times before the courts to rally for their causes, regrettably succeeding at times. Several

high-level meetings were held between the *rabbanim* and the rulers of the country in attempt to reverse their effect, including a number of times when they were granted an audience with the Kaiser Franz Josef himself.

In one distinct case, the Kaiser had levied a large fine on the Jews of the country, who had taken part in an uprising for independence against him. Later he decided to graciously return the money to the Jewish nation as a grant for establishing educational institutions.

The Neologists lobbied extensively for that money to be granted toward their ambitions. In order to counter their objectives, a delegation of seven leading *rabbanim* took off for Austria in order to gain an audience with the Kaiser to plead their cause. By the grace of Hashem, the meeting was a tremendous success. The Rabbis found favor in the eyes of the Kaiser and they managed to persuade him that the Orthodox Jews represent authentic Judaism. He thus ruled for the grant to be used toward the foundation of *chadorim* where Torah could be taught in purity. Despite this success, the Reform continuously persevered in their attempts to modernize Judaism.



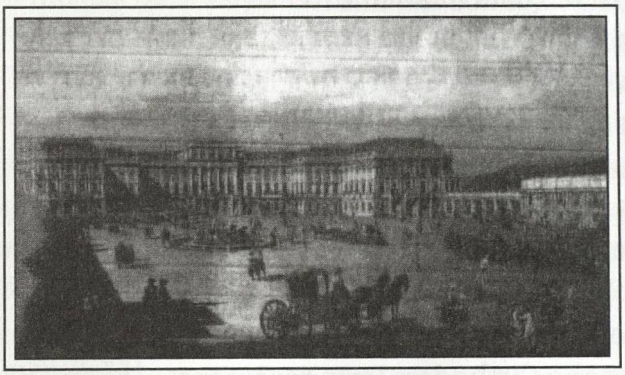
Kaiser Franz Josef

The Situation Begins to Improve

In 1867, the uprising of the populace of Hungary against the monarchy began to bear fruit. The Kaiser came to the realization that he couldn't continue to ignore the ongoing unrest in his country and decided to afford a certain degree

of autonomy to the Hungarian population, in addition to granting them their own nationality. This prompted the founding of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The overall situation for the Jews began to improve under the new circumstances, as the rulers accepted Judaism as one of the official religions of the country, alongside other common religions of the gentiles living in the state. The Jewish communities were granted freedom along with permission to run their affairs independently.



Palace of the Kaiser where the Rabbonim were received

The Separation of Orthodox and Neologists

Consequently, representatives from a range of communities assembled at a congress to set guidelines which would determine how the communities would be run. During the assembly a massive dispute broke out between the Orthodox and the Neologists. The Orthodox representatives insisted unequivocally that all communities are to be run according to the Torah, while the Neologists disagreed vehemently.

Thus, the *rabbanim* saw no alternative other than making a complete segregation from the Neologists. While up until

then the Jews of each town had been united in one single community, due to the concern of the modernists' influence, the situation currently required urgent modifications. The *Shomrei HaDas* society was established, and the *rabbanim* began working toward founding exclusive communities. In 1869, a contingent of *rabbanim* met again with the Kaiser. The religious communities were subsequently recognized by the law of the country, and the segregation of the communities, known as the *abteilung*, became official.

In a large number of Hungarian towns, this new system was immediately implemented. In many cases this was out of sheer necessity, for the aggravation which the Orthodox Rabbis suffered from the Neologists ruled out any possibility of unity. In other instances, the townspeople opted to implement the segregation even though the situation was not so bad, in compliance with the ruling of the majority of the Torah leaders. Thus from that time on, most Hungarian towns and villages maintained two separate communities, Orthodox and Neologist. The clear definition as to who belonged to which camp, significantly curtailed the Neologists' negative influence.

In some places however, the community leaders chose to remain all together in one *kehillah*. These communities were known as "status-quo *kehillos*." Yet often in these places, the situation gradually deteriorated, and over time the necessity arose to implement the segregation there as well.

With this in mind, one can glean an appreciation of the significance of a solid education during that turbulent period. Indeed Rav Moshe Konig merited learning under the greatest leaders, men who stood at the helm in the struggles to uphold authentic Yiddishkeit, those who represented their brethren at the head of delegations to plead their case before the authorities. Inevitably he attained an unyielding outlook

pertaining to matters of religion, and over the years exerted much effort to enhance the adherence to the Torah-true way among the masses.

It is worth noting that exceptions did exist regarding segregation of some *kehillos*. This was due to the fact that the religious had the upper hand and so the people all remained united, living in accordance to the Torah's ways.

The Sheva Kehillos in the Burgenland region were unique in this aspect. They were all run with strict adherence to Torah and mitzvos, continuing so from the time of their founding until their decimation at the onset of the World War II in 1938.

Considering that much of this chronicle relates to the community of Kobersdorf — one of the Sheva Kehillos, a short overview of the structure of these seven towns and villages and of the Jewish communities therein is in order.

9 The Sheva Kehillos*

The term "Sheva Kehillos" refers to the Jewish communities located in seven towns and villages in the Burgenland district, which was then in western Hungary, and has been part of Austria since the end of World War I. The names of these seven towns are; Eisenstadt, Lakenbach, Mattersdorf, Tzehlem (Deutschkreutz), Frauenkirchen, Kobersdorf and Kitzee.

These *kehillos* were formed in the late seventeenth century during a period which was a particularly unsettling era for Hungarian Jewry. The Hungarian overlords harassed the Jews of the country greatly and suppressed them terribly. For an extended period Jews were barred from settling in the larger town and villages, and were only permitted to dwell on the outskirts. These restrictions stood in place for many years, and in numerous districts, were repealed only as late as 1840.

Likewise in the Burgenland district, the Jewish inhabitants suffered a similar fate to the rest of their brethren. In 1670, the Kaiser Leopold issued an edict banishing Jews from the

* The following chapters were not intended to provide full coverage relating to the Sheva Kehillos; for this a full encyclopedic work would be necessary. Therefore the following is an attempt to provide a small glimpse of the structure and organization of the Sheva Kehillos.

whole province. Jewish residents of all the distinguished communities in the region including Eisenstadt and Mattersdorf were expelled from their hometowns, and were not permitted to return until about a decade later.

The Count's Kindness

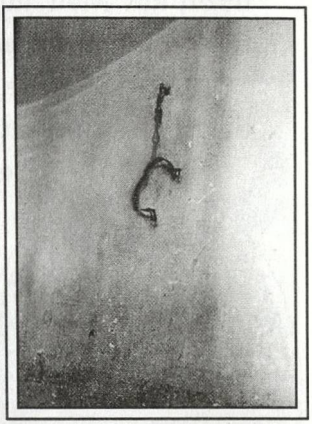
It was during this distressful era that Count Paul of the Esterhazy dynasty acquired land in this area, obtaining full ownership over the territory. Then, in 1690, he graciously welcomed Jews to settle on his property. He also granted them permission to travel freely within his land. Any Jew whose affairs required him to travel frequently received a document similar to a passport, stating that the holder of this document is under the protection of the Lord Esterhazy and is to be received courteously by whomever he comes in contact with. The holders of these passes were known as protected-Jews (Schutz-Juden).



Last page of document with signature and seal of Paul Esterhazy

Following the admittance of Jews to his territory, the Count had a detailed document drawn up granting autonomy to the heads of these communities and authorizing them to run their affairs according to the laws of the Torah. Indeed the communities of these towns and villages had their

own taxing system, and at times, even the courts of law judged their cases according to the Torah. In the case of an individual being found guilty of certain misdemeanors, a unique method was employed to punish him. A chain was affixed to the wall near the entrance to the shul, and the sinner would be pinned to the wall, in sight of all the congregants, in order to suffer justifiable humiliation for his misdeeds.



Humiliation chain at entrance to shul in Frauenkirchen

Over time, there were many Jews from the vicinity, as well as from other sections of Hungary and beyond, who accepted the invitation of Lord Esterhazy and came to settle on his land. In merit of the protection he granted to them, they were privileged to live their lives in tranquility and conduct their lifestyle fully in compliance with the Torah's ideals. Indeed, the communities thrived and flourished for many years to come.

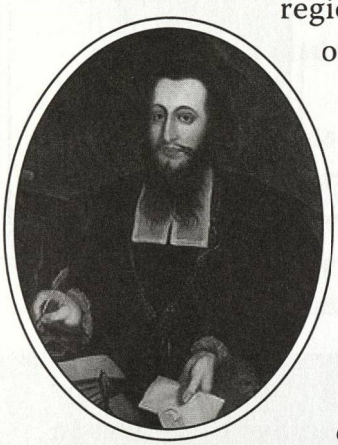
One Rav for All Kehillos

The communities were led by well-known *rabbanim* who enjoyed full jurisdiction in all matters concerning the running of the communities. Many Torah luminaries chose to settle in these towns over the years, from where they disseminated Torah to all parts of the country. They established yeshivahs and taught Torah to the multitudes, which greatly served to enhance the spiritual ambiance of the region.

Initially, all seven towns were under the leadership of one *rav*. This was arranged by the influential banker and *shtadlan*, R' Shimshon Wertheimer, who was appointed by the Hungarian

ruler to oversee all the Jewish affairs in the country. He called upon Rav Meir, author of the *sefer Panim Meiros*, to settle in the region and lead the communities of the Burgenland.

Rav Meir came to settle in Eisenstadt in 1717, and his authority was instantaneously accepted by the Jews of the entire region. He did much to elevate the upkeep of the Torah, not only in his district, but in all of Hungary. He founded a yeshivah — the first recorded yeshivah on Hungarian soil — and he brought the people of the country to previously unknown levels in Torah study.



R' Shimshon Wertheimer

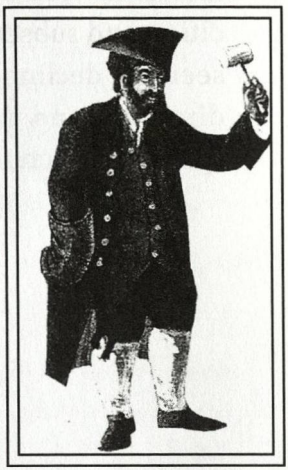
Many famous *rabbanim* came to serve these seven *kehillos* over the years and they dominantly led every aspect of their communities. The fact that the sovereignty was in the hands of the *rabbanim* and the pious *roshei kehillos*, acted as a shield against the many secular winds blowing through Europe over the years, which wreaked havoc in many Eastern European communities.

The Rabbis of these communities toiled tirelessly for the protection of Torah values, not allowing themselves respite in matters vital to the upkeep of religion. They all worked in unison to support the fortification of these ideals, and would convene from time to time to discuss what initiatives could be undertaken on behalf of the perseveration of authentic Yiddishkeit. When necessary they would inaugurate new *takanos* regarding kashrus and other matters of importance for the upkeep of tradition.

There are numerous unique *minhagim* which were established in these *kehillos* and were adhered to stringently, with some taken on as well by other communities in the vicinity.

The members of these communities assiduously held on

to their exquisite traditions all through the years of their existence. For example, the time-old custom known as "*shul-klappen*," where the *shamash* would make his rounds morning and evening and rap with his wooden hammer on the doors of the homes to arouse the townspeople to their *tefillos*, was upheld all the years in these communities.



Depiction of shul-klapper from the early 1800s

Interestingly, the last *shamash* of Kobersdorf died around the time of the German annexation. The townspeople took note of the hostile atmosphere and were very apprehensive as to what the future held for them. Therefore, when they buried the *shamash*, they buried with him the hammer which had been used for hundreds of years to arouse the people to the service of Hashem.

All members of these communities, even the simplest of the *baalei batim*, were distinguished for their great respect for *rabbanim*. For example, out of deference for the *rav*, it was accepted that every morning, only the *rav* would enter the shul already attired in his *tallis* and tefillin. The rest of the people would don their *tallis* and tefillin after entering the shul and stand ready for the prayers, which would commence immediately upon the *rav*'s entrance. Additionally, the regular laymen would not wear their tallis over their heads during davening, only the *rav* or a learned member who had been bestowed with the title Moreinu would do so.

The love of Torah of the regular laymen of these *kehillos* was legendary, as was their support for the Torah students in their midst. The *kehillos* continued so for hundreds of years, until the German conquest of Austria. Even in the later years, following the 1840s with the abolishment of the decrees limiting Jewish

settlement in many parts of the country, these communities continued to thrive. Even though several families opted to leave this area in preference for one of the larger towns and cities, and subsequently, the population of these towns began seeing a decline, nonetheless, the religious character didn't diminish, and the communities continued to be led in the spirit of halachah.

10 The Kehillah of Eisenstadt

The foremost of these *kehillos*, during the early years, was the community of Eisenstadt. This ancient town was built upon the ruins of a Roman military encampment. Legend has it that the legionaries of that encampment were a division of Titus's army which took part in the siege and destruction of Yerushalayim.

There are records of Jewish residency in the town from as early as 1373. Rav Yaakov Margolis, who served as *rav* from 1526, is the community's first documented *rav*.

Later on the community experienced times of difficulties,



Entrance to the Jewish ghetto in Eisenstadt

such as when Jews were banished from the town and forbidden to reside there altogether. Full tranquility only descended upon the Jews of Eisenstadt in 1690 upon being granted the document of protection by Lord Esterhazy and hence the founding of the Sheva-Kehillos.

Rav Meir of Eisenstadt

Initially, following the inception of these *kehillos* under the leadership of Rav Meir of Eisenstadt, the community gained exceptional prominence. As mentioned, although each one of the seven towns had a *rav* of its own, they were all subservient to the leadership in Eisenstadt. For clarification of complicated issues, they would turn to Rav Meir of Eisenstadt, and they all accepted upon themselves the *takanos* which he instated.

Rav Meir established a yeshivah in town. Apparently this was the first existing yeshivah on Hungarian soil; hence it could be considered the foundation for Torah life in the country. The yeshivah attracted students from far and wide, becoming a basis for the dissemination of Torah; many of the students went on to establish yeshivahs of their own.



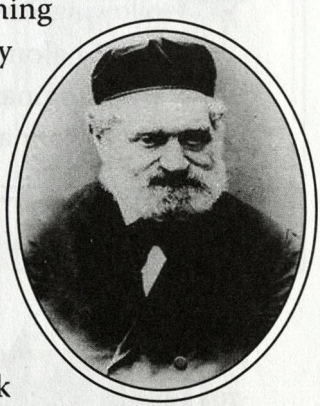
Kever of Rav Meir, the Panim Meiros, in Eisenstadt

The yeshivah continued to exist for many years, and even after Rav Meir passed away in 1744, his influence continued to be felt within the Sheva Kehillos and beyond. The yeshivah continued to flourish and yield *talmidei chachomim* of a high caliber.

A number of other prominent Rabbis served in Eisenstadt over the years and headed the yeshivah there. The great Rabbi Akiva Eiger was born there in 1762, and the *kever* of his father, Rav Moshe, is close to the *kever* of the Panim Meiros in the town's cemetery. The community leaders were eager to have Rabbi Akiva Eiger serve as their *rav*. In 1810, they penned him a long letter detailing their commitments to him if he would accept the position. However, he declined their offer as he had already accepted a rabbinical position in the prestigious community in Markish-Friedlad in Germany, and refused to forsake his constituents.

Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer

Years later in 1851, the renowned Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer came to serve the Eisenstadt community, leading the townspeople and teaching at the yeshivah there. Initially, he was greatly revered by all Orthodox Rabbis from across the spectrum, with many sending their sons to learn under him in his yeshivah. Among his many endeavors, he fought valiantly against the Reform and their cohorts in their attempts to instate modifications to Jewish custom.



Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer

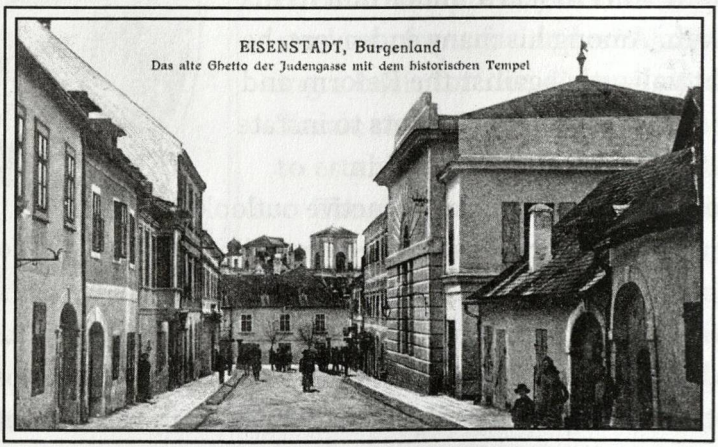
However, he adopted a distinctive outlook in a number of significant matters regarding European Jewry. Uncharacteristic to Hungarian Jewry's Torah leadership, he maintained that it is acceptable for a student who delved sufficiently in his Torah studies to add to his roster the studies of general subjects, such as Latin, mathematics and geography. He also had a distinct attitude concerning

the issue of the segregation of the *kehillos* and relating to the founding of a seminar for Rabbis.

These matters were cause of consternation among other Orthodox leaders, resulting in many of his associates to turn against him. Thus, under these circumstances, after productively leading the community for eighteen years, Rav Ezriel decided to accept an invitation which he received to head the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary, and in 1870 he left Eisenstadt, moving to Germany to assume this position. From that time on, the community of Eisenstadt slowly began losing its prominence, and over the years its number of Jewish residents dwindled considerably with the yeshivah also ceasing to exist sometime thereafter.

Rav Shalom Kutna

Following Rav Ezriel's departure, the community appointed Rav Shalom Kutna to serve as their *rav*. Rav Shalom, who originated from Kutna, Poland, was a tremendous *talmid chachom* and was known to be uncompromising in

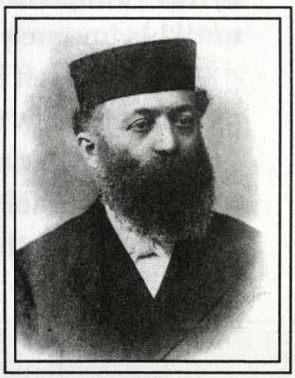


Jewish street in Eisenstadt with shul on the right

matters regarding Yiddishkeit. His tenure was during a critical period for Hungarian Jewry, as the Neologists were beginning to attain positions of influence, compelling the Orthodox to segregate the communities. Rav Shalom stood at the forefront of the battles against the modernists, helping lead the struggles for the upkeep of Torah values, not only locally but across Hungary.

He successfully led the community of Eisenstadt for close to forty years, until his death in 1909. His learned son-in-law, Rav Yeshayah Fuerst, had relocated to Vienna to serve as *rav* of the Schiff shul; so the community of Eisenstadt had to search for a new *rav*.

One proposition, acceptable to the community leaders, was Rav Meir Zvi Jung who lived in a village near Tokay called Tiszae-Ezlár. He had learned in the Pressburg yeshivah and was a reputable *talmid chachom*. However, he was inclined toward the viewpoint of Rav Hildesheimer, as well as Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch of Frankfurt, who held the opinion that studies of foreign subjects in combination with Torah studies was permitted. Even though in Germany this system proved itself successful in stalling assimilation; in Hungary, however, the majority of the Torah leaders strongly opposed this outlook. The *rabbanim* of the various communities of the region forwarded a strongly worded letter to Rav Meir Zvi informing him of their opposition to his appointment. In order to avoid controversy, he declined the offer of the Rabbinate, and instead relocated to London where he led the Orthodox community until his death in 1921.



Rav Meir Zvi Jung

It's worth noting that the *rabbanim's* stringent stance was

primarily in relation to the community of Eisenstadt. This was in view of the fact that Eisenstadt had always been considered a prestigious community among the Jewish communities of the country, and the *rabbanim* were concerned that others would take example of its conduct. They considered it therefore imperative that the structure of the community be strictly in compliance with all the decisions initiated at the assembly of the Orthodox Rabbis during the 1860s, so as to serve as a positive example to communities across the spectrum.

Eventually a suitable candidate was found and appointed as *rav* of Eisenstadt. An alumnus of Pressburg, Rav Zev Zvi Klein was from the town Sala in Hungary. He served there until 1919 when he left in preference for a position in the Rabbinate in Berlin. His place as *rav* of Eisenstadt was filled by his younger brother Rav Akiva, who led the community until his untimely passing in 1931.

Rav Akiva left behind an unmarried daughter, and in their pursuit of a new Rabbi, the community leaders appealed to Rav Akiva Sofer, the *rav* of Pressburg, to recommend an eligible husband for her, a young man who would be worthy of replacing her father's position as *rav* of Eisenstadt.

Rav Mordechai Schlesinger

He proposed his student, Rav Mordechai Schlesinger, and indeed he served as the last *rav* of Eisenstadt. Immediately after his marriage, at the tender age of twenty-two, the community leaders presented him with the contract of the Rabbinate.

He was an especially gifted young man and a powerful orator; his lectures were attended by hundreds of participants. He earned the respect of all the townspeople — including

the non-Jewish residents — and led the community until the Anschluss in 1938, when he relocated to Eretz Yisrael.

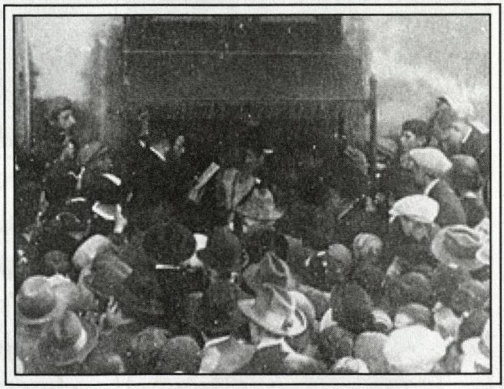
In view of the fact that Eisenstadt was a center of industry and commerce, there were several of the town's Jews who prospered in business and amassed considerable wealth. Prominent among the affluent families of the town were the descendants of R' Shimshon Wertheimer, the wealthy banker who had been instrumental in the founding of the Sheva Kehillos. Although he had resided in Vienna, he also owned a mansion in Eisenstadt. This was an impressive building which also a housed a private shul that was frequented by the upper-class residents of the town.



Rav Schlesinger addressing the public in the town square

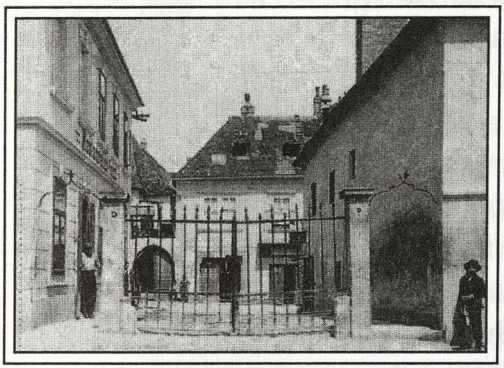
As was often the case, a number of these affluent residents had modern leanings and their adherence to the commandments of the Torah weakened. Nevertheless, this had no influence on the element of the *kehillah*, for as mentioned, the community was run all its years in accordance with the laws of the Torah.

The *rabbanim* who served the community expended great effort to stem the modern entities' influence and growth, which was prevalent during the period leading up to the war. The following anecdote emphasizes the caution the *rabbanim* ex-



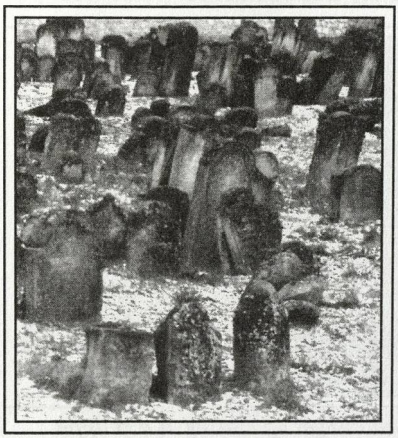
Rav Schlesinger officiating at a chuppa in Eisenstadt

hibited regarding any newfangled ideas. A member of Rabbi Schlesinger's community placed a Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (Jewish National Fund) charity box in his home. Since such an act displayed affiliation with this Zionist organization, the *rav* voiced his disapproval, but the gentleman argued that his brother, a prominent Torah leader, agreed with his actions. The *rav* however, was skeptical, and he dispatched a letter to this man's distinguished brother, requesting that he elucidate his viewpoint on the matter. The brother , in order to confirm his concurrence with the *rav*'s judgment and to prove his opposition to his brother's actions, he traveled to Eisenstadt to visit the *rav*, but refrained from entering his brother's home.



The Shabbos gate in Eisenstadt's Jewish district

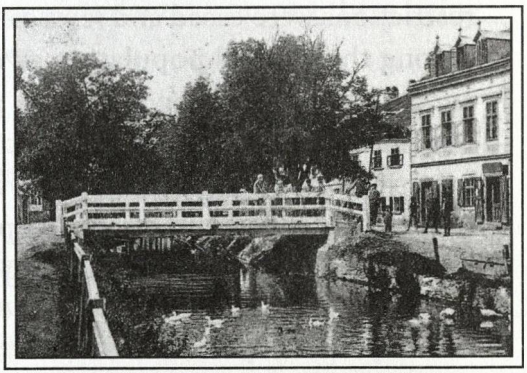
The Jewish school of Eisenstadt was run, as in the earlier times, according to the accepted standards of Yiddishkeit. Other features of Jewish conduct were also maintained appropriately. For example, there was a gate at the entrance to the Jewish district. This gate would be closed every Shabbos in order to allow for an *eruv* to permit carrying in the street. This, along with other aspects of the town's Jewish character, was always upheld by the community, which clung to its Jewish ideals right until the very end.



The Beis Hachayim in Eisenstadt

11 The Kehillah of Mattersdorf

Mattersdorf was one of the earliest Jewish communities in Western Hungary. The community existed for close to a thousand years, though it fell apart and was then rebuilt a couple of times, until 1690 when Mattersdorf was established alongside the Sheva Kehillos. The town gained significant prominence over the years, chiefly due to it being the home of the Chasam Sofer and his yeshivah, for the period prior to his taking up the Rabbinate of Pressburg.

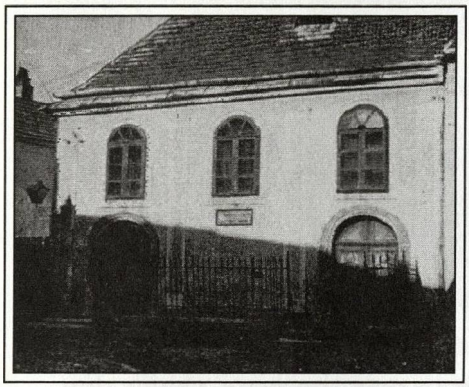


Bridge leading to Mattersdorf Jewish ghetto, dubbed "Juden-brucke"

In the early years the Jewish residents were banned from settling in most of the town and were confined to the Jewish ghetto on the banks of the Wulka River. The Jewish quarter was run independently from the rest of the town's residents, with their own taxing and judiciary system. They even had their own mayor. It was usually the *rosh hakahal* who filled this post.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the restriction

of place of residence was lifted and Jews began settling in other parts of town too. However, a number of other restrictions were still in place, similar to the other towns in the region. It was illegal for Jews to own land, and only a few of the Jewish residents were granted permits to deal in commerce and earn a living as peddlers.



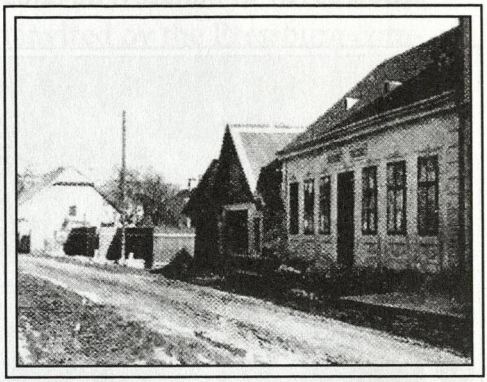
The shul in Mattersdorf

Ultimately, this resulted in enhancing the religious atmosphere in the town, as being unable to work, a large percentage of the town's Jewish residents spent their days immersed in Torah study, with their commercial needs supplied by those who had been granted a license to trade. Eventually all the restrictions were eased and Jews gained a place of prominence among the general population as many of the town's shops and businesses were under Jewish proprietorship. Nevertheless, the noble custom of those in commerce supporting their brethren toiling in Torah study was upheld. Even when the Chasam Sofer came to town, this practice was still followed, with the community supporting a group of thirty Torah scholars.

The Kehillah Amenities

The town's shul was constructed with great precision conforming to many halachic specifications. The original edifice was erected as early as 1575, and over the years was reconstructed and renovated. Both the yeshivah and

the Talmud Torah of Mattersdorf were housed in a separate building, erected in 1883.



The Talmud Torah of Mattersdorf

The community was very stringent in their observance to Torah, and its leaders took great care not to allow any infractions whatsoever. The community merited a number of world-famous leaders at its helm who led the townspeople in their religious conduct and taught at the local yeshivah.

From 1740, until he left town in 1747, Rav Yehudah Leib of Frankfurt led the community. He was a tremendous *gaon* indeed, there is printed correspondence between him and Rav Meir of Eisenstadt. He headed the community and taught in the yeshivah, producing many students — among them being the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger.

Rav Yirmiyahu Rosenblum

Rav Yirmiyahu Rosenblum, later known as Rav Yirmiyeh Mattersdorfer came to lead the community in 1780. A well-known student of his from his previous position was the famed Rav Simchah Bunim of Pershischa.

Rav Yirmiyeh held his post as *rav* of Mattersdorf until 1791, when he left after a particularly unsettling occurrence. The *rav* noticed an affluent family engaging in inappropriate behavior; upon being rebuked, the wealthy family began harassing the *rav* in attempt to undermine his authority. As part of the wealthy upper-class, they took his rebuke as an

affront to their social standing. Thus when offered the position as *rav* of Sanatov, he chose to leave Mattersdorf, though not before proclaiming that the town's residents were not worthy of achieving prosperity.



A Jewish street in Mattersdorf with the shul visible on the right

This curse indeed affected the economic position of the community, and was only retracted years later, when, prior to assuming the position as *rav*, Rav Shimon Sofer — son of the Chasam Sofer — visited Rav Yirmiyeh's *kever* and begged forgiveness on behalf of the townspeople for slighting his honor.

The Chasam Sofer Leads

A new era dawned upon the town of Mattersdorf some years later with the appointment of the Chasam Sofer. He arrived in 1798, after spending some years teaching Torah in Prostitz and serving as *rav* in Dreznitz. His students from his previous yeshivah in Dreznitz followed him to Mattersdorf, and countless more flocked to him from other locations across Hungary, with numerous of his students eventually going on to become famous *rabbanim*. By this time, the Chasam Sofer was recognized as one of the greatest Torah leaders of that period, consequently his position there granted the town unprecedented prestige. He led the community until

1807, when he accepted the invitation of the Pressburg *kehillah* to serve as their *rav*.

In fact, he had already been invited by the Pressburg community two years prior to his actual acceptance, and had been ready to accept their invitation at that point. However when preparing to depart from Mattersdorf, a devastating fire broke out in the town which left many of the townspeople homeless. Not wanting to forsake the community at their time of distress, he postponed his relocation to Pressburg for the time being.

A Calamity in Town

The background story to this unfortunate incident originated many years prior. It was during the time that Rav Yissachar Ber Bloch (known as Rav Yissachar Ber Chassid, in view of his tremendous righteousness), who served as the town's rav some years preceding the Chasam Sofer's tenure, noted an infringement in halachah that was practiced by the town's people. Every Friday night upon concluding the meal the families would summon a non-Jew to extinguish the Shabbos candles, concerned that the flames might cause a fire during the night. Rav Yissachar Ber considered this practice an infringement in halachah and instructed his townspeople to cease doing so. He promised that no harm would result from this. He added that if a fire would ever break out in the town, his gravesite should be approached and he would intercede on their behalf.

Indeed for a number of years his command was upheld and no candle ever caught light. However as the years went by, there were some who resumed their old habit, thus forfeiting his holy merit for their protection. That was when unfortunately the above-mentioned devastating fire broke out. Upon seeing the flames, the townspeople dashed to the cemetery to daven at

his grave to try and undo the damage that had befallen them, but they were astonishingly unable to locate the site. The fire continued to spread until a large part of the Jewish quarter had burned down.

As a result of the fire, many of the townspeople were rendered homeless, and the Chasam Sofer therefore remained with them to provide encouragement and the necessary arbitration to uncertainties which arose as a result of the fire. Two years later, the townspeople had managed to re-establish themselves and the Chasam Sofer relocated to Pressburg.

Rav Bunim Ginz

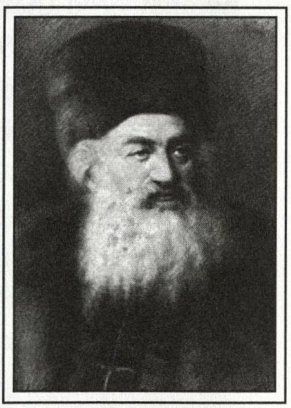
In the following years, the position of the rabbinate in Mattersdorf was held by a number of eminent *talmidei chachomim*, prominent among them was Rav Bunim Ginz, son of Rav Moshe from Eisenstadt and brother of Rabbi Akiva Eiger. [The original family name was Ginz. Rabbi Akiva and his descendants assumed his mother's maiden name, "Eiger," whereas Rav Bunim retained the name Ginz. His descendants adopted the surname Ginz-Schlesinger, eventually dropping the Ginz and becoming known as Schlesinger alone.]

Rav Bunim held a close acquaintance with the Chasam Sofer, and would sometimes travel to Pressburg to spend time in his company. On one such visit, the Chasam Sofer honored him with an invitation to relay a public address to his students in the yeshivah. During the lecture, Rav Bunim mentioned a certain insight to which the Chasam Sofer voiced his disagreement. Rav Bunim added additional proof to his view, but the Chasam Sofer reiterated his argument, and the students all watched in fascination as the two Torah giants debated with each other, with unique affection and admiration for one another.

Apparently, the townspeople's poverty was a reason for the rabbinate of Mattersdorf changing hands recurrently. The *rav* could barely make ends meet with the low salary that the community could afford, and he always kept his eyes open for vacancy of a more prestigious and better-paid position. As a matter of fact, Rabbi Akiva Eiger tried to assist his brother by endorsing him for the rabbinate of other prominent communities. However, nothing materialized, so Rav Bunim retained his position in Mattersdorf until passing away prematurely, before reaching sixty years of age.

Rav Shimon Sofer

Later, in 1844, the community called upon Rav Shimon Sofer, son of the Chasam Sofer, to come and serve as their *rav*. Rav Shimon felt gratified for this proposition, expressing his appreciation in a letter of acquiescence which he penned to the community leaders, writing humbly, that "even though I have been known to the townspeople ever since my childhood and you are all are certainly aware of my shortcomings, you have nevertheless agreed to have me at your helm, no doubt out of deference to my illustrious ancestry."



Rav Shimon Sofer

Rav Shimon appointed a number of local scholars to serve as *dayanim* alongside him. However he alone held full authority over every aspect within the community. The town benefited tremendously from his piety and his erudition, particularly the numerous *talmidei chachomim*, who greatly utilized having a sage of his caliber in their midst;

though his impact was felt even by the most simplest of the townspeople.

The positive impact he had on those in his vicinity is apparent through an anecdote recounted about a businessman originally from Mattersdorf. This man's business affairs would often take him to distant parts of the world. Accordingly, he spent a good part of his life in far-away countries in which there were no Jewish communities, only returning to his original hometown upon reaching old age. Upon being questioned on how he had succeeded holding on to his Yidishkeit while isolated for so many years in foreign surroundings, a feat which was not prevalent among the later generation, he answered that today's youngsters didn't merit a glimpse of the great Rav Shimon Sofer. This indicated that it was the positive influence attained from being in his proximity which kept him strong in his Yiddishkeit all those years.



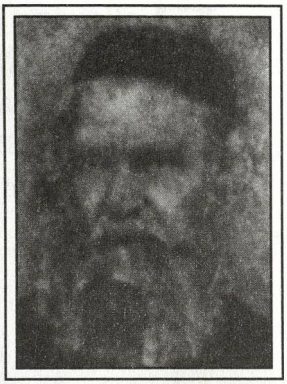
Rav Shimon Sofer as rav of Cracow

Rav Shimon served there until 1860, when he ascended to the position as *rav* of Cracow. This was one of the most prestigious communities in the Torah world and its leaders vied for the privilege for their community to be led by a *rav* of Rav Shimon's caliber.

His departure greatly affected the local Torah scholars in Mattersdorf as they had been accustomed to turning to him for the clarification of all complex issues. There was one particular scholar in town, Rav Aharon Singer, who took his departure very hard.

This Rav Singer was a son of the *rosh hakahal* of Mattersdorf, R' Yitzchak. He had studied in the yeshivah of the Chasam Sofer and had established a very close acquaintance

with Rav Shimon. In fact, he was one of the *dayanim* whom Rav Shimon had appointed to serve alongside him, and would routinely discuss with him any important topic that came his way. He was a popular personality and was highly regarded by his contemporaries for his erudition and humble nature. Other *rabbanim*, even those of different towns in the vicinity, would come and take pleasure in discussing their deliberations with him. Hence, due to his positive attributes the townspeople saw him as a fitting candidate to fill the rabbinical post.



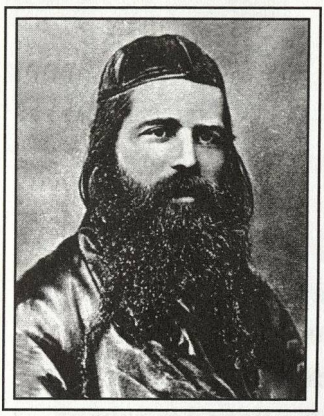
Rav Aharon Singer

However Rav Aharon, in his incredible humility, declined to accept the position as *rav*. Since he was basically leading the community in any case, the townspeople didn't appoint an official *rav*, making do with Rav Aharon's leadership in his unofficial position. Thus he led the community and taught at the yeshivah for a number of years. He encouraged the majority of his students to continue their studies in the great yeshivah in Pressburg under the Ksav Sofer.

The Ksav Sofer in turn had great admiration for Rav Aharon and would always send him warmest regards with his students returning to Mattersdorf at the end of each semester. It 1869, when the students from Mattersdorf took leave of their *rebbi*, the Ksav Sofer, they noted that uncharacteristically he didn't mention a word about Rav Aharon, sending no regards and making no enquiry of his welfare. Unfortunately the reason soon became clear with Rav Aharon's passing shortly after that Yom Tov, to the sorrow of all his admirers.

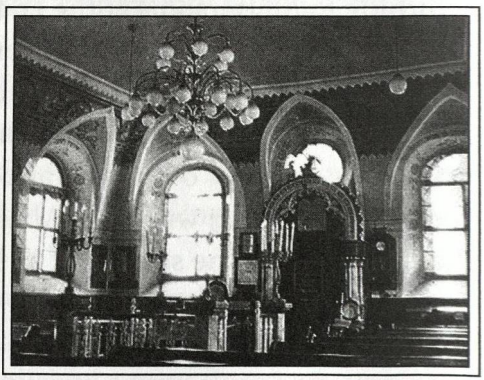
Rav Shmuel Ehrenfeld

Following his passing, the community endured a few years without a *rav* at its helm, and its religious affairs were managed by the town's *dayanim*, prominent among them Rav Yosef Pressburger, a son-in-law of Rav Aharon. Then in 1877, the community turned to Rav Shmuel Ehrenfeld, a grandson of the Chasam Sofer, (son of his son-in-law Rav Dovid Zvi Ehrenfeld, then the *rav* of Siksa [Szikszó]), to come and lead them as *rav* of Mattersdorf. Initially he was hesitant to accept their offer, since his chief aspiration was to instill Torah and *yiras Shamayim* in his students, and he was worried that Mattersdorf, a town in proximity of Vienna with all its negative temptations, would not be an appropriate venue for this. Eventually he was convinced to accept the position. The community was delighted have a third generation of the Chasam Sofer's family at their helm.



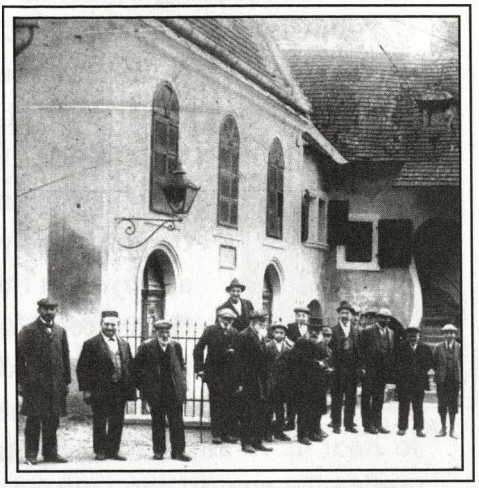
Rav Shmuel Ehrenfeld

During his tenure the yeshivah flourished exceedingly, and many of his students developed into famous Hungarian Rabbis in the years preceding World War II. Their method of teaching and leading their communities, as well as their firm stance toward ensuring absolute adherence to Orthodox principles, was modeled by their years studying under



Interior of the Mattersdorf shul

Rav Shmuel. He went to great lengths to ensure that his students would stay on the accepted path. Any *bachur* would wanted to enter his yeshivah was required to sign a declaration and promise never to attend a college or any institution for foreign studies. In addition to the effort he invested in his students and residents to further their growth in Torah, he also endeavored greatly to instill in them piety, purity and *yiras Shamayim*. For example, during the Three Weeks, from the Seventeenth of Tammuz until Tishah B'Av, he would precede his *shiur* with tearfully reading aloud excerpts from the Midrash regarding the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, evoking in his students a longing for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim.



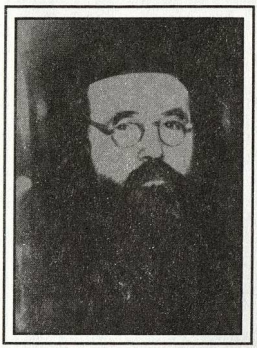
Members of the community outside the shul

Throughout his tenure as *rav*, Rav Shmuel faithfully maintained his family's traditions, conducting his ways similar to those of his grandfather and uncle. He maintained a connection with his uncle Rav Shimon, even making the trip to Cracow once to spend a Yom Tov in his company and bask in his holiness. Rav Shimon in turn related to him with respect and honored him to address the public from the podium of the main shul of Cracow.

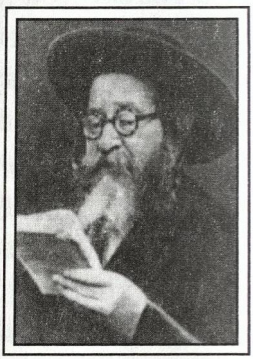
After Rav Shmuel passed away in 1883, his son Rav Simchah Bunim took over his position. Despite the fact that he was only twenty-seven years of age, the community nevertheless all accepted his authority. The yeshivah continued to thrive under his helm with students coming to learn there from far

and wide and many going on to become *rabbanim* of fame. He resolutely led all of the town's institutions and was very active in improving the lot of the town's indigent residents.

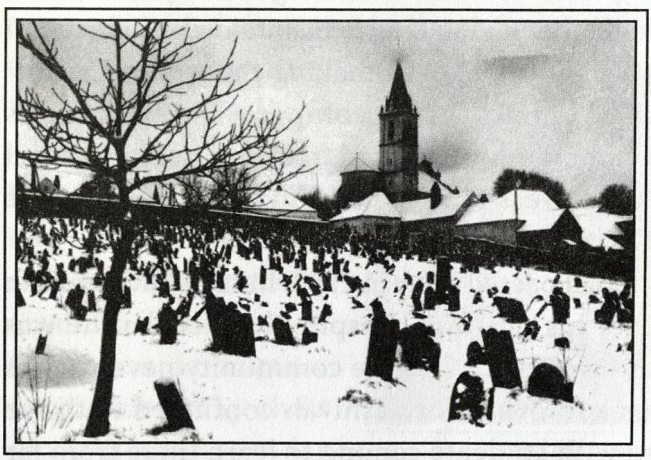
Following his passing in 1926, the community and the yeshivah continued to run successfully under the leadership of his son Rav Shmuel Ehrenfeld. During this time, Rav Yisrael Toisig, a grandson of Rav Aharon Singer, taught at the yeshivah, in addition to serving as *dayan* in the community. In fact, for some time after World War I, there were two yeshivahs in town, one headed by the *rav* and a second by Rav Toisig, but eventually they combined into one, with both teaching there simultaneously. The community consistently maintained its strict religious standard throughout the years and persisted in this manner until its decimation with the German conquest in 1938.



Rav S. Ehrenfeld



Rav Y. Toisig



Beis Hachayim in Mattersdorf before the war

12 The Kehillah of Tzehlem

Prominent among these seven communities, was the *kehillah* of Tzehlem. The real name of the town Tzehlem, as referred to on the maps, is actually Deutschkreutz. However, considering that this was the name of an icon of non-Jewish worship, the Jews gave the town its name Tzehlem, which is the Yiddish word for cross (*kruez*).

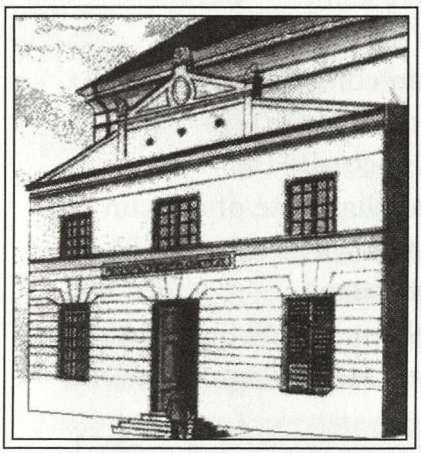
I have particular affinity for Tzehlem, as my husband *zt"l* was born there. His family had lived in Tzehlem for several



Tzehlem. The Jewish quarter is on the right with the shul towering above the quarter.

generations. He would fondly recount incidents from his youth; as a matter of fact, we visited the town together a few years after the war and discovered his childhood home. However we couldn't spend much time there. When the non-Jews saw us eyeing the property, they became anxious that we would reclaim what was rightfully ours and they acted menacingly toward us; so we had to cut our visit short.

Tzehlem held a place of prominence among Jewish communities in general due to the great luminaries who served and taught there. The town was home to a famous yeshivah which attracted many students from all over Hungary.



An early sketch of the shul in Tzehlem

The Jewish residents were upright people, stalwart in their adherence to halachah and loyal to the *rav* and all of his requirements. They faithfully supported the yeshivah, opening their homes to the *bachurim* who came to learn there from out of town, providing them with lodging and their daily meals.

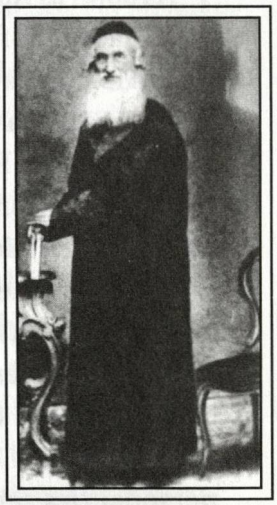
The Jewish community there, though not as ancient as the ones in Eisenstadt and Mattersdorf, had been in existence for hundreds of years. The Jews of the town were a respected part of the general population of Tzehlem. Many of them were well-off, earning a prosperous livelihood through commerce and industry. There were some who worked in wine and whiskey production, some in milk and dairy products, while others were employed in the metal, lumber and textile industries.

In addition to the yeshivah, there was also a Talmud Torah, and there is evidence of its existence from as early as the 1780s.

The town's shul was built in 1746, when the community was granted a plot of land by the Esterhazy overlord specifically for this purpose. Close to ninety years later, in 1834, a devastating fire broke out in town, and severely damaged the shul's wooden building. When rebuilding the shul, the townspeople extended the shul, as the community had expanded. Later, in 1857, the building was refurbished in order to make it sustainable against the elements, protecting it from damage by fire or by water.

Rav Menachem Katz-Prostitz

Rav Menachem Katz-Prostitz, who had originally served as *rav* in Magendorf, was appointed in 1840 as *rav* of the town. A close student of the Chasam Sofer, he rejected any offer of a position in a town not in the vicinity of Pressburg as long as the Chasam Sofer was alive, so that he would be able to continue basking in the light of his *rebbi*.



Rav Menachem Katz

His closeness to the Chasam Sofer can be appreciated from the following incident, which occurred during the Chasam Sofer's final moments on earth. A few weeks prior to his passing, in his weakened state the Chasam Sofer dispatched a letter to Rav Menachem requesting that he come and visit him. The letter was delayed and only arrived after Sukkos, in the early hours of the dismal day that the Chasam Sofer passed away. Upon receiving the letter, Rav Menachem immediately set out to Pressburg to comply with his *rebbi*'s wishes.

By the time he arrived, the situation was grim. An anxious

crowd had gathered in the street below the Chasam Sofer's dwelling, all praying intensely for his recovery. Rav Menachem entered the house and approached his *rebbi*'s bedside, and the Chasam Sofer's eyes lit up when he saw his beloved *talmid*. He immediately asked him if he recalled a certain explanation which he had rendered on a particular concept in *Maseches Sotah*. Rav Menachem recalled the explanation and repeated it to his *rebbi*. The intention of this request was due to the fact that when the Chasam Sofer felt his end drawing near, he had begun reviewing all the Torah he had studied during his lifetime, as is the way of *tzaddikim*, to prepare himself for the ominous judgment after death. Apparently he had managed to recall all of his Torah barring this one insight, and therefore he requested his student to come and remind him of it.

As soon as Rav Menachem finished relaying the explanation, the Chasam Sofer pointed to the exit of his room and stated, "Rav Menachem; *gesisah*," indicating that his time had come. Rav Menachem was a Kohen and could not be in a room with a dead person. Remarkably, as soon as he exited the building, the light of Yisrael was extinguished as the Chasam Sofer's holy soul left his body.

Following the passing of the Chasam Sofer, Rav Menachem accepted the invitation to lead the prestigious community of Tzehlem. He served there for over fifty years, and under his leadership, the community and the yeshivah flourished significantly. Out of their esteem for him, a number of great personalities sent their sons to learn under him. In addition to heading the yeshivah, he also managed the Talmud Torah, and stringently led every aspect of the community. Likewise he did much to assist the *rabbanim* of the nearby towns in their endeavors to preserve the level of Yiddishkeit in their communities.

His jurisdiction covered every aspect of the community,

and the townspeople upheld strict standards pertaining to all matters of Yiddishkeit. A number of measures were taken under his initiative to ensure the safeguarding of religious practice among all of the town's Jews. For example, if an individual would be seen conducting his ways in violation of the Torah, he would not receive an *aliyah* to the Torah. Indeed, during the years of his leadership, all the townspeople led their lives strictly in accordance with the Torah. It is recounted that during his tenure no married Jewish woman was ever seen in town with uncovered hair.



Protection for newborn with portrait of Rav Menachem

The townspeople all revered him tremendously, so much so, that it became a practice for women after giving birth to place his portrait in the room of the newborn baby as a protection against evil spirits.

Even the non-Jews of the town venerated him greatly. This was intensified following an incident that occurred, when some local urchins were taught a lesson after causing trouble and mocking a Jewish custom. The practice of the local Jews in paying their last respects to a deceased town member was to place the coffin in an enclosed carriage which would be led to the cemetery. All the townspeople walked after the carriage and the *shamash* — holding a *tzedakah* box and chanting repeatedly, "Charity is a safeguard from death" — led the procession.

Some urchins who wanted to ridicule the Jews broke into the cemetery storageroom and stole the wagon. They began mimicking a funeral procession. One of their ilk climbed inside the wagon, another held the *tzedakah* box and chanted, and the rest of them followed behind. The Jews who saw this

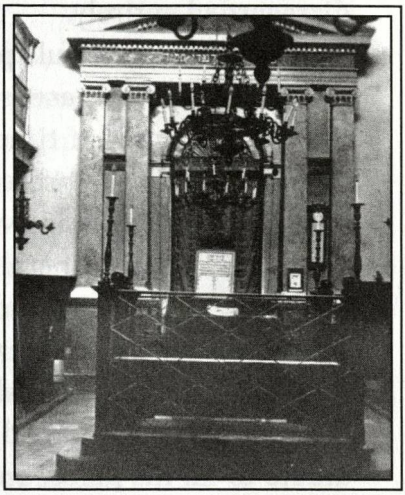
mockery were deeply hurt and ran to Rav Menachem to relay the happenings. He calmly told them not to worry, noting that this would be the last time the non-Jews would dare do such a thing. Indeed once the urchins reached the cemetery and completed their show, they waited for their friend to climb out of the wagon, but he didn't. They looked inside the wagon, and saw to their horror that he was no longer alive. Thus they learned their harsh lesson not to harass the Jews.

Over the years Rav Menachem came to be recognized as a leader of Hungarian Jewry. It was he who led the delegation of *rabbanim* representing their brethren before the Kaiser in 1869 regarding the segregation of the *kehillos,* to plead on behalf of the Orthodox communities that they be granted official recognition. The Kaiser, who had heard of his activities toward the welfare of the poor and downtrodden, bestowed him with due honors, and was greatly impressed by his shining countenance and his wisdom. All in all, his presentation before the Kaiser, with the other *rabbanim* of the delegation, manifested the legitimacy of the Orthodox approach, and resulted in a great *Kiddush Hashem.*

The following anecdote is an example of how he successfully had the Orthodox behavior recognized by law, revoking the attempts of the Neologists to instigate otherwise. A group of Neologists had a meeting with the Kaiser in their efforts to sway his opinion against the Orthodox. Upon hearing of their notions, Rav Menachem urgently set out to Vienna, along with two other *rabbanim,* to plead their case before the Kaiser in order to try and neutralize their destructive act. Upon his arrival, he was escorted to the Kaiser, but as it wasn't a prearranged meeting, the Kaiser did not receive them in his official reception room. He met with the *rabbanim* in his art gallery, where he was present at the time.

He welcomed the Rabbis warmly and inquired what had

brought them with such haste. Rav Menachem gazed at the majestic pieces of art in the room and commented that he was awestruck by the tremendous magnificence of the art collection in the room. As such, he said, before discussing the objective of their visit, he would be grateful to be granted a few moments to view some of the artwork. The Kaiser was flattered by the rabbis' apparent show of interest in his collection, and gladly guided them around his gallery, detailing the name of the artist and year of creation of each piece.



Aron kodesh and bimah in Tzehlem shul

Rav Menachem exhibited great interest in the Kaiser's explanations, but mentioned that he heard of an artist in a certain small village who boasts that his modern painting style surpasses that of the many world-famous artists of preceding generations. The Kaiser answered that the fellow's arrogance is baseless, and the status of his artwork will only be confirmed if in hundreds of years from now people will cherish his artwork in the manner that the artwork of the past years are treasured.

This was exactly what Rav Menachem was hoping to hear. He exclaimed, "This precisely is the negation to the claims of the apostates that their modern concepts supersede the Torah-true traditions which have been in place and adhered to faithfully for thousands of years. Their boasting is as baseless as the village artist's, and can be confirmed only in hundreds of years' time, if students will still be delving into their ideas in the manner that the Torah has been studied for all generations. The Kaiser, extremely impressed by Rav Menachem's

ingenuity, gave him his word that he would give credence only to the Orthodox, whereas the Neologists' petitions would be disregarded entirely.

After that successful episode, Rav Menachem continued to toil in support of these issues and traveled to Budapest and Vienna a number of times to take part in official meetings toward the effect of preserving authentic Yiddishkeit.

Rav Menachem was over ninety years old when he passed away in 1891. His funeral was a large affair, attended by Rav Shalom Kutna of Eisenstadt, Rav Simchah Bunim Ehrenfeld of Mattersdorf, many other *rabbanim*, as well as regular people from neighboring towns who came to pay him his last respects. His son-in-law Rav Dovid Friedman was the unanimous candidate to fill his place, and at the funeral it was announced that he would be the new *rav* of Tzehlem. All the attending *rabbanim* blessed him with success in continuing his father-in-law's legacy.

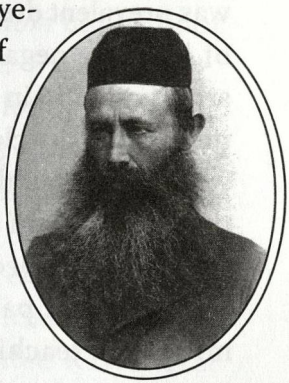
Rav Dovid Friedman

Rav Dovid possessed a very sharp mind and was recognized from a young age for his great intellect and knowledge. He had originally studied in Pressburg under the Ksav Sofer, and with the passing of the Ksav Sofer in 1872 he sought an alternative venue to further his progress in Torah studies and relocated to the yeshivah of Tzehlem. Rav Menachem instantly discerned his advanced level and drew him close, and in 1874, he took Rav Dovid as a son-in-law.

Soon after his marriage, at the young age of twenty-three, he was appointed to serve as *dayan* alongside his father-in-law. Whenever his father-in-law, the *rav*, had to travel out of

town for his endeavors on behalf of his brethren; Rav Dovid would substitute for him and take care of his local obligations, including teaching in the yeshivah.

After assuming the position of *rav*, the yeshivah continued to thrive, as in the times of his father-in-law. Many erudite students, attracted to his brilliance as well as to his mode of teaching, came from afar to learn under him. He adopted the teaching style of his *rebbi*, the Ksav Sofer, training his students how to achieve expertise in practical halachah through tracing everything to its source.



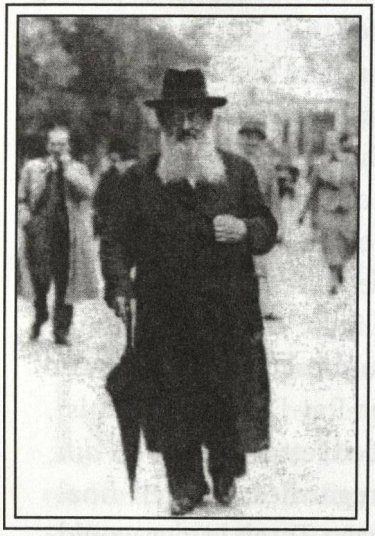
Rav Dovid Friedman

Rav Dovid was a staunch defender for the honor of the Torah and its scholars. He would firmly denounce any perceived disparagement of a *rav* or Torah scholar. Once, a heated dispute took place concerning the rabbinate of Galanta. A new *rav*, who was related to one of the leading layman of the community, had just been appointed, and some were apprehensive that the *rav* would be beholden to the layman, which would have an impact on his rulings. They voiced their concerns in a disrespectful manner, and many *rabbanim* affirmed their view on this subject. When Rav Dovid heard this, he immediately penned a sharply worded letter to the *beis din* involved with the issue, stating that regardless of their final verdict, it was a disgrace to presume that a Torah leader would be beholden to a layman, and on no terms may reference be made to such a concept. He added that if he would ever hear such terminology used in his community, he would without delay excommunicate the person who spoke in that manner.

Similar to his father-in-law, Rav Dovid firmly led the community in an uncompromising manner. Both Jews and non-Jews respected him greatly for his wisdom and his piety, and it was

common for the non-Jews to ask him mediate their disputes. He took particular care to ensure that the townspeople would uphold the sanctity of Shabbos. Indeed, although modernism was prevalent during that period, Tzehlem remained unsullied of all these negative influences, and the town continued to strictly maintain its religious atmosphere. Interestingly, in a newspaper article penned during that period by a journalist who had visited the town, the writer stated with astonishment that the winds of modernity blowing through the country had somehow skipped over Tzehlem.

Rav Dovid passed away suddenly in 1906, while in the middle of teaching in the yeshivah. He left behind him a generation of great scholars. A number of Rav Dovid's students, as well as his son and sons-in-law, were famous leaders of Hungarian communities preceding World War II. Three of his sons-in-law who gained renown are Rav Mordechai Rottenberg, Chief Rabbi of Antwerp; Rav Benzion Snyders, *rav* of Győr; and Rav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal of Pishtian.



Rav M. Rottenberg

Rav Mordechai Rottenberg had served for a number of years as *dayan* in Tzehlem, but had already relocated to Galicia to serve as *rav* in Vodowitz, a small town there. Upon his father-in-law's passing, the community viewed him as a suitable candidate to fill his father-in-law's place as *rav* of Tzehlem. The *rosh hakahal* at the time, Shimon Lipschutz [Rav Mordechai's father, R' Naftali, was a son of Herschel Lipschutz of Cracow, father of Shimon], was his uncle and he tried to persuade Rav Mordechai to take the

position. Rav Mordechai refused for two reasons: the residents of his present community pressured him not to forsake them, and out of respect for his brother-in-law, Rav Shlomo the son of Rav Dovid, who was in fact a *talmid chachom* but had not been chosen as a candidate for the rabbinate.

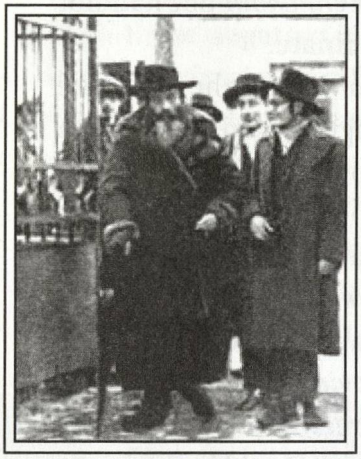
A number of prominent personalities vied for the rabbinate of Tzehlem. This was in view of the high regard with which the community was beheld and due to the famous yeshivah housed there.

Following a contested election and acting on the advice of Rav Shmuel Rosenberg of Unsdorf, who was considered a leader of Hungarian Jewry, the community appointed Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald, author of *Keren L'Dovid*, to fill the position of *rav*. Prior to this appointment, Rav Greenwald had served as *rav* of Szerdahely. In his youth, Rav Eliezer Dovid had actually studied under Rav Moshe Konig, and he corresponded with him in writing during his tenure in Tzehlem. He served the community and led the yeshivah for five years, investing great effort for the benefit of its students. In 1912 he left Tzehlem and went to serve as *rav* in Oberwischau (Vishevve), and eventually became the *rav* of Satmar.

Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah Greenwald

Following his departure, Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah Greenwald, his nephew (son of his older brother, the author of *Arugas HaBosem*), came to serve the community. His tenure coincided with World War I, and, in addition to his obligations to the community and the yeshivah, he extended himself greatly during that tumultous period to assist his beleaguered brethren, particularly the Galician refugees, who moved to the region to escape the persecution in their homeland.

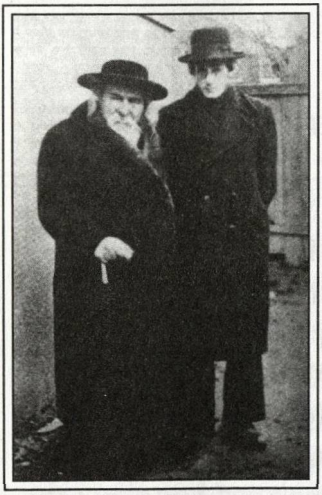
In the years following the war, the student-body of the yeshivah declined considerably due to the instability in the area during that period. Gangs of Hungarian nationals would roam through the towns and villages sowing terror among the Jewish population, in what was known as the White Terror. Eventually in 1921 the situation was stabilized, when the region officially came under Austrian sovereign in accordance with the Treaty of Trianon.



Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah Greenwald

Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah led the community, encouraging the people and giving them his support. He held onto the position as *rav* of Tzehlem until 1923, when he left to become the *rav* of Papa (Pupa).

After him, Rav Yosef Elimelech Kahana came to lead the community. In his youth he had studied in the yeshivah in Ungvahr, under Rav Chaim Zvi Manheimer and Rav Shlomo Ganzfried, author of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, and was highly regarded for his tremendous scholarship. During his tenure in Tzehlem, the yeshivah regained its previous prominence with many *talmidim* coming to learn there from across the land. A well-known student of his was Rav Shmuel Wosner *zt"l* of Bnei Brak. As a matter of fact, Rav Wosner would often eat "*teg*" at the home of the Frischman family. Many years later while living in Bnei Brak, descendants of the family went in to Rav Wosner



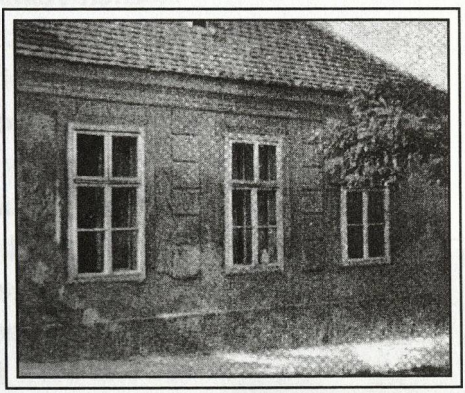
Rav Y E. Kahana

and when mentioning their surname, he fondly recalled the accommodations he was provided in the Frischman home and praised the family for this.

He led the community until 1931 when he was offered the rabbinate of Ungvahr, the town where he had studied in his youth, where he served until the war.

Rav Levi Yitzchak Greenwald

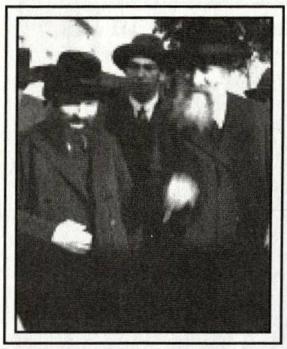
The last *rav* of Tzehlem was Rav Levi Yitzchak Greenwald, the youngest son of the Arugas HaBosem. His inauguration as *rav* in 1932 was a memorable event, complete with a festive meal for all of the townspeople, attended by representatives of a number of neighboring communities and addressed by the *rabbanim* of Eisenstadt, Lakenbach and Sopron. Even the town's children had a part in the festivities, and specially ordered candies (actually salt sticks) were distributed to the *kehillah* members' children. Upon his entrance to the towns, the townspeople lined the streets with many going out to greet him with large banners expressing their joy at his arrival, and a large procession accompanied him until the shul.



The Talmud Torah in Tzehlem

He led the community with devotion and taught in the yeshivah where many students came to learn from near and far. The yeshivah retained its high level under his leadership, and he was greatly admired by his students.

As a matter of interest, although the constitution of the *kehillah* of Tzehlem was in accordance with the Ashkenazic customs, as was the way of all the Sheva Kehillos, the Greenwald family members were Chassidim and frequented the court of Belz. Nevertheless, they didn't impose their Chassidic affiliation upon the community, rather conducting themselves in public according to the local traditions. In the yeshivah however, certain Chassidic customs were assumed, and on Friday nights the *rav* would conduct a weekly *tisch* in the company of his students.



The Tzehlemer Rav welcoming the Nitra Rav on a visit to Tzehlem

Although the townspeople adhered to their Ashkenazic traditions, they had no opposition to Chassidim. On the contrary, they held Chassidic Rebbes in high esteem, and it seems that there were many who were somewhat influenced by their leaders' Chassidic affiliation.

My husband recounted that when his oldest brother was gravely ill, his distraught mother traveled to the Belzer Rav to receive his blessing and advice. This was probably because of the influence of the town's *rav*.

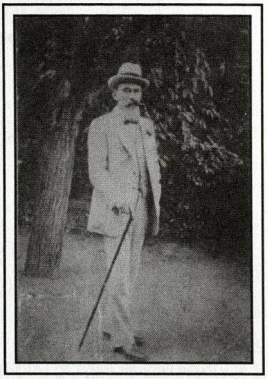


Rav Levi Yitzchak with his students

Rav Levi Yitzchak was beloved and highly revered by all the townspeople, and he in turn conducted himself with exceptional humility and with affection toward his constituents. In addition to running the yeshivah and all his other responsibilities as *rav*, he would give a weekly *farher* to the boys of the town's *cheder*. My husband would

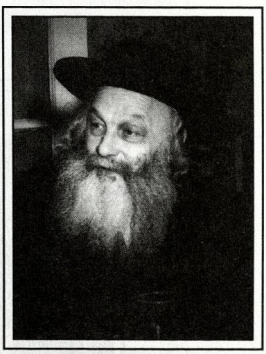
go to the yeshivah every Thursday with his classmates to be tested by the *rav*.

All in all, the townspeople maintained their strict standards in Yiddishkeit, and exemplified themselves with their kind deeds and love for the Torah and its scholars. The yeshivah was a focal point of the community, and the majority of the townspeople had *bachurim* staying in their homes on a regular basis. The last *rosh hakahal*, Lazer Dovid Spiegel, was a wealthy wine merchant who had inherited his business from his father. In fact, Tzehlem was known for its wine production, supplying the whole region with its high-quality wines, and the Spiegels held a place of prominence in this industry. His grandfather Naftali Hertz had also held the position of *rosh hakahal* a number of years earlier (prior to the abovementioned Shimon Lipschutz).



Lazer Dovid Spiegel

The position of *rosh hakahal* was one of tremendous authority, surpassed only by the *rav*. In the majority of instances they would exert their influence for the assistance of their brethren and in support of the *rav* in his efforts toward advancing the Torah's interests. Indeed, the Spiegels were known for their integrity, as well as for their open home and their extraordinary esteem for all *talmidei chachomim* and for the *bachurim* of the yeshivah.



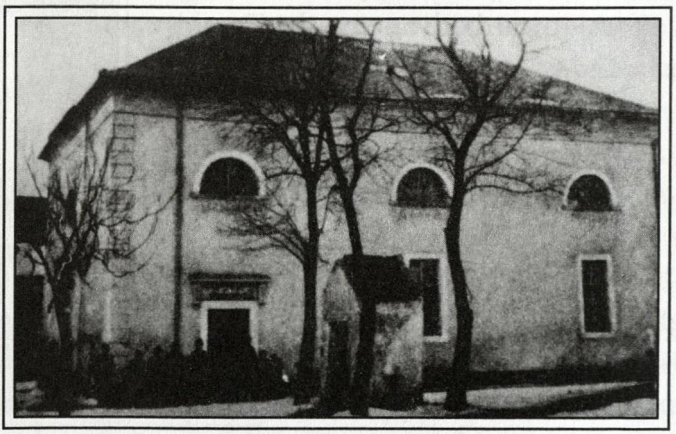
Rav Levi Yitzchak Greenwald after the war in the U.S.

In 1938, the German conquest of Austria brought about the decimation of Tzehlem. Providentially, the *rav* had managed to procure a visa to America and relocated there, where he reestablished the Tzehlemer institutions.

13 The Kehillah of Frauenkirchen

Frauenkirchen wasn't a large town, and its Jewish community was the latest to be established of all the seven *kehillos*. The first evidence of Jewish residency there is sometime during the seventeenth century. The town was home to a large impressive shul, a Talmud Torah, a *hekdesh* to provide shelter for poor travelers and a Jewish hospital, and for some time there was also a yeshivah in the town.

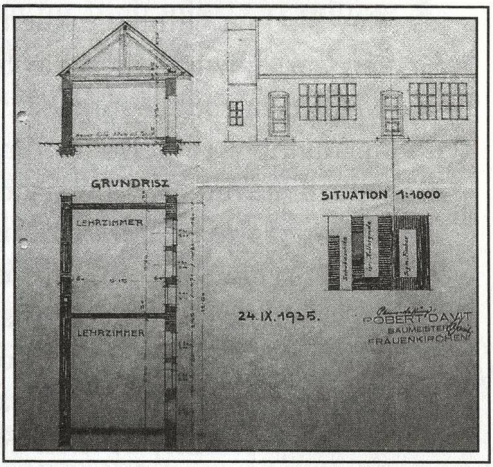
In 1749, the community bought a plot of land for their first shul. This building was used for close to a hundred years, until 1840 when a devastating fire ravaged the village and the



The shul in Frauenkirchen

shul sustained severe damage. The community immediately established a fund for the building of a new edifice, and by 1843 an impressive structure had been erected.

As time went on, the community realized the necessity for the construction of a school building. An educational institution did exist from as early as 1712, but not on its own premises. Thus in 1854, the school building was erected. There were two classrooms in the school, one for the younger children and the second for the older ones learning on a higher level.



Building plans for the Talmud Torah building in Frauenkirchen

The first recorded Rabbi to serve in Frauenkirchen was Rav Naftali Hertz Auerbach, who led the community during the 1730s. He was a close acquaintance of Rav Meir of Eisenstadt and held written correspondence with him.

A number of other great personalities served there, markedly the great Rav Dovid Deutch who served there from 1790 until 1800. He was held in high esteem by all contemporary *rabbanim* of his generation, including Rav Yechezkel Landau of Prague, author of the *Noda B'Yehudah*, the Chasam Sofer, the Yismach Moshe from Ujehly and Rav Chaim of Sanz. Later, Rav Dovid went on to serve as *rav* of Novo-Meste (called Ir Chadash by the Jewish residents).

Rav Shalom Ullman

In the ensuing years, the community merited having a number of other great luminaries at their helm. In 1802, Rav Shalom Ullman came to lead the community. Rav Shalom was known to all as Rav Shalom Charif, the sharp one, due to his tremendous intellect. He had previously served as *rav* in a number of German communities, the country of his origin. He moved to Hungary circa 1800 and accepted the invitation of the Frauenkirchen community to lead them. These years coincided with the tenure of the Chasam Sofer in Mattersdorf, with whom Rav Shalom held a particularly close acquaintance, having studied together with him under Rav Pinchas Horowitz in Frankfurt as well as under Rav Nosson Adler. The proximity of their two communities gave them sufficient opportunity to maintain their bond and indeed they regularly corresponded with each other.

Rav Shalom served the community faithfully for seven years, until the occurrence of a frightening episode which caused him to leave the town. It was in 1809, the year that a fierce war took place between Napoleon's French forces and the Austrian empire. As Napoleon's soldiers entered Frauenkirchen, they immediately made their way to the *rav*'s home and took him captive. The *rebbetzin* pleaded with them to leave him in peace; however, ignoring her cries they maliciously tied him between two horses and took him into custody in this cruel manner. They then demanded that the community pay an enormous ransom, threatening to harm the *rav* if this demand would not be met. The community members were not very wealthy and even after assembling all their valuables, they were still missing most of the money. Left with no option, they approached the soldiers and presented them with what they had collected.

Fortunately, the soldiers took the money without checking the amount and released the *rav*.

Following this episode, Rav Shalom feared staying in the town, and even though he was exceedingly grateful to the community of Frauenkirchen for their efforts in gaining his release, he nonetheless felt that he had no choice and left the town, relocating to nearby Lakenbach where he was appointed to serve as *rav* there.

In the ensuing years, there were a number of additional famous *rabbanim* who served the townspeople. Among them was a grandson of the great Rav Pinchas Horowitz of Frankfurt.



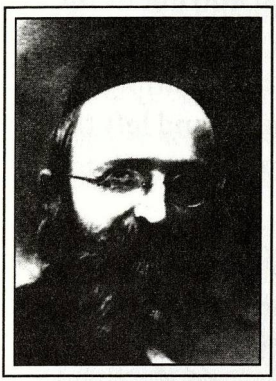
Rav Y. Y. Landsberg

During the 1840s, the *rav* was Rav Yisrael Yitzchak Aharon Landsberg, who later went on to become the *rav* of Grosswardein, where he served until his passing in 1879. While in Grosswardein, he gained fame as one of the Torah leaders of the land and was frequently turned to for arbitration on the various issues involving the Orthodox communities. However, he stated that his most tranquil period was the few years spent as *rav* of Frauenkirchen, and he mentioned his regrets for giving up this post. It was during his tenure in Frauenkirchen that the impressive shul building was erected, with the construction and inauguration done under his auspices.

Rav Moshe Shimon Levy

The last *rav*, who served there up until the community's decimation, was Rav Moshe Shimon Levy. He ascended to this position in 1892, after having served as *rav* of

Jóka (in the Nitra region) for a few years. He gained renown for his diligence and great Torah knowledge, and over the years was requested by a number of prominent communities to come and lead them. However, he turned down all these offers, explaining that he was especially fond of his present position, due to the piety of Frauenkirchen's residents, the erudition of the local scholars, and the devotion of even the simple men to Torah study.



Rav Moshe Shimon

The aspect of his duties from which he derived particular pleasure was the daily in-depth Torah *shiur* he gave to a group of learned men. In his later years, when his eyesight began failing him, he would on no account agree to forgo the shiur, but since he had difficulty reading, one of the attendees would read the text aloud, and the *rav* would elucidate and elaborate on the matter.

The *kehillah* was indeed comprised of many scholarly individuals and even the simple *baalei batim* were upright people who took care to lead their lives in accordance with halachah. In the few instances where an individual attempted to publicly violate the laws of the Torah, the *rav* would battle fearlessly in order to preserve the religious atmosphere in the town. He instituted a number of directives within the com-



Rav Moshe Shimon Levy outside his home



Beis Hachayim in Frauenkirchen

munity in order to reinforce the upkeep of Shabbos and kashrus.

As there was no yeshivah in town, Rav Moshe Shimon would persuade *kehillah* members to send their sons away to study in one of the prestigious yeshivahs of the country. In this way he ensured the continuity of Torah among his constituents. Rav Moshe Shimon retained his position for forty-five years, until he left for Eretz Yisrael at the onset of the war.

My brother-in-law, Mr. Alexander Rechnitzer of London, came from Frauenkirchen. He married my husband's sister, Esther Frischman from Tzehlem. He was an example of the pious and upstanding *baalei batim* of these *kehillos*.



A Jewish street in Frauenkirchen.
On right is a business owned by A. Rechnitzer.

14 The Kehillah of Lakenbach

The community of Lakenbach was of the larger communities of the Sheva Kehillos, and at its prime, midway through the nineteenth century, numbered over one thousand individuals.

A number of famous rabbanim served the community over the years. Following the establishment of the Sheva Kehillos, Rav Meir of Eisenstadt sent his son Rav Binyamin to live in Lakenbach in order to lead the community there.

In 1770, the community appointed Rav Shlomo Zalman Lipschutz from Cracow to serve as their *rav*. He had been visiting the country on a mission of his local *beis din*, to



The Shul courtyard in Lakenbach

accumulate signatures from the Hungarian Rabbis on relevant issues. His arrival at Lakenbach coincided with the passing of the *rav*, Rav Binyamin, and he delivered a powerful *hesped* which duly impressed the townspeople. They forwarded a proposal, offering him the rabbinate to fill the newly vacated post. He conveyed his consent, providing that the community accede to a number of stipulations, chiefly that they establish and support a yeshivah in their midst. After reaching an agreement he accepted their offer, and led the community for close to forty years. During his tenure he did much to benefit the community, instating several *takanos*, and promoting more rigorous adherence among the townspeople to the Torah and its commandments.



Kever of Rav S. Z. Lipschutz

Rav Shalom Ullman

Following the passing of Rav Lipschutz, the position was filled by Rav Shalom Ullman. He was considered one of the greatest *geonim* of his time, and was acquainted with some of the prominent leaders of the Jewish nation.

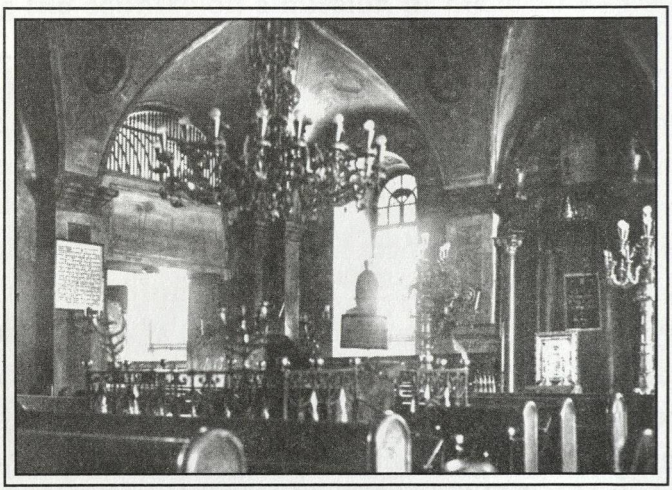
As mentioned earlier, he had served until 1809 as *rav* of nearby Frauenkirchen, but left that town after an unsettling episode which made him frightened of living there. He then accepted the invitation of the Lakenbach community to fill the recently vacated position of the rabbinate. He held an acquaintance with the other *rabbanim* of the Sheva Kehillos,

in particular with Rav Bunim, the brother of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, who had recently assumed the rabbinate of Mattersdorf. Rav Shalom and Rav Bunim were *mechutanim*; his son Rav Shlomo Zalman was married to Rav Bunim's daughter.

Many prized students flocked to the yeshivah in Lakenbach to learn under him. In addition to the yeshivah which already existed in town, he opened another yeshivah to cater to younger students, and handed over the position of leadership to his son Rav Shlomo Zalman who later became the *rav* of Mako (Makevve).

Rav Shalom was venerated tremendously by all the townspeople, and his name spread far and wide. Aside for his greatness in Torah, he also gained renown for having spiritual powers, with awareness of proceedings in the heavenly realm. Even the non-Jews greatly respected him and dubbed him the "Wunder-Rabbiner."

His great powers can be perceived from an astounding occurrence that transpired with a student of his, Rav Shmuel Shmelka Klein, later the *rav* of Szellish. Once, when he was strolling through the woods on the outskirts of the town,



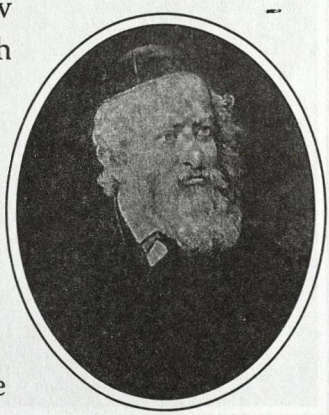
Interior of the Lakenbach shul

deeply engrossed in Torah study, a pack of wolves that had been roaming in the woods came upon him, ready to attack him. He searched desperately for an avenue of escape from the severe danger, when all of a sudden an old man appeared out of nowhere and chased the wolves away, thereby saving his life. Later, he visited his *rebbi* Rav Shalom and described his experience. Rav Shalom informed him that the old man was no mortal. It was a *tzaddik* of several generations earlier, the author a famous *sefer*, who came to save Rav Shmuel Shmelka from danger due to the merit he had accrued by delving into the *tzaddik*'s *sefer*.

Rav Shalom led the community until his passing in 1825, and his position was filled by his son Rav Avraham. Rav Avraham took an active role in promoting his community's development. He instated numerous associations — in support of the town's poor, as well as for enhancing the observance of the laws of the Torah. Particularly after a devastating fire ravaged the town causing damage to the shul and to many homes, Rav Avraham exerted himself to repair the damage, soliciting support from other communities and affluent Jews across Europe.

Like his father, he was also respected by his contemporaries and was in close contact with a number of well-known luminaries of his time, including the Ksav Sofer and Rav Avraham Shag, who both eulogized him upon his passing in 1849.

After him, his son Rav Dovid Ullman was appointed as *rav* of Lakenbach. Even though he was only twenty-six years old at the time, the community unanimously chose him to fill the place of his father, due to his greatness in Torah and righteousness. He served the community faithfully for over fifty years,



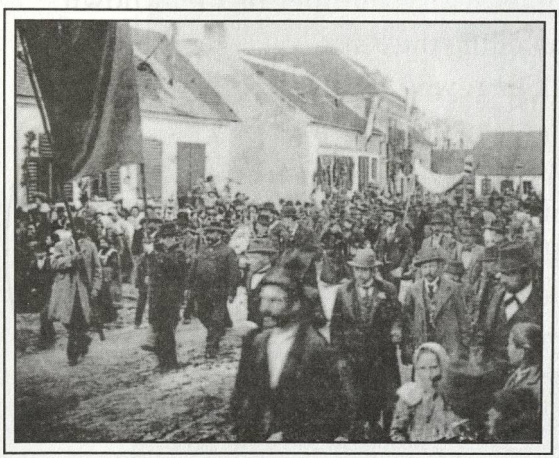
Rav Dovid Ullman

until his passing in 1901. Rav Dovid had several sons leading lives of Torah, as befitting to their illustrious ancestry. His youngest son, Leib, resided in Lakenbach and was a reputable *talmid chachom*. However rather than joining the rabbinate, he chose to earn a living through commerce, and acquired the ownership of a leather-goods factory. He prospered in business and became well-known for his integrity and his charitable deeds.

Rav Yehudah Kraus

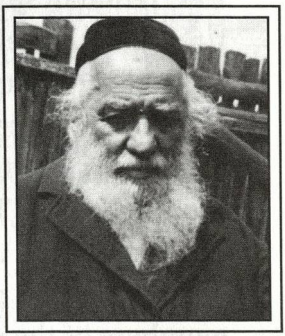
Thus for the first time in close to a hundred years, the community *rav* was not from the Ullman dynasty. Community leaders now turned to Rav Yehudah Kraus, the *rav* of Janoshalma, a small town in the Nitra district. He acquiesced to their entreaty. Lakenbach's residents were overjoyed with his acceptance and went out to welcome him, escorting him into town under a canopy. Young and old all joined in the procession.

Rav Yehudah had been a close pupil of Maharam Schick. In addition to his extensive Torah knowledge, he was a very talented personality and he applied his brilliance toward the act of disseminating Torah. Acting on the advice of Maharam Schick, he chose to forgo publishing his own *chiddushim* in order



Welcoming procession for Rav Yehudah Kraus, 1902

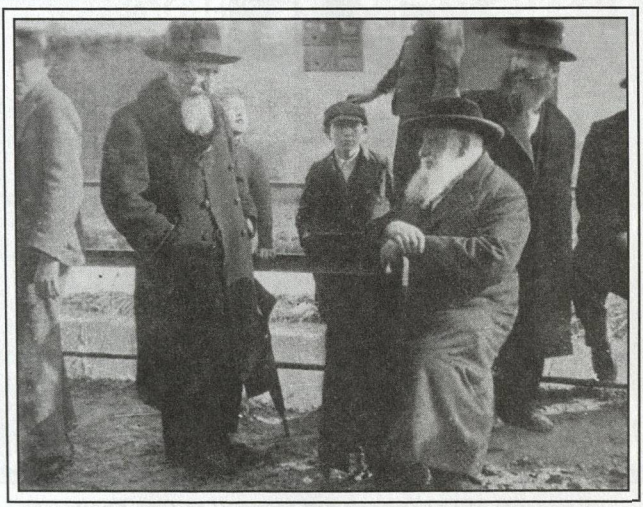
to avail himself fully to teaching Torah and halachah to the masses. To this effect, he translated many popular halachic works into Yiddish to make them accessible to even the simple unlearned folk.



Rav Yehudah Kraus

Rav Yehudah endeavored greatly to enhance the levels of Torah study and devotion to the mitzvos among his constituents. The townspeople were enamored with his powerful oratory, and he addressed them regularly on numerous occasions throughout the year. Additionally, he attracted a group of students, locally and from out of town, who came to learn Torah from him on a regular basis.

He was particularly vigilant against any modern notions, standing steadfastly on guard to prevent any infringement in matters of halachah and Jewish tradition. To this end, he often attended meetings and conventions for community *rabbanim* on this topic. Specifically in his own community, he exercised great caution against any inappropriate conduct.



Rav Y. Kraus with Rav S. Benedikt from Vienna. Standing behind him is Rav Ungar.

One year before Purim a group of unruly youth made plans for a Purim party which would breach the codes of modesty. Rav Yehudah spoke out against this, but they brazenly continued with their plans. On Purim night, at the scheduled time of the party, the *rav* himself stood sentry at the party venue's entrance. When the youth arrived and saw the *rav* at the doorway, they were filled with trepidation and stopped their activities. Thus the *rav* managed to prevent their misconduct and to uphold the *kedushah* in the community.

All in all the *rav* was successful in his endeavors, and the members of the community all adhered appropriately to the Torah's ways. An individual who sought to discard the yoke of Torah would simply leave town, as there were no facilities in Lakenbach for a lifestyle not in accordance with the Torah. Rav Yehudah led the community faithfully until 1935 when he immigrated to Eretz Yisrael.

In view of the fact that Lakenbach was in close proximity to Kobersdorf, there were some facilities shared by the

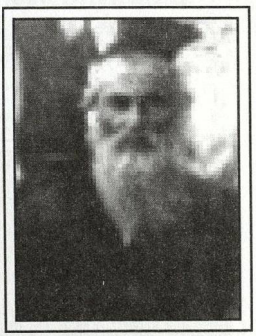


Residents of Lakenbach bid farewell to Rav Kraus. Rav Ungar is at his right.

two communities. In the early years when Kobersdorf didn't have its own *rav*, Rav Binyamin of Eisenstadt guided that community from his residence in Lakenbach. Additionally, years later, after the yeshivah of Lakenbach ceased to exist for a period until it was reestablished by Rav Yehudah Kraus, there were a number of youngsters from Lakenbach who used to commute to Kobersdorf to learn Torah from the village's scholars, including Rav Moshe Konig. (This will be discussed in more detail later.)

The *rav* of the town Rav Yehudah Kraus was a close acquaintance of Rav Moshe Konig of Kobersdorf and corresponded with him frequently. They each held the other in high esteem, as is evident from the manner in which they addressed each other in their letters.

One of the town's *dayanim* was Rav Shlomo Yacobovitz, a grandfather of the Chief Rabbi of England, Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jacobovits. He was from a distinguished family and was a son-in-law of Rav Tuvia Schwartz who had also served as a *dayan* in Lakenbach. He had a great rapport with the *rav*, Rav Yehudah, and the two accorded each other due respect. Rav Yehudah would periodically repeat Rav Shlomo's *divrei Torah* in his *derashos*.



Rav S. Yacobovitz

One of Rav Shlomo's sons, Yoel, was one of the students who went go to Kobersdorf to learn from Rav Moshe Konig. All of his children grew up to be upstanding people leading lives of Torah. Mr. Baruch Galandaur, Rav Shlomo's son-in-law, was a pious and learned individual and a skilled physician. He had a practice in Lakenbach, and he would also cycle into Kobersdorf to treat patients there.

The last *rav* who served the community was Rav Meir Chaim

Ungar, son-in-law of Rav Kraus. He took over the rabbinate in 1935 after his father-in-law emigrated to Eretz Yisrael, and served there until the Anschluss, when he relocated to Yerushalayim. His son-in-law was Rav Nosson Gestetner of Bnei Brak.



Rav Y. Kraus flanked by son R' Moshe Aharon, rav of Nagybánya, and his son-in-law Rav Ungar. The girl is Rav Ungar's daughter, Ethel Gestetner.



Beis Hachayim in Lakenbach

15 The Kehillah of Kitzee

Kitzee is the most northerly of these towns, in close proximity to Pressburg. The community of Kitzee was very small in comparison to the other communities, and even in its prime, only numbered roughly 370 individuals. By 1880, approximately 110 Jews lived there, and following the turn of the twentieth century the community continued to dwindle considerably and at some point, barely continued to function.

The village had been home to numerous great *talmidei chachomim*. In 1813, the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger, passed through the town on the way to Eisenstadt to the wedding of his daughter to the Chasam Sofer. The *rav* of Kitzee was then the renowned Rav Zvi Hirsh Broide, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger honored him with a visit to discuss various issues concerning Jewish law with him. Rav Zvi Hirsh was famous throughout Hungary and



Jewish street and shul in Kitzee

beyond, and upon his passing; the Chasam Sofer especially came to Kitzee in order to pay him his last respect and eulogize him.

There is no record of a yeshivah in Kitzee, although other community amenities existed there. The shul was housed in an impressive edifice, built in 1826. The *kehillah* owned a *hekdesh* building to provide shelter for the poor and homeless, as well as a community building (*gemeinde haus*) wherein there was a kosher butcher and wine shop.


סדר
הגדה של פסח
עם ברכותיהם לפניהם
ולאחריהם · ועם ציורים
נאים · וערבים לקוראיהם
ובפרט לקטנים המסובין
על שלחן אביהם
קק קיצע · סמוך לעיר
פרעשׁ בורג:
בשנת תק"ל לפק

Illustrated Kitzee Haggadah

The village gained some publicity during the eighteenth century due to a gifted artist, Chaim ben Ascher Anschel who resided there, from 1741 until 1782. He illustrated Haggadahs and other religious articles. The title page on his *sefarim* noted that the locale of publication was "Kitzee in the vicinity of Pressburg."

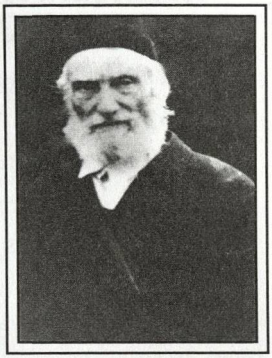
Rav Zvi Hersh Perls

The last *rav* in Kitzee was Rav Zvi Hersh Perls. His grandfather Rav Meir Abeles, a student of the Chasam Sofer, had served as the village's *rav* before him, from 1844 until 1887.

Rav Zvi was born in Verbau and was a scion of a rabbinic family. He had studied in his youth under Rav Eliezer Zev Alt of Kobersdorf, and continued on to Pressburg to learn under the Shevet Sofer.

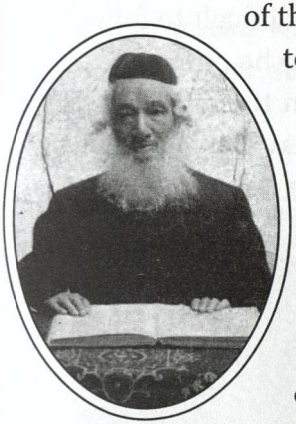
He began his tenure in Kitzee as a young man in 1880 when he came to serve as *dayan* alongside his grandfather

Rav Meir, and then in 1888 ascended to the position of village *rav*. Initially when he was offered the position, he observed the structure and situation of the Jews of the village, and noted with dismay that the community seemed to be fading away. He went to consult with the *av beis din* in Pressburg Rav Dovid Neiman (known as Rav Dovid Lakenbach; which was his place of birth) to seek his advice. Rav Dovid was one of the last surviving students of the Chasam Sofer and was highly revered by his contemporaries, significantly as he was considered a link in the continuation of the *mesorah*.



Rav Zvi Perls

Rav Dovid placated him and encouraged him to take the job. He relayed what he had heard from his teachers: in light of the fact that all Sheva Kehillos were founded together, they therefore all share the same destiny. All seven are judged in heaven simultaneously, and hence the fate of one of them will be the fate of them all.



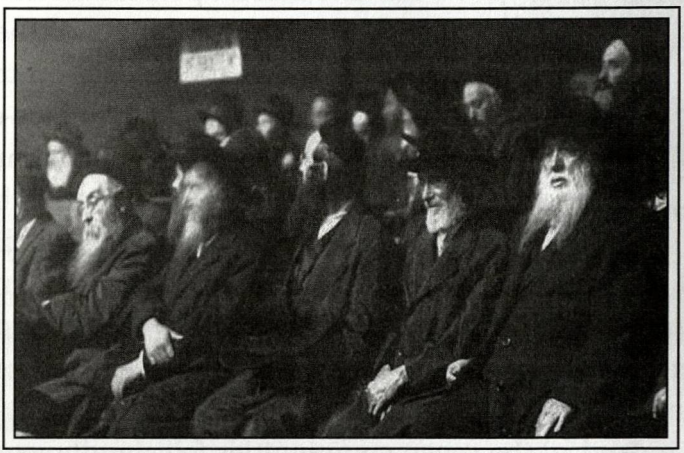
Rav Dovid Neiman

Rav Zvi acted upon his advice and ascended to the rabbinate of the village, over the years he held on to the position assiduously, even in face of its declination. He led the small community affectionately, gaining appreciation by all for his pleasant demeanor and kind disposition, and he would toiled in Torah study day and night. He was actually approached a number of times with attempts to persuade him to relocate to Pressburg, but he wouldn't forsake his community and served there up until the Anschluss in 1938, when indeed all the seven communities fell simultaneously.

At times, Rav Zvi would apply himself toward communal

affairs beyond the borders of his village, and join forces with the other *rabbanim* of the region in their efforts toward the fortification of the Torah's ideals. For example, in 1900, he was among the signatories on a widely circulated document to reinforce the performing of the mitzvah of *bris milah* appropriately, and preserve the method of "*metzitzah b'peh.*" In 1929, he was among the participating *rabbanim* at the Second World Congress of Agudas Yisroel in Vienna (the Knessiah Gedolah). This was attended by many of the greatest Torah luminaries from all over the Jewish world, including the Rebbes of Ger, Chortkov and Sadigura, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky of Vilna, Rav Meir Shapira of Lublin and many others. A large number of Hungarian *rabbanim* were also in attendance, as well as *rabbanim* from the Sheva Kehillos and other communities in the vicinity.

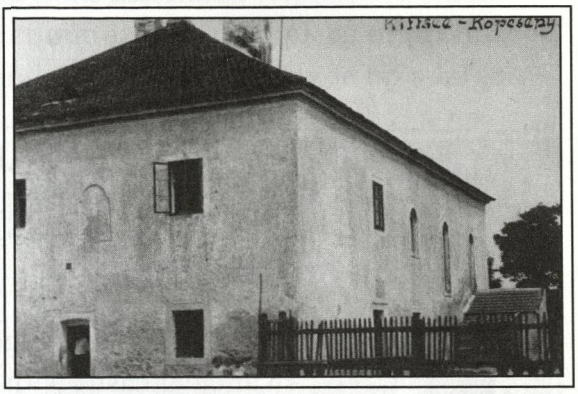
As he reached old age Rav Zvi found it difficult to fulfill the obligations he had to the small *kehillah*, so he called upon his grandson Rav Mordechai Meir Friedman to assist him. Rav Mordechai Meir was a great-nephew of Rav Dovid Friedman, the previous *rav* of Tzehlem. In fact he spent a few years



Agudah Knessiah Gedolah, 1929.
R. to l.: Rav Yehudah Kraus, Rav Zvi Perls and Rav S. Ehrenfeld.

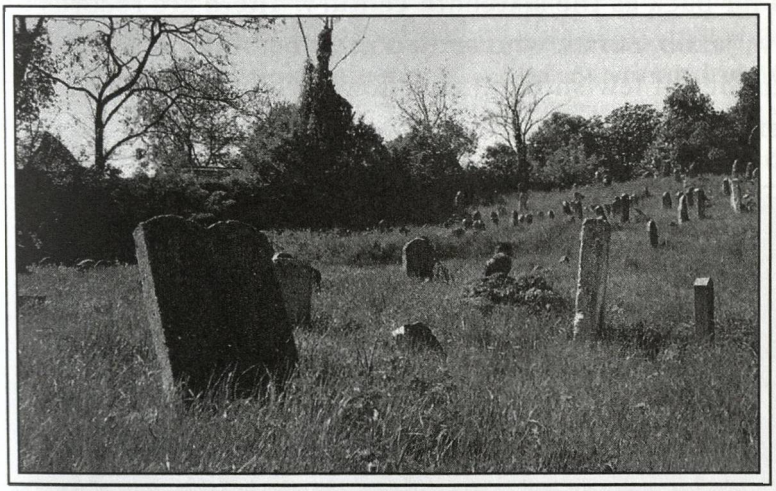
learning in the Tzehlemer yeshivah under Rav Yosef Elimelech Kahana, and then continued on to the yeshivah in Pressburg.

Upon undertaking the position in Kitzee, he attempted to revive the dwindling community by attracting a group of *bachurim* to give *shiurim* to them. By that time the Jewish community of Kitzee numbered only seventy individuals.



The shul in Kitzee

As with all of the Sheva Kehillos, the community of Kitzee was obliterated with the German conquest in 1938. Rav Mordechai Meir survived the war and lived out his days in Bnei Brak.



Beis Hachayim in Kitsee

16 The Kehillah of Kobersdorf

Kobersdorf is a beautiful village, surrounded by a lush forest. An ancient castle with an old drawbridge, former home to the Hungarian Lord of the Esterhazy dynasty, is on Kobersdorf's main street. At the center of the village stands a well with naturally carbonated mineral water; the villagers would draw their drinking water from that well. A stream with fresh mineral water also runs in the forest at a short distance from the village.

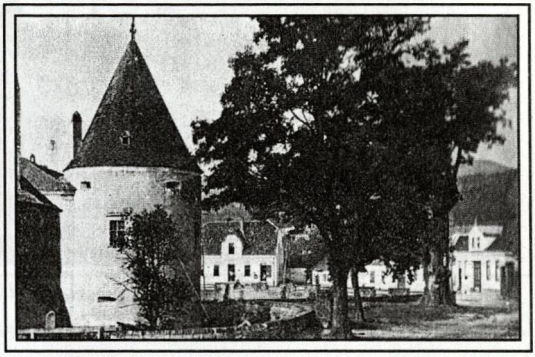
There is evidence of Jewish residence in Kobersdorf from as far back as the sixteenth century. There are records of a Jew, Jakob Gerstl, who settled in Kobersdorf in 1529 with a number of Jewish families following him after. There was a period when the Jews were banished from the region, and an



An old aerial photo of Kobersdorf. The shul is visible on the bottom left.

official Jewish community was eventually established there in the end of the seventeenth century, upon receiving the document of immunity from Lord Esterhazy.

The village's Jewish community held a place of prominence among the general populace. They made up a large percentage of the village's population, and there were years when the Jewish residents numbered close to half of the population of the village altogether. A number of positions of influence were held by members of the Jewish community and with their honest and forthright conduct, they earned the respect of the locals. Even the bank of the village was under Jewish ownership.



Esterhazy castle, called "The Schloss" on the main street in Kobersdorf

The community boasted a shul, a mikveh and a school, as well as a community building called Beit HaKahal (*Gemeindehaus*) where the official meetings, *dinei Torah* and other communal events were held. These buildings, as well as the homes of many members of the community, were located on *Schloss-gasse*, Kobersdorf's main street, named so for the big castle situated on that street.

There is indication of a Jewish school in Kobersdorf from as early as 1726. The community employed a *melamed* to teach the Jewish children, though initially there was no specific school building. At the beginning of the 1800s the community acquired a plot of land on which they constructed a building to house the school, as well as the mikveh. The villagers invested considerable resources on behalf of the education of

the youngsters, ensuring that they develop into upright Jewish citizens, well-versed in Torah and knowledgeable in other essential subjects. The foremost stress was naturally placed on Judaic subjects, but mathematics as well as the German and Latin languages were also taught at the school.



Schloss-gasse as it appeared in those days

In 1852, the community instituted the *chevrah kaddisha*, which initially was headed by R' Shmuel Schlesinger, a distinguished leader of the community. From that year onwards, every member of the community would pay yearly membership fees to the chevra, with meticulous records kept in a notebook called the *Pinkas Chevrah Kaddisha*.

The community merited having at its helm a number of famous *rabbanim*, who taught Torah to the townspeople and led them in their *avodas Hashem*. This was in addition to several well-known *talmidei chachomim* who took up residence there, which served to significantly enhance the religious atmosphere of the village.

At the outset, Kobersdorf didn't have its own *rav*, thus Rav Binyamin, the son of Rav Meir of Eisenstadt, who resided in nearby Lakenbach, alternated between his hometown and Kobersdorf and led both communities until his passing in 1770. Subsequently, the


Signature of Rav Binyamin
(בנימין החונה ק"ק לק"ב (לאקנבך
וקב"ד (וקאבערסדארף)

community was led by a number of prominent *rabbanim*, to which reference can be found in the responsa of the Torah leaders of that era, such as the Noda B'Yehudah, the Chasam Sofer, and others.

Rav Avraham Dovid Rubinstein

At the beginning of the 19th century, Rav Avraham Dovid Rubinstein, originally from Poland, led the *kehillah*. He was a great *tzaddik* with tremendous knowledge in the revealed as well as the hidden part of the Torah, and was known during his time as a miracle worker. He held a close acquaintance with the Chasam Sofer and corresponded with him frequently. The Chasam Sofer, in turn, held him in high esteem as is evident from the respectful titles he attaches to Rav Avraham Dovid's name in a letter. The Chasam Sofer even sent his two sons, Rav Shmuel Binyamin (the Ksav Sofer) and Rav Shimon, to pay a visit to Rav Avraham Dovid and receive his blessing.

There was an interesting discussion between him and the Chasam Sofer concerning the correct pronunciation of the name of the village Kobersdorf, and how to spell it correctly on a *get*. The controversy arose since it was customary by many in the community to pronounce the name of the village as "Kobelsdorf," with the letter "l" in the middle, rather than with an "r" as pronounced by the general public.

In 1804, when Rav Avraham Dovid heard that the Chasam Sofer planned to leave the Rabbinate of nearby Mattersdorf and relocate to Pressburg, he terminated his own tenure in Kobersdorf. Not wanting to distance himself from the Chasam Sofer, he accepted an offer to serve as *rav* of Kadelburg, a town in the vicinity of Pressburg.

Rav Dovid Alt-Eibnitz

In 1807, Rav Dovid Alt-Eibnitz a student of the Chasam Sofer in his yeshivah in Mattersdorf was appointed as *rav* of Kobersdorf. It was during the beginning of his tenure that the Chasam Sofer paid a visit to the village. The Chasam Sofer was by then the recognized leader of Hungarian Jewry, and his visit was cause for great excitement among the residents of the village. The whole community, young and old alike, all flocked to the outskirts of the village in order to welcome him.



Community insignia

While visiting, he spent some time discussing with Rav Dovid matters of Jewish custom, and he gave him some unique advice regarding his position as *rav*. He told him to make sure to always have a calendar on hand, as at that time the calendars listed the *minhagim* appropriate for each time of year. He explained that since this calendar is easily obtainable by the general public, a simpleton might approach the *rav* about an inconsequential *minhag* brought down in the calendar which the *rav* was unaware of. This, in turn, could diminish the respect of the rav in the eyes of the questioner. Having a calendar on hand would help the *rav* verify any questionable *minhagim*, and thus uphold his honor in the eyes of all of his constituents.

As his visit came to a close, he cautioned the townspeople to show due respect to their *rav*. Overall, it was a very memorable visit and was a great display of *kavod haTorah* which the villagers remembered for many years to come.

Rav Dovid established a small yeshivah in Kobersdorf for the local *bachurim*. The *shiurim* were given in the town's shul and during the day, the *bachurim* studied either in the shul or in their places of lodging.

Rav Dovid served the community faithfully for forty-three years until his passing in 1850. Then for a short time there was no official *rav* in the village and the community's religious affairs were taken care of by three local *talmidei chachomim*, one of whom was Rav Eliezer Zev Alt, Rav Dovid's son. The community leaders drew up a contract with them as to who would receive which honor and also made it clear that they would vacate the position as soon as a suitable replacement would be found for the position of *rav*.

Rav Avraham Shag

In 1852, the eminent Rav Avraham Shag came to Kobersdorf to lead the community. He was a great *tzaddik* and was famous as one of the foremost *talmidei chachomim* in all of Hungary.

Rav Avraham did much to enhance the level of Yiddishkeit within the community and elevated its members to substantial levels in their Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*. He constantly entreated the people to adhere to the ways of the Torah according to tradition. In his lectures, he would frequently instill in them the importance of preserving distinction from the ways of the non-Jews, imploring them to adhere to the Jewish code of conduct, in names, manner of speech and way of dress.

The residents of the village revered him accordingly, and he had full jurisdiction over every aspect within the community. Every detail was implemented exactly according to the laws of the Torah and in compliance with Jewish tradition, with no inclination whatsoever toward modern ideas that were being espoused in some other communities.

There was one instance when someone had a personal grievance against the *chazzan* of Kobersdorf, and in an attempt

to besmirch him, spread a rumor that in the, an organ was used in the Kobersdorf shul. Word of this purported scandal reached Rav Shlomo Zalman Ullman, the *rav* of Makó (Makova), who was famous for his unrelenting battles against the incorporation of any modern ideas. He sent a letter to his nephew, Rav Dovid Ullman, *rav* of nearby Lakenbach, requesting that he investigate if there was any truth to this gossip. Rav Dovid's reply signifies the strong influence which Rav Avraham had over his community and of the subservience of all of his constituents to his authority. He clarified the source of the rumor for his uncle and added that the Kobersdorf community is led by the esteemed Rav Avraham Shag who has complete command over every aspect within the community, in a manner which is worthy of envy by other Hungarian communities.



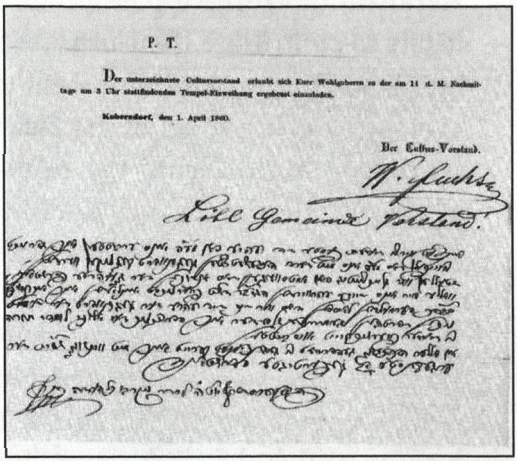
Kever of Rav S.Z. Ullman in Mako

The community of Kobersdorf gained considerable fame during Rav Avraham's tenure, and *talmidim* flocked from far and wide in order to learn Torah from him. This was in addition to many people who would come for the sake of receiving his blessing. There were even numerous students of his who chose to settle permanently in Kobersdorf after their marriage in order to continue to learn Torah from him.

The Community's Growth

The community saw significant expansion during those years and by the late 1850s the Jewish populace numbered some 600 individuals, which was around forty percent of the general population of the village. It was clear by then that a respectable

edifice was required for the shul, as the arrangement which had been in place until then for all necessary requisites was no longer feasible. Up until now the school building had been used for their *tefillos*, but the community had by now far outgrown these premises.



P. T.

Der unterzeichnete Cultusvorstand erlaubt sich Euer Wohlgeboren zu der am 11 d. M. Nachmittage um 3 Uhr stattfindenden Tempel-Einweihung ergebenst einzuladen.

Kobersdorf, den 1. April 1860.

Der Cultus-Vorstand.

W. Fuchs

Löbl. Gemeinde Vorstand.

Invitation, in Yiddish, to inauguration of new shul 1860

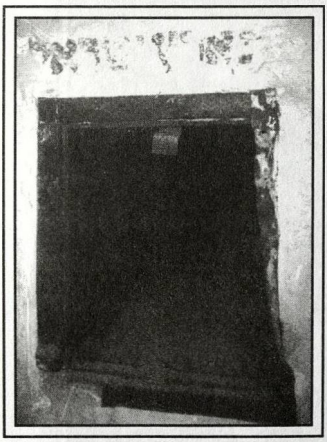
In 1857, the community leaders convened a meeting, and it was decided, under the direction of the *rav*, to erect a magnificent building as appropriate for the house of Hashem. There were those who deemed it unfeasible to build such a grandiose edifice, but nevertheless the community forged ahead. They purchased a plot of land for the new shul



The shul as it appeared in those days

a short distance from the old structure, on the same street. The groundbreaking ceremony took place in 1858, and Rav Avraham delivered a passionate speech encouraging the villagers to contribute their utmost toward the completion of the building. The construction went underway, with Rav Avraham overseeing every detail of the planning. He invested great effort on behalf of glorifying the house of Hashem, meticulously paying attention to every detail of the construction. By 1860 a beautiful edifice had been erected, and it is still intact today.

The shul's inauguration was an impressive affair, attended by many Torah leaders of the region. The *rabbanim* of all Sheva Kehillos came to join the ceremony, along with other notables and distinguished personalities. Representatives of the community and *bachurim* from the yeshivah went out to the highway leading to the village to await the arrival of the important guests and escort them to the event with appropriate honor. At the inauguration, Rav Avraham delivered an emotional speech thanking Hashem for bringing them to this achievement. Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt also addressed the attendees as did a few other visiting personalities, and all were full of thanksgiving for attaining this significant accomplishment.

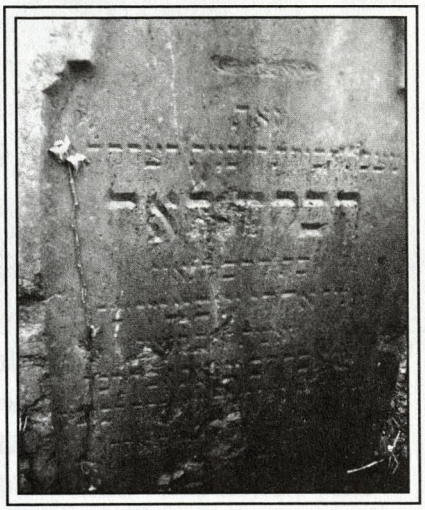


Pushke at entrance of Kobersdorf shul for the poor of Eretz Yisrael

In addition to Rav Avraham's obligations to the community and his efforts for Hungarian Jewry in general, he also served as one of the heads of the charitable trust for the sake of the poor of Eretz Yisrael, overseeing the collection and dispatchment of the funds. When the new shul in Kobersdorf was erected, he had attached to the wall of the outer chamber two *tzedakah* boxes,

one for the sake of the local poor and the other for the poor of Eretz Yisrael. He had incredible love for Eretz Yisrael and he felt tremendous attachment toward the Holy Land.

Rav Avraham led the community for over twenty years, until 1873, when he saw his lifelong dream come to fruition and he immigrated to the Holy Land. His first wife, Rebbetzin Rivkah Leah, had passed away ten years earlier in 1863, and she was buried in the Kobersdorf cemetery. He subsequently remarried, and relocated to Eretz Yisrael with his second wife and a number of his prized students. His sons had preceded him to Eretz Yisrael and were already settled in Jerusalem.



Kever of wife of Rav Shag in Kobersdorf

Even after his departure, his indelible mark remained on the village with the people keeping up the *takanos* he had instated and continuing to guard his honor.

17 Rav Moshe Konig's Marriage

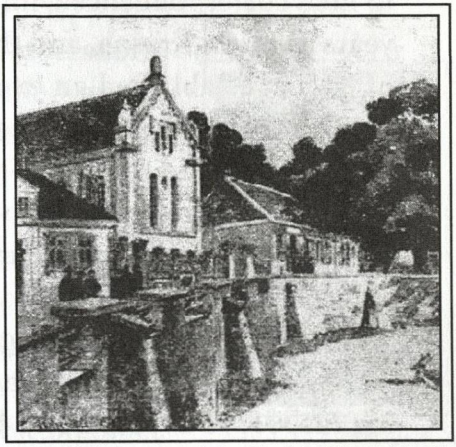
Rav Moshe Konig spent several productive years learning in Kobersdorf under his *rebbi*, Rav Avraham Shag. His tremendous diligence in learning had begun to bear fruit and he gained renown as a budding *talmid chacham*, with the scholars in the town coming to recognize the treasure they had in their midst.

Already at that stage in life, he had mastered tremendous proficiency in many areas of the Torah and had created many wonderful *chiddushim*, *chiddushim* that he could have been proud of even in his later years. As an older man, he would at times mention and quote from the *chiddushim* he had innovated in his youth. He was erudite in a wide array of subjects; his scholarship was not confined to the *masechtos* regularly studied in yeshivah. He also developed many original insights in the realm of Aggada, making it a pleasant experience for people with appreciation to Torah to spend time in his company.

Matrimony

In 1867, it was time for Rav Moshe to consider marriage and proceed toward building a family. Indeed in that year he was chosen as a chassan for the daughter of

one of the leaders of the Kobersdorf community, R' Shaya Zolschan.



An old picture of the Shul in Kobersdorf

It was a common occurrence in Kobersdorf — and presumably in other towns that housed a yeshivah — for a member of the local community to chose one of the yeshivah *bachurim* as a son-in-law.

As there were no organized dining facilities for the *bachurim*, they would eat their meals at the homes of the local *baalei batim*, resulting in an intimate relationship developing between the boys and the villagers. The townspeople had ample opportunity to observe the *bachurim* from up close and appreciate their positive attributes This fact, concurrent with the admiration and affection in general which the villagers had toward the Torah and its scholars, was reason for many to choose a *chassan* from among the yeshivah's students.

One prominent example of this tendency is the previously mentioned R' Shmuel Schlesinger, the head of the *chevrah kaddisha* in Kobersdorf. A scion of a rabbinical family and a relative of Rabbi Akiva Eiger's, R' Shmuel was recognized as a pious and learned individual and brought up his children in a similar manner. He selected two outstanding students of the Kobersdorf yeshivah as a suitable match for his two daughters, both of whom went on to gain renown.

Rav Yaakov Moshe Schwartz, who married R' Shmuel's daughter Krasl, was famous for his position as the *rav* of Karoly (the town where Rav Yoel Teitelbaum served years later before becoming *rav* of Satmar). He was a dear student of Rav

Avraham Shag and even after leaving Kobersdorf continued to hold correspondence with him. At first he served for a few years as *rav* in Krasna, and then later, in 1881, when the Jews of Karoly established an exclusive community to be run in accordance with halachah, they called upon Rav Yaakov Moshe to come and lead them.

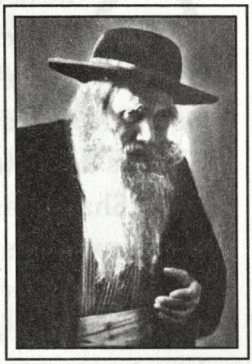
Rav Meir Zev Roth, who married R' Shmuel's daughter Rosa, had originally studied in Pressburg under the Ksav Sofer and continued on to Kobersdorf to study under Rav Avraham Shag. Following his marriage, he stayed in Kobersdorf and kept up his connection with Rav Avraham. In 1874, following his *rebbi*'s departure to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Meir Zev left Kobersdorf and went to live in Mád where he was employed as a *shochet*. He associated himself with Rav Hillel of Kolomaya, and at times assisted him in his endeavors in strengthening Yiddishkeit around the country. Around 1890, he followed the example of his *rebbi* and left Hungary for Eretz Yisrael, settling in Yerushalayim.

R' Shmuel also had an exceptional son Mordechai Zvi who was recognized as an outstanding scholar. He had been a student of the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg, and continued learning there under the Ksav Sofer. He married a daughter of Shlomo Meir Adler, an upright member of the Kobersdorf community.

Interestingly, his contemporaries in the Pressburg yeshivah were quite surprised when he became engaged, for he had a good reputation and could have made a match with the daughter of either a famous *rav* or a wealthy man. But he prefered this local *shidduch,* as his family was acquainted with the girl's family and her father was recognized as a pious individual. His friends noted this course of action with due admiration.

Another similar noteworthy account is concerning the shidduch of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld with daughter of

Shlomo Zeltzer of Kobersdorf. How did a top *bachur* studying in the prestigious Pressburg yeshivah marry the daughter of a layman in the small village of Kobersdorf? When Rav Yosef Chaim was called up for conscription into the Hungarian army, he immediately traveled to the Rebbe of Sanz who gave him a *berachah* that he would receive an exemption. Before Rav Yosef Chaim entered the recruitment office, he wanted to do something to increase his merit, so he accepted upon himself that when he'd receive his exemption, he'd accept the first *shidduch* offered to him disregarding money or prestige. Standing nearby was Dovid Leib Zeltzer, a young *bachur* from Kobersdorf. As soon as Rav Yosef Chaim received his exemption, Dovid Leib grabbed the golden opportunity and immediately suggested his sister as a match. In compliance with his vow, Rav Yosef Chaim accepted the proposal.



Rav Y. C. Sonnenfeld

Referring back to Rav Mordechai Zvi Schlesinger, after his marriage to the daughter of R' Shlomo Meir Adler, he lived in Kobersdorf and studied under Rav Avraham Shag. A few years later, he was appointed *dayan* in nearby Lakenbach, and from 1860 served as *rav* of Nad-Follau in the Siebenbergen region (today, Nuşfalău, Romania) and headed a yeshivah there.

R' Shlomo Meir Adler originated from Eisenstadt and had settled in Kobersdorf many years earlier, subsequent to his marriage to Chaya Sara, his noble wife. They had a large family, mostly daughters, and merited a number of learned sons-in-law. He passed away around 1840.

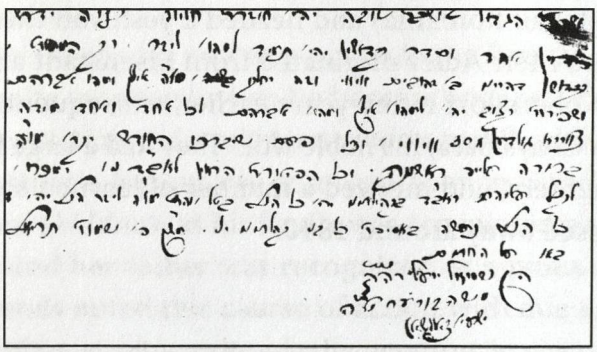
R' Shaya Zolschan

One of their daughters, Rachla, was married to R' Shaya Zolschan, a son of R' Yaakov Zolschan, who was a great *talmid chachom* and an honorable member of the Kobersdorf community. Rav Moshe Konig married R' Shaya's daughter.

R' Shaya was a very pious individual and was well-versed in many areas of the Torah. He was one of the leaders of the Kobersdorf community, and in 1860 he was elected as *rosh hakahal*, a position he retained until 1866. Accordingly his signature can be seen on numerous official community documents.

Over the years he exerted great efforts on behalf of Hungarian Jewry. During the period of infighting in Hungary, he proved himself a loyal representative of his nation in their time of distress, toiling tirelessly on behalf of his brethren. In particular, at that stage, he successfully undertook to assist toward the release of yeshivah students from the draft, by meeting up with officials and via further means at his disposal.

He gained renown for the many kind deeds he performed,



Signature of R' Shaya Zolschan on document, appointing dayanim in 1851

this included providing aid to the poor and the downtrodden, giving *tzedakah* and, together with his wife Rachla who was a great *tzaddeikes*, opened his home to many guests. Countless *talmidei chachomim* would frequent his home and eat at his table.

He brought up his children to emulate his noble ways. His sons were diligent in their Torah learning and *gemilus chasadim*, and his daughters were distinguished in their piety and kindheartedness.

Rav Moshe enters married life

R' Shaya and Rachla had a daughter, Krasl. When she reached marriageable age, her father chose the learned bachur Rav Moshe Konig as her *chassan*. R' Shaya knew the *bachur* the local yeshivah; he had probably been their guest. The wedding took place in Kobersdorf on Rosh Chodesh Elul, 1867, with the *rav*, Rav Avraham Shag, officiating.

After their marriage, Rav Moshe and Krasl settled in Kobersdorf and enjoyed a few years of tranquility. R' Shaya supported them, and thus Rav Moshe could, as before, immerse himself fully in his learning and toil in Torah day and night. He remained attached to his *rebbi*, listening to his Torah and observing his conduct.

In a certain way, he now had an advantage over his unmarried years. Before his marriage, he would return to his parents' home for Yom Tov when the yeshivah closed. Now that he lived in Kobersdorf, he had the additional opportunity to bask in his *rebbi*'s light during the Yom Tov season as well.

Indeed, in his writings, Rav Moshe describes a custom he perceived in his *rebbi*'s conduct while davening with him during *chol hamoed* Pesach. As is known, the *minhag* of Ashkenazic

Jewry is to don tefillin on *chol hamoed*, and the universally accepted time to take off the tefillin is after Shemoneh Esrei prior to reciting Hallel. On the first day of *chol hamoed* Pesach, however, when the allocated portion of Torah reading includes the mitzvah of tefillin, Rav Avraham would only take his tefillin off after the reading from the first *sefer Torah*. Rav Moshe then goes on to discuss the sources for this custom.

Unfortunately these wonderful years of tranquility didn't last for long. Just three-and-a-half years after their marriage, the family was struck by misfortune. His father-in-law the noble R' Shaya Zolschan passed away before reaching old age and prior to marrying off all his children. The date of his passing was 6 Adar, 1870, and he was laid to rest in the Kobersdorf cemetery. This was a misfortune not only for the family, but for the entire community and for all who had benefited from his noble ways.



The kever of R' Shaya Zolschan

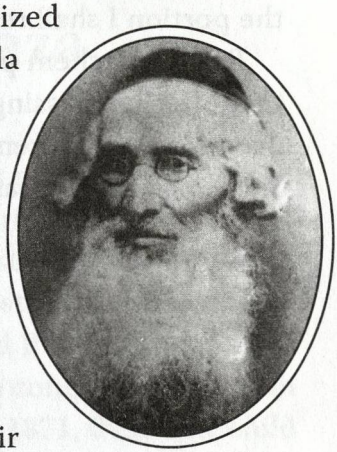
For the time being, his widow Rachla stayed in their house in Kobersdorf and continued with her day-to-day life. This wasn't easy, as her source of livelihood had been cut off and she had to find alternative ways to earn a living.

Some two years later, another tragedy struck the family. Michoel Zolschan, R' Shaya and Rachla's still-single son, passed away at the tender age of twenty two. He had been a very diligent *yeshivah bachur* and had toiled in his Torah study day and night. It was a great sorrow for this budding scholar to be cut down in his prime.

Following this misfortune, Rachla left her home in Kobersdorf and went to live with one of her married children

in Tzehlem. During this trying period, the piety and righteousness of Rachla was clearly distinguishable. With amazing strength of character, she raised herself above her personal grief and continued persisting in her acts of kindness as before and availing herself to help others in need.

While in Tzehlem, she forged a connection with the Rebbetzin of the town, the wife of Rav Menachem Katz-Prostitz, who was by this time recognized as a leader of Hungarian Jewry. Rachla assisted the elderly Rav and Rebbetzin in running their household.



Rav Menachem Katz

In 1881, Rav Menachem's wife passed away. A *shidduch* was suggested for Rav Menachem with the pious Rachla Zolschan. Both sides accepted the proposition and they married a short while later. It was great prestige for the Zolschan children to have their mother united in marriage to such an eminent Torah sage.

Rachla tended faithfully to all his needs, allowing him to live gracefully in his old age, and to continue leading his community and teaching at the yeshivah without worrying about his personal obligations. Rav Menachem appreciated her accomplishments immensely and sought to reward her appropriately for her outstanding loyalty. Shortly before his passing, he asked her what he could do to aptly reward her for her tremendous kindness.

When Rachla didn't reply, Rav Menachem suggested an innovative recompense. As is known, Chazal tell us that when Mashiach comes, Hashem will make a feast for the *tzaddikim* and they will be served from the *livyason*. Many years earlier, Rav Menachem's *rebbi* the Chasam Sofer had given him an

assurance, that if he the Chasam Sofer would merit partaking in this feast, he will reserve some of his portion of the *livyason* for Rav Menachem. Now, continued Rav Menachem, "Of this I have no doubt — the Chasam Sofer will indeed take part in this feast. Consequently I am therefore also assured of receiving a share, and as such," he told his wife, "when that time will come, I will remember your devotion to me and will divide the portion I shall receive with you."

Rav Menachem passed away on 16 Adar, 1891. It seems that after his passing, Rachla moved back to Kobersdorf to live near her children. She passed away at a ripe old age on 18 Shevat, 1909 and was buried in the local cemetery.

18 In Janoshaza

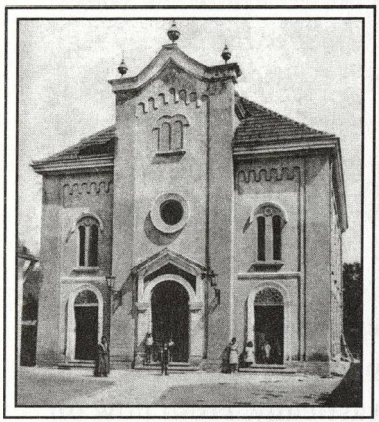
Subsequent to his father-in-law's passing and the ensuing loss of his source of support, life for Rav Moshe and his young wife changed drastically. From now on they had to find alternative ways to sustain themselves. Yet despite this difficulty, they continued living, for the time being, in Kobersdorf, with Rav Moshe continuing to toil in Torah as before. During this period, in 1871, their first child was born, a daughter, whom they named Zissel.

However, shortly thereafter, considering the dire straits in which they found themselves, they weren't left with much of a choice and so Rav Moshe had to seek job offers beyond Kobersdorf. He evidently desired a job associated with learning and teaching Torah. This type of job was difficult to obtain in a small village as Kobersdorf in which there was no shortage of Torah scholars.

The Move to Janoshaza

They found out that in Janoshaza, a town some distance away, there was prospect of employment in the realm of teaching Torah.

The town of Janoshaza — situated in the Vás district in south-western Hungary — was larger than Kobersdorf. An established community, officially founded in 1830, existed there. By 1836, the community had built a shul and over the years they added other essential amenities. The *rav* serving at the time of Rav Moshe's relocation was Rav Moshe Reichenfeld. He was a son of Rav Yehoshua Reichenfeld, a *dayan* in Eisenstadt, and had come to serve the community in 1852. He maintained his position for close to fifty years, until his passing in 1901, and during his tenure the Jewish amenities in the town were greatly enhanced. He led the local yeshivah which also attracted some students from out of town, and he spearheaded the establishment of a Talmud Torah so the town's children would have structured Torah learning. The community erected a two-classroom building next to the shul to serve as the Talmud Torah.



The shul in Janoshaza

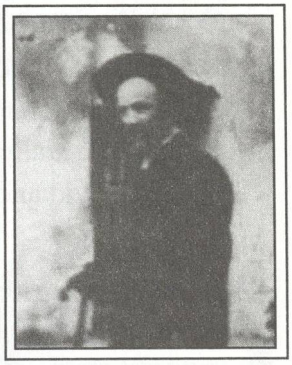
Rav Moshe was offered a job as a *melamed* in this Talmud Torah, so the family packed their meager belongings and left Kobersdorf, relocating to Janoshaza.

Generally, the structure of education in the smaller communities in those times was that for part of the day the children would learn general studies, often from a non-Jewish teacher, and it was common for these classes to be combined with boys and girls. Then, for the rest of the day, the boys would receive lessons in *limudei kodesh* in the Talmud Torah. The schools were not divided into individual classes for each age group, as there were usually not enough children in the small towns and villages to fill so many classes. There were often only two

classes to teach children at two alternative levels, preparing them in advance of their leaving town to study in one of the country's yeshivahs.

Rav Moshe was appointed to teach the higher level class. He strove assiduously to instill in his students Torah knowledge and *yiras Shamayim*. Aside for his teaching, he continued with his rigorous schedule, exerting himself in his Torah study.

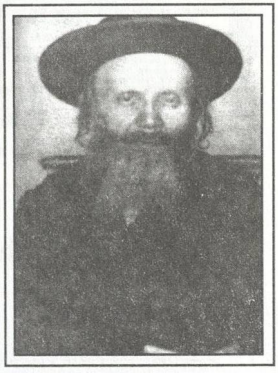
His students held him in high esteem and they grew attached to him, with a number of them retaining their connection even many years later after reaching adulthood. It was common that before a student left town to go study in yeshivah, he would want to express his gratitude to Rav Moshe. The boys would do so in a way most appreciated by Rav Moshe — by presenting him with a *sefer* to add to his growing library. Rav Moshe would affectionately inscribe within each *sefer*, "I received this from my beloved *talmid*, So-and-so."



Rav Y.Y. Greenwald of Chust

Within a short time in this position, he gained renown for his Torah knowledge and for his piety, and consequently *ehrliche Yidden* who lived in the vicinity vied for the privilege of having their children learn under his tutelage.

Prominent among his students of that period were the Greenwald brothers, sons of Rav Amram Greenwald. Rav Amram had passed away at a young age, leaving a houseful of orphans. The burden of their upbringing fell on the shoulders of his oldest son, Moshe, who later gained renown as the *rav* of Chust and author of *Arugas*



Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald

HaBosem. In his quest for the most ideal *chinuch* for his brothers, he brought them Janoshaza to learn Torah from the *melamed*, Rav Moshe Konig. A close friendship was initiated between Rav Moshe and the *rav* of Chust — even years later Rav Moshe refers to him in a letter and calls him *yedid nafshi*, my soul mate.

One of these brothers was Rav Eliezer Dovid, who eventually gained fame as a leading halachic authority and led prominent Hungarian communities. A younger brother was Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah, who in his unassuming nature refused to take a rabbinic position, and resided in Chust near his oldest brother.*

There actually exists printed correspondence between Rav Eliezer Dovid and his former teacher Rav Moshe Konig. When Rav Eliezer Dovid was serving as *rav* in Tzehlem, prior to his eventual appointment as *rav* of Satmar, Rav Moshe in his humility turned to his former student for his opinion on a halachic issue. Rav Eliezer Dovid's reply is printed in his sefer *Keren L'Dovid*. He refers to Rav Moshe with honorable titles, among which "the mentor of my youth."


קרן לדוד

חלק אורח חיים

Sefer of Rav E.D. Greenwald

Thus the Konigs enjoyed some years of relative serenity, with Rav Moshe doing what he enjoyed most, toiling in his studies and teaching Torah to youngsters. During that period, two more children were born to the Konigs, a boy and a girl. Their son, Yaakov

* Not to be confused with Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah the son of Rav Eliezer Dovid, who served as *rav* of Tzehlem and of Pupa.

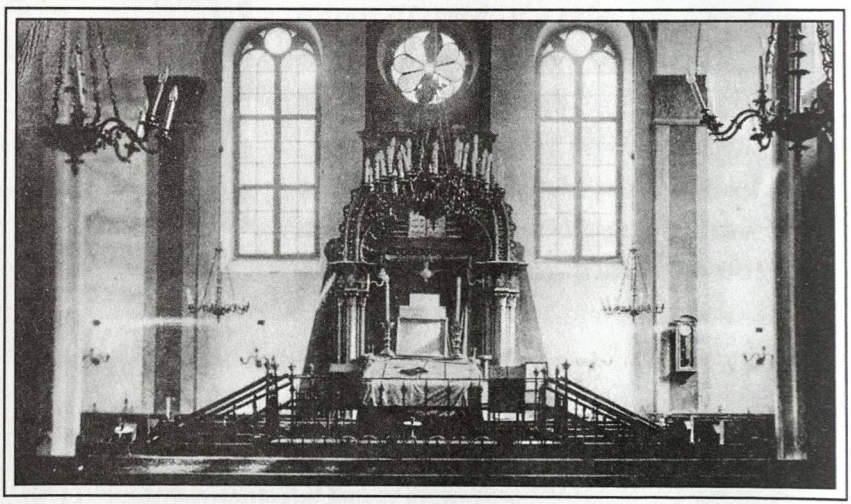
Dov, was born on 24 Tammuz 1874. He was named Yaakov after his maternal great-grandfather, R' Shaya Zolschan's father, and Dov was from Rav Moshe's side, the father of R' Asher Konig. Their daughter Kreindl was born in 1878.

Rav Moshe lived with his family and taught Torah to his students in Janoshaza for some ten years. Around 1882, his wife Krasl fell ill and it became difficult for her to run the household. Ultimately they came to the decision to move back to Kobersdorf. It seems that hoped the fresh village air with the streams of mineral water there would be to her benefit. Additionally, in Kobersdorf she had family who could help her with her day-to-day chores. Hence, ten years after leaving the village, they returned to their original hometown and settled there permanently.

19 Back to Kobersdorf

Kobersdorf of 1882 was not the same as it had been when Rav Moshe left ten years earlier. His *rebbi* Rav Avraham Shag was no longer the *rav* there, as he had ascended to Eretz Yisrael and had passed away there. Several scholars who had resided there in order to bask in his light had also left the village upon his departure.

Yet, even after Rav Avraham Shag had left the village, his influence was still felt and the *kehillah* members guarded his memory, specifically in matters pertaining to the shul that



The interior of the shul in Kobersdorf

Rav Avraham had erected, which continued to stand in all its glory and was used incessantly.

It is recounted, that some years after Rav Avraham left Kobersdorf, the *rav* of neighboring Tzehlem paid a visit to the village and upon entering the shul, expressed his dismay at the way the partition separating the women's section from the main sanctuary was built. He felt this way due to his extra stringency in this area. He stipulated the requirement for a metal grating to be erected over the existing *mechitzah*, adding that he would avoid revisiting the village until this would be implemented. However he was unsuccessful in prevailing over the Kobersdorf *baalei batim*, as they insisted on keeping the structure unchanged, explicating, "If the existing *mechitzah* was good enough for Rav Avraham, then it is good enough for us too."

Rav Avraham Eliezer Zev Alt

Following Rav Avraham's departure, the community appointed Rav Avraham Eliezer Zev Alt, the son of the previous *rav*, Rav Dovid Alt-Eibnitz, to serve as their *rav*. Rav Avraham Eliezer Zev was a *talmid* of Rav Shlomo Zalman Ullman of Lakenbach and Makava. Previously, he had unofficially led the community as *dayan*, during the short period following the passing of his father in 1850 until the appointment of Rav Avraham Shag in 1852.



Rav Eliezer Zev Alt

Remarkably, at the time that Rav Avraham Shag came to accept the position as *rav* of Kobersdorf, he was concerned that Rav Eliezer Alt might be disturbed since he

wasn't appointed his father's successor. As a result, he gave Rav Alt his word that he would merit a long life and that within twenty-five years, he would be appointed *rav* of the town. Indeed, upon Rav Avraham Shag's departure this promise was fulfilled, and Rav Alt lived to a ripe old age, serving the community until 1898.

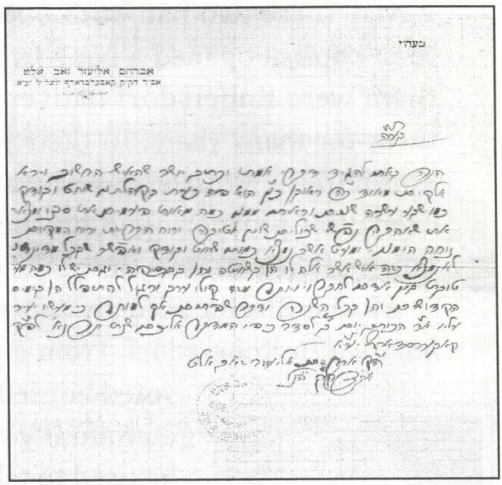
Meanwhile, during the twenty years that Rav Avraham Shag had occupied the Rabbinate, Rav Eliezer Zev resided in Sopron. He didn't hold an official position there, but rather spent his time toiling in Torah as a regular citizen, and earned a living through engaging in commerce. He also taught Torah to a small group of devoted students. Notably among these was Rav Amram Fischer who later became the Rav of Júnk.

During those years, he corresponded with many leaders of Hungarian Jewry, specifically those of the Sheva Kehillos, discussing halachic issues with them. The other *rabbanim* often expressed strong leanings toward his opinion in halachic matters, at times even revealing their absolute reliance on his judgment.

After assuming his position in Kobersdorf, Rav Eliezer Zev kept up his connections and he worked in unison with other *rabbanim*, investing effort toward the upkeep and enhancement of authentic Yiddishkeit. When necessary, he would battle vehemently against halachic infringements.

He was particularly close to Rav Aharon Singer, *dayan* and unofficial *rav* of Mattersdorf. Sometimes, when Rav Eliezer Zev would come across a difficult concept in his Torah learning, and out of his strong desire to clarify the subject, he would make the three-hour trek to Mattersdorf to discuss the matter with Rav Aharon. This could even happen late at night, and by the time he reached Mattersdorf, Rav Aharon would be sleeping. Rav Aharon, however, took great pleasure in these discussions and did not mind being woken at that late hour.

The basic structure of the *kehillah* continued under Rav Eliezer Zev Alt in the identical manner as in the times of Rav Avraham. The *rav* had full authority over the school, the *shechitah*, and all matters concerning the community. As a matter of fact, the contract which the community had granted to Rav Alt upon his appointment was very similar to the one granted twenty-two years earlier to Rav Avraham Shag. There as well, the community leaders undertook to support a yeshivah and sustain the *bachurim* coming from out of town to learn under him. Indeed the yeshivah continued under his helm and he taught Torah to the local *bachurim* as well as to several out-of-town *bachurim*.



Letter from Rav Alt endorsing the village shochet

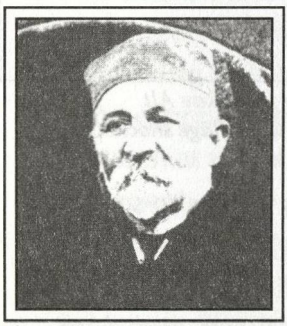
Accomplishment of Community Members

Several members of the Kobersdorf community had, in recent years, achieved success in their business ventures and had become very wealthy. The land in the Burgenland region was very fertile, and Kobersdorf was surrounded by farms. The common business venture for a Jewish villager at that time was to work as a salesman, buying produce from the farmers of the district and then reselling it in the larger towns. The more successful salespeople had invested their proceedings from these dealings in real estate and in other

ventures. These men owned tracts of land which they rented out for residential and industrial purposes.

Prominent among the prosperous businessmen of Kobersdorf, were two cousins, Moshe Riegler and Baruch Luria. These two had both become very wealthy, and with their capital, opened a bank to service the villagers. Both of them were Kobersdorf natives whose families had resided there for many years. In their youth, they had both studied Torah in the Pressburg yeshivah under the Ksav Sofer, and even after prospering in business, they continued to spend much of their time in Torah study.

Moshe Riegler actually served for some time as the *rosh hakahal* in Kobersdorf. From a young age he had always devoted himself to assist in the upkeep of the community's amenities. As a young man, he used to take care of the village mikveh, keeping the place clean, and changing the water a couple of times a year, which was a tough job before indoor plumbing. Later on he rose in prominence within the community eventually being appointed as president. He always tried to assist the *rav* in his obligations to the community, and he displayed great respect to the other *talmidei chachomim* in the village.



Moshe Riegler

This was the lofty atmosphere pervading the whole village. The entire community adhered stringently to halachah, and even the laymen spent much of their time learning Torah.

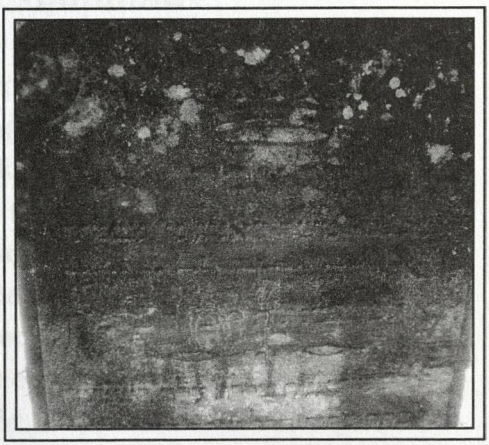
It was this environment to which Rav Moshe Konig returned. He hoped that when his wife, Krasl, would receive the help she needed and would benefit from the clear air and fresh mineral water, she would regain her health and they would be able to live a life of tranquility.

Upon his return to Kobersdorf, he was soon recognized by all for his erudition in all areas of the Torah. He had many friends in the village; some were former yeshivah friends, and others were veteran residents who remembered him from ten years earlier, before he had moved to Janoshaza. They all related to him with admiration and accorded him due respect.

Even though he didn't hold an official position, the people of the village would turn to him with questions and for clarification of halachic issues. They would often ask him to resolve their monetary disputes, and in return, would pay him a small fee.

Krasl's Untimely Death

Regrettably, not only did his wife Krasl's health fail to improve, it continued to deteriorate and her body weakened considerably. Unfortunately on Yom Kippur night in 1883, to the sorrow of her family and friends, her soul departed from this world. She was only thirty-four years old. Rav Moshe now had three young orphans to care for.



Kever of Krasl Konig, Rav Moshe's wife

Krasl's funeral took place the day after Yom Kippur and she was buried adjacent to the *kever* of her father R' Shaya. Apparently the plot was originally reserved for her mother, but since she had remarried, the plot was

allocated for their daughter. Mention of the tremendous grief felt by all of the community upon the untimely passing of this righteous woman is inscribed on her *matzeivah*.

The period following his wife's death was very difficult for Rav Moshe. He had to contend with three young orphans. Zissel, his oldest, was only thirteen years old. Although his mother-in-law was still alive and lived in nearby Tzehlem, she couldn't take care of the children, as she had her obligations to her venerated second husband, the great Rav Menachem Katz. Nevertheless the children would visit her occasionally and spend time with her. They thus cultivated a relationship with the family of their step-grandfather Rav Menachem, which they kept up later even after Rav Menachem passed away.

Rav Moshe began to look for a *shidduch*. His children needed a stable home and upbringing. Indeed a suitable suggestion was not long in coming.

20 Rav Moshe's Second Marriage

As mentioned, Rachla Zolschan, Krasl Konig's mother, was the daughter of R' Shlomo Meir Adler of Kobersdorf. R' Shlomo Meir had another daughter, Finkl. She was married to a pious individual, Moshe Roth from Kis-Lúd a small village in Hungary. They lived in Győr after their marriage.

The Győr Community

Győr was a large metropolis, one of the largest cities in Hungary, following Budapest and Debrecen. The Jews called the city Ráb, probably due to the Rábca River which ran through the town and on whose banks the city's first Jewish residents had resided.

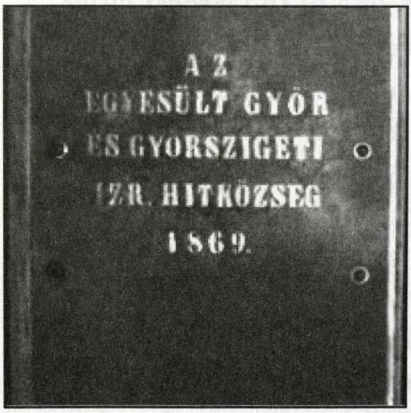
During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the town was established as the center for grain export. All wheat slated for export that had been grown around that part of Hungary, passed through Győr, and from there was exported to nearby countries: Serbia, Romania, Moravia and Bulgaria. Many members of the Jewish community were employed in the grain industry — as agents, salesmen and clerks. Others

were employed in the manufacture of sacks for storage and transport of the grain, and the community prospered greatly.

Initially, until 1840, there were no Jews living in the main city, due to the law prohibiting Jews to dwell within the large towns and cities across Hungary. Prior to that year, they were only permitted to enter on market days to take part in the buying and selling of the produce, and they were required to leave by nightfall. The Jews' places of residence were either in the small towns and villages, or on the outskirts of the larger towns.

A reputable Jewish community existed in Győr-Sziget, a suburb of Győr; it was in this district that the Roths resided. After 1840, permission was granted for Jewish residence in the town proper, and an official community was established there. In 1851, the Jewish community in the city united with the Győr-Sziget congregation to form a single community: Jewish Main Congregation of Győr and Győrsziget (in Hungarian: *Győri és Győrszigeti Izraelita Anyahitközség*).

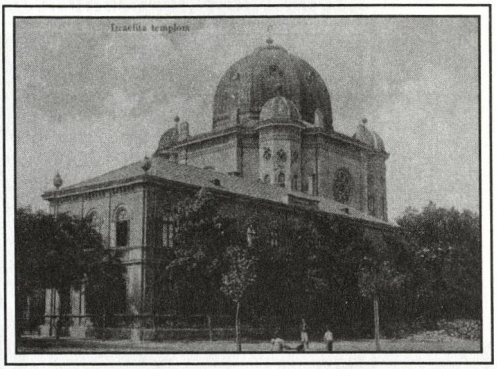
The unification of all the townspeople in a single community wasn't entirely straightforward, as there were many there who had modern leanings and were sadly not particularly concerned with the upkeep of mitzvos. This was unfortunately common in the larger metropolises, and indeed, the controversy in the 1840s which had led to the eventual segregation of the communities, was more profound in the larger towns.



Terms for the running of the combined communities 1869

At first the structure of this united community followed Orthodox traditions, but in 1871 a particularly distressing

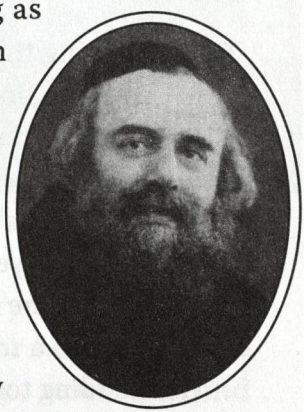
event occurred which caused the division of the community. The modernists — in their pursuit to emulate the non-Jews' manner of religious services — placed an organ in the shul. The Orthodox members finally realized that the two sects could not continue to coexist.



Synagogue in Gyor used by the Neologists

They detached themselves from the modernists and established a community of their own, calling upon Rav Yaakov Snyders, who had served previously in the communities of Yergen and in Magendorf, to come and serve as their *rav*. He was *rav* there until his death in 1904, when his position was filled by his son Rav Benzion. During his tenure, Rav Benzion established an official yeshivah.

Moshe Roth was a respected member of the Orthodox community. He earned a living as a salesman and held a community position as well. It is recorded that he served as a *mashgiach*, possibly on the issue of kashrus.


Rav Benzion Snyders

Moshe and Finkl Roth spent their life in Győr, until their passing at a ripe old age. They had three daughters. One of them married R' Shia Elyakim Grunsweig and lived in Győr. R' Grunsweig's son-in-law was R' Yisrael Klein, a prominent Belzer chassid, and father of R' Shimon Wolf who is the *gabbai* of the present Belzer Rebbe. The Roth's second daughter was married to a Kuperstein and they lived in

Budapest. Their third daughter Perel was a talented girl and was distinguished for her piety.



Burial site of Moshe and Finkl Roth in Gyor cemetery

Rav Moshe Remarries

Following the death of their niece Krasl, the wife of Rav Moshe Konig, a *shidduch* between Rav Moshe Konig and their daughter Perel was suggested. They accepted the proposition with Perel's agreement. This was despite the fact that she was only eighteen years old, and Rav Moshe was a forty-one-year-old widower with three young children. Nevertheless, she viewed it as an honor to become a partner in marriage to a *talmid chacham* of his caliber.

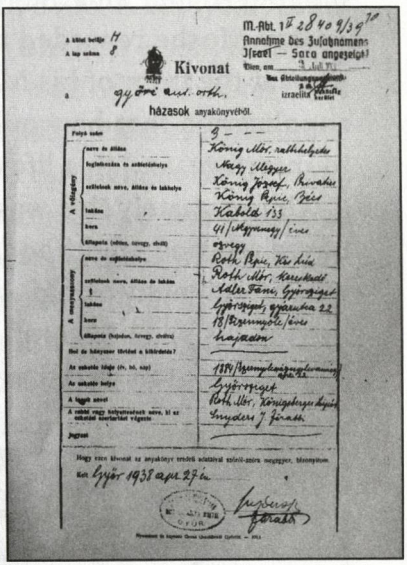
The wedding took place in the summer of 1884 in the Roth's hometown, Győr; Rav Yaakov Snyders, the local *rav*, officiated at the wedding.

The couple decided not to remain in Győr after their marriage, for Rav Moshe had found his niche within the community

of Kobersdorf as he had previously served there in an unofficial rabbinical position. Shortly after their wedding, Rav Moshe and Perel returned his original hometown, Kobersdorf.

Once there, they settled into routine, with Rav Moshe continuing to toil in Torah study, and Perel running the household and taking care of his children. She also took in some needlework to make an income. She would sew *kittel*s and men's shirts and sell them to the villagers.

In addition to her obligations to her family, she also availed herself to help the people of the community. In short time, all the villagers were aware of her righteousness and kind-heartedness. She would frequently volunteer for various initiatives, including serving as a member of the *chevrah kaddisha* and in other programs for the assistance of people in need. Visitors coming to Kobersdorf to pray at the *kevarim* of family members knew that they could turn to her for help locating the gravesite, and she would accompany them to the cemetery to show them the location of the *kever* they sought.


Kivonat
házasok anyakönyvéből.
Official certificate of Rav Moshe's second marriage

Despite her many responsibilities and kindnesses, her foremost priority was taking care of her husband's children and running her household. She related to her husband with extraordinary reverence, and did all she could so that he could toil in his Torah studies undisturbed. She applied herself diligently to providing his orphaned children with a warm environment, tending to all their needs and bringing them up in an appropriate manner.

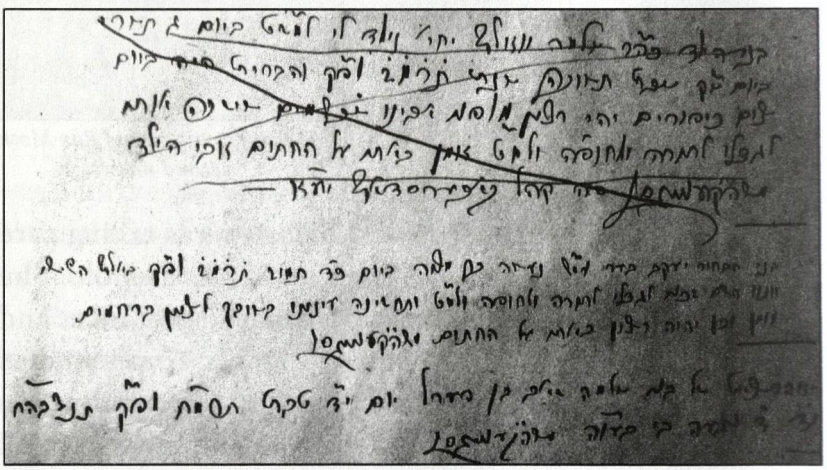
The bar mitzvah of Yaakov Dov, Rav Moshe's son, was celebrated together three years after their marriage, when Perel was all but twenty-one years old.

Rav Moshe and Perel's Children

Rav Moshe and Perel's first child, a son, was born just over two years after their marriage in 1886. He was born the day after Rosh Hashanah. His *bris* took place on Yom Kippur and they named him Shlomo Zev.

Rav Moshe recorded the event of his birth on the blank page at the front of his Mishnayos, noting his aspiration and supplication that he would merit rearing him to adulthood, to marriage, and to a life of Torah and good deeds.

Unfortunately this was not to be. The young Shlomo Zev never reached adulthood. Sadly he died in infancy when he was fifteen months old, on the fourteenth of Teves in 1887, leaving his parents bereft and grieving. Understandably, Rav Moshe took this very hard and he recorded his *yahrtzeit* on



Rav Moshe's handwriting, recording the birth and later the death of his son

the blank page of his Mishnayos, beneath where he recorded his birth and aspirations for his future, adding, "The hand of Hashem has stricken me due to my numerous sins."

Subsequently, they had another three daughters. The eldest was born in 1889, about a year after the death of their son; and was given the name Krasl, after Rav Moshe's first wife. In 1892 they had their second daughter, Sarah, and in 1896 their third daughter, Esther, was born.

In 1890 the news arrived of Rav Moshe's father's passing in Vienna, on 25 Cheshvan. He was around eighty years old at the time and had lived a productive life. A few years later, in 1894, Rav Moshe and Perel gave birth to a son, and they named him Asher after Rav Moshe's father. However they didn't merit raising him, for he also sadly died in childhood.

Rav Moshe endured much travails throughout his lifetime, and suffered frequently from various ailments which weakened his body considerably. Moreover, he was always in dire financial straits and barely had enough money for daily expenses. But despite all the tribulations he endured, he continued to apply himself diligently to the study of the Torah. Learning Torah gave him comfort and brought him serenity and peace of mind. He upheld his rigorous schedule, toiling in his studies and availing himself to answer queries and give advice to his fellow villagers. Perel too, maintained her righteousness with her upbeat attitude and continued with her noble deeds.

21 Effects of Financial Distress

Rav Moshe and Perel merited marrying off the three children from his first marriage. However, as a result of his grim financial situation, when his children finally got married, they were older than the accepted age for matrimony.

In the smaller villages, the salary paid to the village *rav* was minimal, and often he could barely make ends meet with the miniscule wage he received. As a result, the salary was a major factor when considering a proposed rabbinic post — would they able to learn and teach Torah unconstrained on the proposed salary.

This was even more profound regarding a scholar who didn't fill the official position of *rav*, and instead held some other rabbinic post. Even though these individuals were often tremendous scholars and provided a great service to the community, the villagers simply couldn't afford more than a mere pittance to recompense them for their service. Consequently, these Rabbis would usually need to take on an additional job in order to be able to put food on their table.

Hence, even after becoming appointed as official *dayan* of the village, Rav Moshe's salary wasn't enough to provide for his family's needs. He would therefore learn privately with students. His wife also took in needle work to supplement

their income. Nevertheless his overall financial situation was truly dismal.

He had always felt a tremendous affection for the many extraordinary works which had been authored by *talmidei chachomim* throughout the generations, and he felt his learning was greatly enhanced through perusing such volumes. He craved to amass as many *sefarim* as possible to learn from them on a regular basis, but he simply couldn't, due to his lack of means. This caused him great distress.

Occasionally he alludes to this in his writings, mentioning that he is unable to look up a certain source, as he does not have access to the *sefer*. Sometimes he writes this even concerning popular works written by well-known authors, from which he had seen excerpts quoted in their name.

His thirst to attain clarity in his studies yet being unable to search himself for the answers to his questions forced him to find other means of acquiring this knowledge. He would often publicize his questions in the Torah journals of the time and request of readers with a more extensive library to look up what was written on the subject and share it with him.

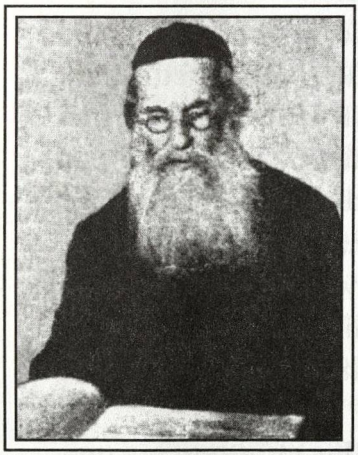
In one instance, after writing a query, he stated: "I request scholars to submit what they find on this subject, since I, due to my many sins, lack a collection of *sefarim* and am inhibited from looking up the matter myself."

When the time came to marry off his children, his predicament exacerbated, specifically since he yearned to marry off his daughters to Torah scholars, and lacking the means to provide a respectable dowry, his stakes for this were not very high.

His Children's Shidduchim

His eldest daughter, Zissel, got married in the winter of 1896 when she was twenty-five years old. Her *chassan* was a budding *talmid chachom*, Yechezkel Ehrenthal from Nagy-Magyar (Magendorf in Yiddish, not to be confused with Nagy-Megyer, birthplace of Rav Moshe, known as Medyer in Yiddish). He had learned in some of the famous Hungarian yeshivahs, including the Pressburg yeshivah under the Shevet Sofer, and he showed great potential in his studies.

Apparently the *shidduch* between Yechezkel and Zissel was orchestrated through a well-known Torah personality of that era, Rav Moshe Katz, who served then as the *rav* of Nitra. He was a son of the great Rav Menachem Katz of Tzehlem, and thus was acquainted with the Konig family, as Zissel's grandmother, Rachla Zolschan, had married Rav Menachem after her first husband passed away.



Rav Moshe Katz

Yechezkel had been an intimate student of Rav Moshe Katz. Their close relationship had begun in the years prior to Rav Moshe's ascent to the position as *rav* of Nitra, when he served as *rav* of Nagy-Magyar, Yechezkel's birthplace. As a young *bachur*, Yechezkel had been his *talmid* in the yeshivah there, and he maintained his connection with him later, even after their ways separated. Eventually after excelling in his learning he received *semichah* from Rav Moshe. Therefore it can be presumed that it was he who was instrumental in forging this *shidduch*.

After their marriage, the Ehrenthals lived for some time in Kobersdorf, and Rav Yechezkel utilized his proficiency in learning, and stood at the side of his illustrious father-in-law, assisting him in his obligations as *dayan* of the village.

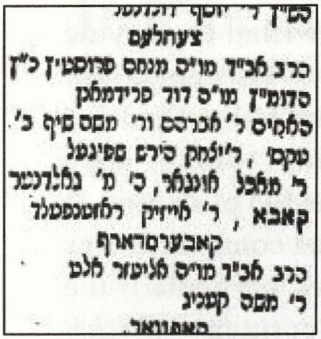
As Rav Moshe didn't have the wherewithal to provide support for the young couple, and the job of assistant *dayan* did not bring in a fixed income, Rav Yechezkel learned and was trained in the practical *halachos* of *shechitah* with the hope of finding employment. He applied for the job of *shochet* in nearby Tzehlem, and possibly in additional communities as well. It was common in many communities, particularly the smaller ones, to hire someone to fill a dual position — *shochet* and *chazzan*. This way the community would only have to pay one salary. Though Yechezkel had been blessed with a pleasant voice and was a suitable candidate, there were scores of applicants vying for the job, and he was not hired. In 1903 he was offered the position to lead a small community in a tiny village in the Nitra region and he moved there. (Further details about his lifetime and his family will be discussed later.)

In the ensuing years Rav Moshe Konig married off his other two children from his first marriage. Yaakov Dov married Sarah Kaufman and left Kobersdorf to settle in Janoshaza where he received a job as a *shochet*.

Meanwhile for Krendel there were no suitable suggestions coming forth. She was growing older, and Rav Moshe aspired greatly to see her married to a Torah scholar, but with no means to supply a respectable dowry, there was little he could do to advance this objective.

It was common for a person who found himself in such a situation, to travel from town to town and to raise some money either through public speaking or through collecting prepayment for a *sefer* they intended to publish.

As a matter of fact, when he had the means to do so, Rav Moshe would contribute for the prepayment of *sefarim* to scholars visiting Kobersdorf collecting in this manner. Indeed his name can be found, alongside the name of Rav Alt, recorded within *sefarim* in the listing of those who gave advance payment toward the publishing.

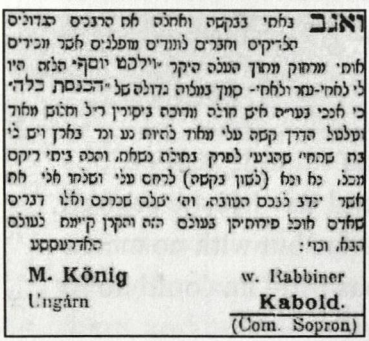


Rav Moshe's name listed in a sefer together with names of other rabbanim who prepaid to help with publishing costs

However for Rav Moshe, this form of raising funds wasn't a viable option, as he suffered from various ailments and therefore didn't have the strength to travel around the country.

His brother Meir Zvi owned the flour mill in Nagy-Megyer and was affluent. Though he did extend some support to Rav Moshe from time to time, it apparently wasn't enough to relieve his dismal circumstances.

As a result, Rav Moshe had to try to alleviate his difficult situation through other venues. Because he was a frequent contributor to a Torah journal and his chiddushim were very popular, at one point when he felt he had no choice, he evoked the compassion of the readers and added a desperate plea for assistance at the end of one of his submissions. He implored all those who were familiar with him through the annals of that publication to have mercy on him and send him their *hachnasas kallah* contributions so that he could marry off his daughter. He added that his house is completely bare, and that due to his weakness he



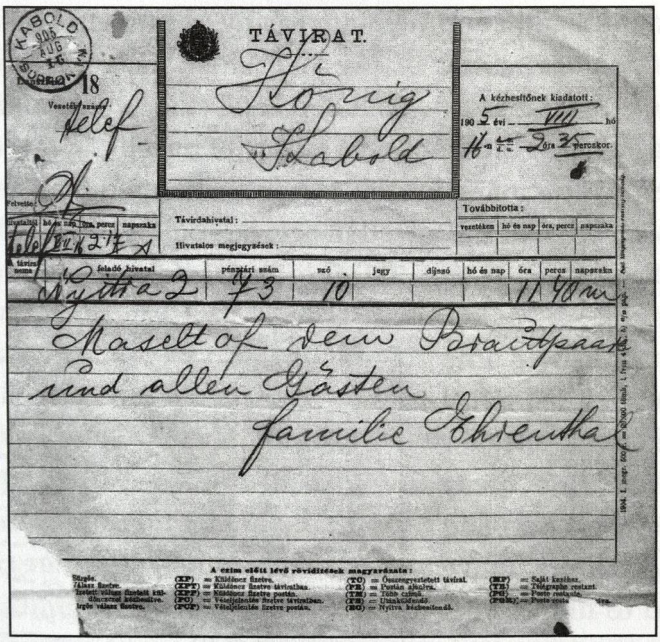
M. Kőnig
Ungárn

w. Rabbiner
Kabold.
(Com. Sopron)

Rav Moshe's public plea for assistance, 1902

couldn't travel from town to town to amass the essential funds for her dowry.

In 1905, a suitable match was suggested for Krendel with a young man from Vienna, Moshe Dovid Weiss. Their marriage took place in Kobersdorf with the attendance of most of their immediate family. The Ehrenthals were living some distance from Kobersdorf where Rav Yechezkel had received his position; and they couldn't make it the *chasunah*. They sent mazel tov wishes by telegram which they dispatched from Nitra, since this was apparently the closest town with a post office. Soon after their wedding, the Weiss couple moved to Vienna and settled there until World War II.


TÁVIRAT.

Herrn
Leopold

Nyitra 2 | 73 | 10 | | | | 11 | 40m

Maseltof dem Brautpaar
und allen Gästen
familie Ehrenthal

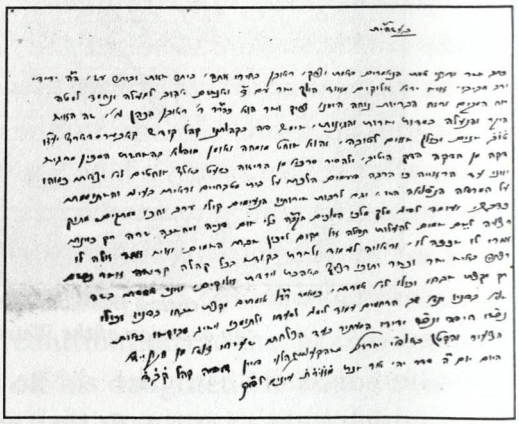
Telegram from the Ehrenthals on occasion of the Weiss wedding

22 The Village Rabbinate

By 1890, the *rav* of Kobersdorf, Rav Eliezer Zev Alt, had reached his seventieth birthday. Nevertheless, he still kept up the fulfillment of his obligations to the community and continued appearing in public as before. In 1891 upon the passing of Rav Menachem Katz, he traveled to Tzehlem to take part in his funeral and eulogized him there. It is recorded that the emotional eulogy of the elderly Rav Eliezer Zev left a particularly indelible impression upon the attendees.

However, as he advanced in age, he couldn't give of himself as before, and it was time to look for help in running the community.

Rav Moshe Konig was recognized by all in the community for his erudition in many areas of the Torah, and the people regularly turned to him for his advice as well as with their halachic queries. This was even before he was appointed with an official position in



Letter from Rav Moshe in 1891 endorsing the village shochet

the community. He would, as mentioned, sometimes be called upon by the villagers to arbitrate in their monetary disputes. The people of the village regarded him with reverence and he was considered somewhat of an assistant *rav*.

The religious services of the community were partially under his responsibility. He helped take care of the *shechitah* in the village and would periodically visit the slaughter house to check on the *shochet* and to answer any queries which came up there.

Rav Moshe's Appointment as Dayan

In 1895, when Rav Moshe was fifty-two years old, he was formally appointed to serve as a *dayan* of the village. From then on he would regularly address the villagers in public sermons. He also delivered many *shiurim* — people would come from all over the district to listen. He was frequently called upon by the locals to enhance their *simchah*s with his *derashos*. And in times of sorrow as well, he'd be asked to eulogize members of the *kehillah*.

Often, on such occasions, *shailos* would arise, and the assembled would turn to Rav Moshe for his opinion. If it was a complicated question, he would issue his *psak*, and then later, after returning home, he would write the explanation for this ruling and publicize it in one of the Torah journals of the time, requesting *talmidei chachomim* to peruse his reasoning and to enlighten him with their opinion on the matter.

When disaster struck the village, he displayed the intense pain which he felt for the misfortune of the locals, sharing their sorrow and suffering as if it were his own.

A Tragedy in the Town

On June 6, 1895, a few days after Shavuos, a horrific rainstorm hit the Kobersdorf. The river running through the town overflowed, resulting in tremendous flooding. The newspapers of the time reported the devastation and mayhem that ensued as a result of the flooding. Tragically a number of people drowned in the floodwaters, including four members of the Jewish community. Escape was made difficult due to the sudden flood, and even roads and bridges were swept away. Many houses were damaged and some were destroyed completely, and the families who had lost their homes and belongings in the flood left Kobersdorf and attempted to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

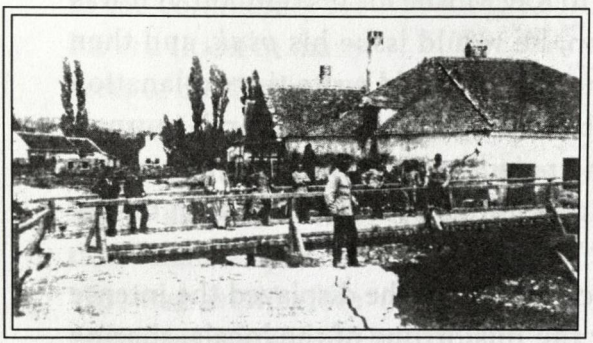
FORTY PERISHED.

Floods at Kobersdorf, Hungary, Were Most Disastrous.

OLDENBURG, June 8.—It is now known that forty persons perished in the flood at Kobersdorf and at least thirty persons are missing. Kobersdorf is a Hungarian watering place near here and the floods as a result of mountain freshets were so sudden that in many instances all avenues of escape were cut off. There is great distress among the peasants in the flooded district. Telegraph wires, roads and bridges have been swept away in many places and the flooded districts are extremely difficult of access.

Newspaper clipping detailing the flood

The interior of the shul also sustained severe damage, and the elderly Rav Alt, who was in the shul at the time of the flooding, barely escaped by fleeing to higher grounds.

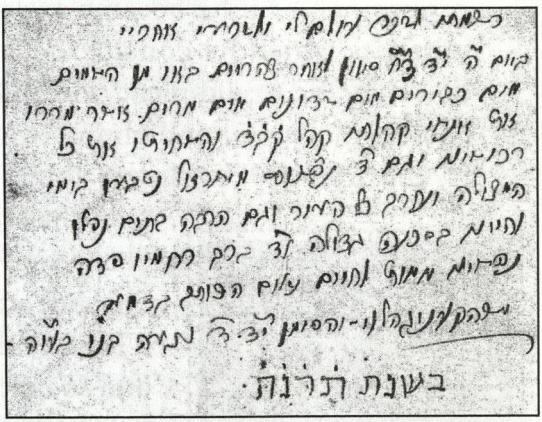


Residents of Kobersdorf surveying damage from the great flood in 1895

Rav Moshe was greatly distressed as a result of the misfortune endured by his community and he recorded the tragedy on a

blank page on the front of his siddur. He writes, "I record for posterity, for me and my descendants; on Thursday 14 Sivan, came down from Heaven heavy waters, wicked waters, which embittered the members of the community of Kobersdorf. It wrecked our belongings. Four Jewish souls were lost through drowning in the flood waters and many houses were demolished. We were all in grave danger. Hashem, in His great mercy, saved our souls and redeemed us from death to life. I write this with tears, Moshe Konig HaLevi."

On the same page, he records a similar incident that happened a year later, writing that he had to rush his family up to the attic in order to save them from the flood waters, and ends with thanks to Hashem for the fact that on this occasion there was no loss of life. (Author's note: It seems that flooding was not an uncommon occurrence in Kobersdorf. I witnessed it once when I was there in 1936, though by that time the damage was minimal, as the residents had better means of coping with the copious waters.)



Rav Moshe's handwritten record of the great flood

Rav Moshe's Care for His Community Members

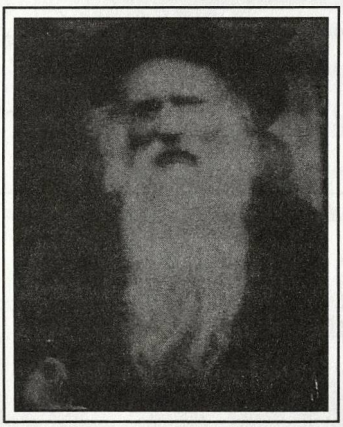
His affectionate conduct toward his fellow community members; his joining them in their times of happiness and feeling for them in instances of misfortune,

reinforced the people's warm feelings toward him. As a result he had the ability to influence them positively and would utilize every opportunity to lecture on important subjects.

In his public discourses and sermons, he would delight his audience with his breadth of knowledge and with his original insights and explanations on verses of the Torah and Talmud. He would utilize his speeches to beseech the townspeople to adhere faithfully to all the *halachos* of the Torah, to cleave to the ways of their forefathers, and not to seek any leniencies in performing the mitzvos.

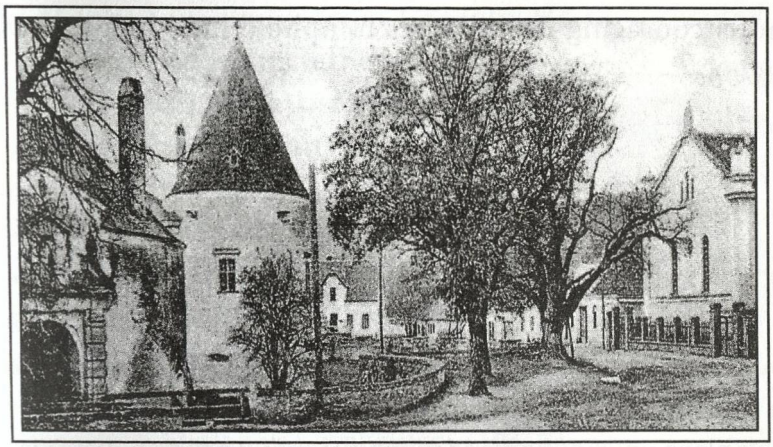
If he ever noticed an issue in which he saw room for improvement, or if he became aware of a conduct among the villagers which he considered a breach in the upkeep of halachah, he would plead with the community members to correct the matter and improve their ways.

One example of this was a time when it came to his attention that some of the villagers were receiving their milk deliveries on Shabbos afternoon. He considered this a breach in the *kedushah* of Shabbos and sought to rectify the matter. First he publicized his opinion and requested of other *rabbanim* to inform whether his judgment of the matter was correct. His opinion received credence a short while later when the *rav* of Núr-Bagad, Rav Shlomo Yehudah Weinberger, publicized a letter proclaiming that the truth is definitely on the side of Rav Moshe.



Rav Shlomo Yehudah Weinberger

On another occasion, a further issue was brought to him. This was during the nine days preceding Tishah B'Av, a period of mourning of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, when



The shul visible across from the "Schloss" on the main street of the village. The butcher shop can be seen to the left of the shul.

the halachah states that no slaughtering may take place, due to the prohibition of eating meat then. There were instances where this ruling wasn't easy to comply with and there was rationale for some leniencies to be allowed, such as in communities where the Jewish butchers would also supply the meat to the general population.

This was the case in Kobersdorf, where the Jews lived cordially among the general populace. The locals, as well as some from the nearby villages, would buy their meat from the Jewish butchers. The pious butchers came before Rav Moshe with their quandary, asking whether it would be permitted to slaughter for their non-Jewish customers, or if it would be preferable to employ non-Jews to kill the animals using their own method. Rav Moshe delved into the matter and came to the conclusion that it would be preferable to permit Jewish slaughtering rather than initiating complications, which could arise as a result of having non-ritual slaughtering take place.

This was so with any issue that arose or any breach that occurred. Rav Moshe worked alongside the *rav* of the village, constantly working on upholding tradition, teaching Torah

and encouraging the villagers to uphold halachah and *minhagim*.

Appointing a New Rav

On the first night of Pesach, in 1898 the *rav* of Kobersdorf, Rav Alt, passed away. His funeral took place on Sunday, the second day of *chol hamoed* and he was buried in the local cemetery. Even though the *levayah* took place on *chol hamoed* when *hespedim* are not customarily given, nevertheless Rav Eliezer Zev Alt was eulogized by several great *rabbanim* at the *levayah*, which attracted a large crowd. The community was enveloped in sadness upon the demise of this great *talmid chachom*.

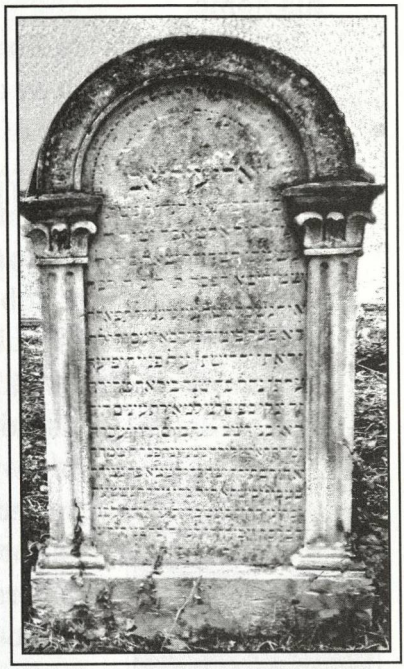

אברהם ליעזר זאב אלט נ"י
אב"ד דקהלתנו
נתקבל לתוך החברא בשנת ברי"ת עשק ד' חומט פסח
ויהי בחצי הלילה ותהי צעקה גדולה
כליל שמורים ליל א' דחג הפסח
בשנת תרנ"ח קי
שבק חיים לנו ולכל ישראל:
הובא למנוחתו ביום א' ב' דחוהמ"פ

Announcement of the passing of Rav Alt in the community pinkas

It was now necessary for the community to appoint a new *rav* to take his place. A suitable candidate for this post would have no doubt been the *dayan* Rav Moshe Konig, whose current position was similar to that of chief Rabbi. Additionally he held a very close rapport with the president of the community, Moshe Riegler, who greatly revered Rav Moshe. In fact, in his writings, Rav Moshe mentions discussions they held, stating, "I was asked a question by my dear friend R' Moshe Riegler." He then goes on to relate the question and how it could be answered.

However, Rav Moshe would not even consider taking up the position, given that the late Rav Alt had a learned son-in-law

Rav Moshe Lipschutz, from Cracow. He now resided in Kobersdorf and in his father-in-law's later years had assisted him in fulfilling his obligations toward the community.



Kever of Rav Alt

The father of Rav Lipschutz was R' Aryeh Zvi of Cracow, known as R' Herschel, a great *talmid chachom* of rabbinic lineage. He was a well-known dealer in rare volumes and manuscripts; England's Cambridge University was one of his clients. He would also produce and sell wine every year before Pesach. The wine business was very lucrative, and he was thus able to spend most of the year in uninterrupted Torah study.

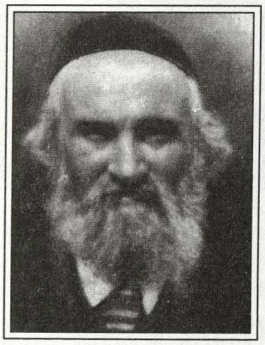
Even though his business affairs took him to many parts of the world, he clung steadfastly to the laws of the Torah and led his life in purity. He refrained from eating meat products during the weekdays, in order not to be tempted to eat meat on his travels to remote locales where he could not be certain of the standard of kashrus in those communities. R' Herschel brought up his children to lead lives of Torah and piety. One of his daughters married to R' Naftali Rottenberg of Cracow, who was the father of Rav Mordechai Rottenberg Chief Rabbi of Antwerp. One of his sons, R' Shimon, was the *rosh hakahal* of Tzehlem.

At one point, R' Herschel lived with his family in Vienna where he worked as a bank manager. During his years in Vienna, his house became known as a venue where a number of great *rabbanim* stayed while visiting the town, on one

occasion he merited hosting the holy Rav Chaim of Sanz in his home.

R' Herschel's studious son, Moshe, spent that era sitting and learning Torah in one of the local shuls which was frequented by a number of highly regarded *talmidei chachomim*. He had already mastered much Torah knowledge during his youth in Cracow, and now in Vienna, he established a good name for himself among the local scholars. Upon visiting Vienna, the *rav* of Kobersdorf Rav Eliezer Zev Alt, caught sight of the young scholar and chose him as a son-in-law.

Shortly thereafter R' Herschel returned to Cracow, and his son Rav Moshe settled in Kobersdorf to assist his father-in-law in his obligations to the community. Indeed, upon his father-in-law's passing, he was appointed to take his place as *rav* of the Kobersdorf with Rav Moshe Konig retaining his position as *dayan*, serving alongside the *rav*.



Moshe Alt, son of the Rav

Rav Eliezer Zev Alt also had a son named Moshe who was likewise a reputable scholar, but he shied away from the rabbinate. He remained in Kobersdorf for the time being, and lived in his father's house, adjacent to the shul. Officially this house belonged to the village *rav*, but instead of evicting the *rav*'s family from their childhood home, the community arranged alternative living quarters for the new *rav*, in a building further down the road, at the same address where the mikveh was situated.

23 Teaching Torah to Students

By the turn of the century, the yeshivah in Kobersdorf had ceased to exist. With the passing of time, the structure of Hungarian yeshivahs had become significantly upgraded and better organized, with many having acquired buildings of their own. Some even had dining facilities and other amenities. Thus there was apparently nothing to attract a student to come and learn in a remote village lacking basic conveniences, unless, of course, the village *rav* was a recognized Torah giant.

Similar was the situation in other small towns in the region, with a number of the yeshivahs in the Sheva Kehillos ceasing to function with the passage of time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was only in Mattersdorf and Tzehlem that the yeshivahs continued to thrive. These were housed in respectable buildings and led by prominent *rabbanim*. Consequently, the residents of the towns and villages without a yeshivah had to seek other options for the Torah learning of their sons.

The common arrangement was for the *bachurim* to leave home and travel to the reputable yeshivahs in the larger towns. This routine was indeed viable for those who lived within the vicinity of such a town, as well as for older boys who had no problem with traveling great distances for the sake of learning

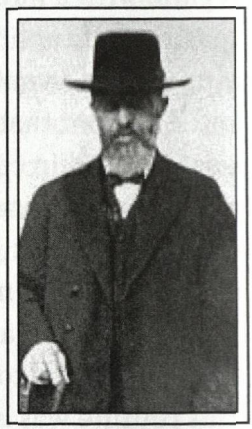
Torah. On the other hand, for the younger boys of the villages, this situation wasn't ideal.

The people of Kobersdorf were fortunate in this aspect. They had in their midst a *talmid chachom* of high caliber, and their children could attain progress in their Torah studies under his guidance. Not only did Rav Moshe come with ten years' experience from his position in Janoshaza, he had great breadth of knowledge and knew how to explain difficult concepts with lucidity.

He began giving *shiurim* in public which were well attended, not only by scholars and students of his own village, but also by residents of other small towns and villages in the region. Additionally he would spend a large part of his day studying Torah with students on a one-to-one basis.

Rav Moshe's Talmidim

The names of several of his students have been recorded. Of particular renown are two students he had taught in Janoshaza, as mentioned previously: Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald, who was later *rav* in Tzehlem and Satmar, and his brother, Rav Yaakov Yechizkiyah of Chust.



Rav Yoel Yacobowitz

One student from his Kobersdorf years was Rav Yoel Yacobowitz, born in 1886 to Rav Shlomo who held the position of *dayan* in nearby Lakenbach. Kobersdorf was actually a very short distance away from Lakenbach and could be reached easily by bicycle. After concluding his school years — as there was no yeshivah in Lakenbach at that

time — he would come in to Kobersdorf to attend the *shiurim* of Rav Moshe Konig.

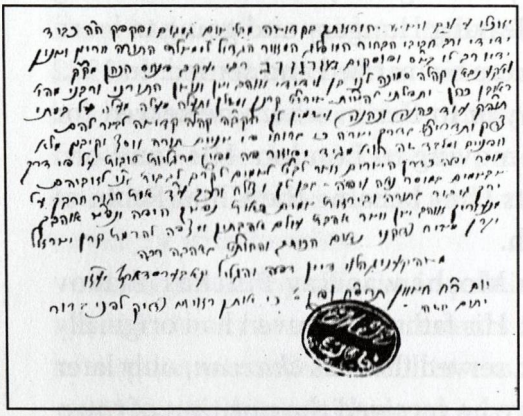
Later he went on to study in the great yeshivah in Pressburg for a few years, eventually leaving Hungary and going to learn in yeshivah in Germany, where he married and settled. In 1922 he was appointed head *dayan* in Berlin where he served for a number of years before moving to London. His son Lord Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits later became the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth.

Another *talmid* of Rav Moshe was Rav Pinchas Yaakov Kohn, also from Lakenbach. His father R' Reuven had originally lived in Kobersdorf and had served there as *chazzan*, only later moving to Lakenbach where he received the position of town *shochet*. Rav Moshe was well acquainted with the family, and developed a friendship which continued long after the family left Kobersdorf.

Rav Pinchas Yaakov Kohn was born in 1878, and spent a number of years learning in the famous yeshivahs of Hungary. He learned first in Mattersdorf, then moved on learn in Chust for four years under Rav Moshe Greenwald and continued on to Pressburg. He had also spent some time learning from Rav Moshe Konig in Kobersdorf. Even after excelling and making great strides in his studies, he would come in to Kobersdorf to visit Rav Moshe and they would spend much time discussing various topics concerning his learning. Rav Moshe took great pleasure in these conversations, as Rav Pinchas Yaakov had developed into an erudite Torah scholar. In 1898 Rav Moshe granted his *talmid* a letter of *semichah* wherein he praised him effusively.

This was a rare occurrence, for Rav Moshe in his humility didn't comprehend what benefit anyone could have from his *semichah* letter. However, he writes of Rav Pinchas Yaakov, that after seeing this particular *talmid*'s accomplishments,

he is unable to deny him what is becoming to him. As a matter of note, by the time Rav Pinchas Yaakov approached Rav Moshe with his request for this letter, he had already received *semichah* from the Shevet Sofer and from the Arugas HaBosem. Nevertheless he desired to add to his collection an additional one from Rav Moshe Konig. Apparently it can be perceived from this, that the value of such a letter was indeed more than which was assessed by Rav Moshe himself in his humility.



The semichah letter of Rav Pinchas Yaakov

When Rav Pinchas Yaakov later showed this letter to Rav Yehudah Kraus, the *rav* of his hometown Lakenbach, Rav Yehudah added a note of his own. He wrote: For those who are unfamiliar, Rav Moshe Konig is the *dayan* of the community in proximity to ours, a great and honorable *talmid chachom* and his word is to be relied upon.

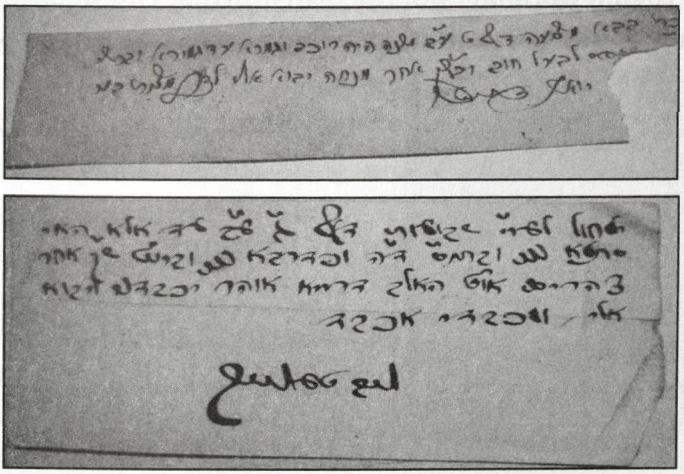
In 1915, Rav Pinchas Yaakov moved to Leipzig and lived there until 1939 when he moved to London.

A third student of his was Yosef Deutch, born in Kobersdorf in 1890. As a *bachur*, he learned under Rav Moshe and held a private study session with him. He stayed in Kobersdorf and lived there all his years until he perished during the war, *Hy"d*. There is evidence of another student by the name of Leib Tellesh, who may have possibly come from nearby Tzehlem.

The routine was that those who learned privately with Rav Moshe would leave small notes on the table where Rav Moshe studied, with the plans for the next day's session — what to

learn and the time their learning would commence. Some of these notes are still in existence today.

In addition to teaching Torah to the studious boys in his vicinity and as well as availing himself to speak in learning with the local scholars, he also showed his aptitude in connecting with the less studious and somewhat problematic youth of the village and its environs. He acted with tremendous warmth and patience toward such boys, and even in a case where a boy found himself put off from the Torah way for specific reasons, Rav Moshe could successfully find an inroad to his heart and encourage him to hold on to his belief. Thus any person on any level could benefit from him; he influenced them positively through his noble ways and deeds.



Notes left by students with agenda for study session

24 Printing Chiddushei Torah

Besides for disseminating Torah orally, through public discourses and teaching his students, Rav Moshe was also a prolific writer. Though he didn't publish a *sefer* — probably due to financial constraits — he utilized what was then a popular tool for transmitting *chiddushei Torah*. This was the Torah journals which were published monthly, wherein *talmidei chachomim* would publicize their Torah thoughts for the benefit of the wider public.

The Torah Journals

These journals provided a great advantage for Torah Jewry on many fronts. First of all, there was the large number of great scholars who had much to share but lacked the resources to publish their own *sefarim*. This would have been a loss for Torah Jewry had they not been able to benefit from their leaders' insights and interpretations on Torah. The monthly periodicals afforded a capacity for these scholars to publicize their *chiddushim*, and it is to the credit of these journals that the *chiddushim* of many great scholars of yesteryear are available for scholars today.

Additionally these journals often served as a base for

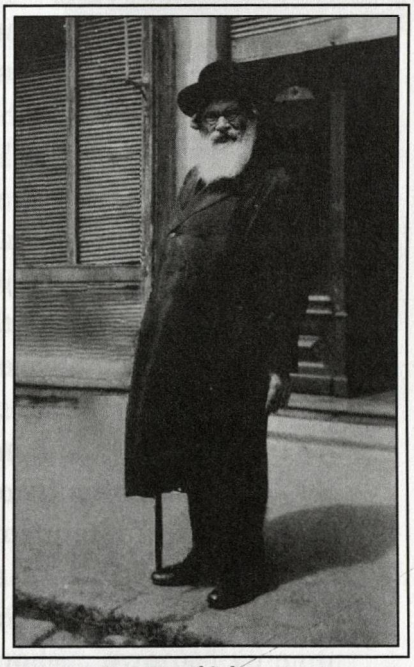
public discussion of vital issues affecting Orthodox Jewry of the time. Scholars would send in their questions and doubts in matters of halachah and readers would submit their response and offer their outlook concerning these queries. The responses were printed in subsequent editions. From time to time there were great debates which took place within the pages of these publications, with the give-and-take of *rabbanim* and *talmidei chachomim* sometimes continuing for several months.

The expenses for the publishing of these journals were covered by a subscription fee paid by the multitudes wishing to receive these monthly pamphlets to enjoy the original insights and wide array of subjects discussed within its pages.

Rav Moshe utilized these journals extensively and over the years submitted hundreds of essays to these periodicals. Some submissions were his personal insights and others were answers to queries sent in by other scholars. He also frequently shared *chiddushim* he had heard from his esteemed *rebbi*s.

Rav Moshe would regularly submit his *chiddushim* to the monthly journal *Vayelaket Yosef.* This was compiled and edited by Rav Yosef Schwartz who was a son of R' Naftali, the *rav* of Mád, and grandson of the famous *Gaon*, Rav Avraham Yehudah Schwartz of Bergsas, and author of *Kol Aryeh.*

Rav Yosef was a talented individual and a notable scholar in his own right. He utilized his talents for the dissemination of



Rav Yosef Schwartz, in his later years in Grosswardein

Torah, authoring a number of *sefarim*. One of his monumental projects was publishing the periodical *Vayelaket Yosef*. This didn't entail simply collecting and printing the discourses which were submitted. Rav Yosef would review each and every essay and in instances when there was a great deal of correspondence concerning a particular subject, he would summarize the content of each letter and only print the basic content in a concise manner. Additionally, he had to take caution not to print a submission containing controversial ideas.

He was highly regarded by his subscribers as well as by many of the great halachic authorities of Hungary. Sometime after World War I, Rav Yosef relocated to Grosswardein where he was appointed as *dayan* and served there until the decimation of the community in World War II.


ספר
ויקט יוסף

Spearheading the publishing of a Torah journal and keeping it running on a constant basis wasn't effortless, and indeed there were many Torah journals which were introduced and then given up on after a short time. This one however, saw tremendous success. It persevered for many years, from 1899 until 1918 and was very popular among the Torah scholars of Europe.

Rav Moshe's submissions gained much popularity and his discourses were frequently discussed by other scholars in subsequent editions. A number of his ideas publicized in *Vayelaket Yosef* were quoted and discussed in the works of some well-known authors. He also regularly expounded on concepts introduced by other subscribers, presenting his novel

ideas on the myriad issues brought up there. Additionally, to the appreciation of the many readers, he often provided sources to numerous queries that had been submitted.

Another journal to which Rav Moshe submitted frequently was *Torah MiZion*. This publication was based in Yerushalayim and was edited and printed by R' Shmuel Zukerman who was a student of the great Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin. The proceeds which he made through the subscription fee were used toward supporting Rav Yehoshua Leib's yeshivah in the Holy City. This pamphlet managed to persevere for eighteen years, from 1887 until 1905, and unified within its annals Torah scholars from the world over.


תורה מציון

קובץ חדושי תורה במקרא ובמשנה ובהלכות
ואגדות ושו"ת אשר יחתרשו התמיד במשך הזמן
מפה"ן ורבנן נאמני והכמי חו"ל בארץ ובחו"ל

שנה חמישית חוברת א

נדפס

פעה"ק ירושלם תובב"א

At one time, a close acquaintance of Rav Moshe, Rav Yehudah Kraus, the *rav* of nearby Lakenbach, undertook the launching of a periodical where scholars could submit their insights in aggadah. His objective was to sort and publish the *chiddushim* therein according to their applicable seasons and thus named his periodical *Davar B'Itto*, meaning literally, "a word in its time." Rav Moshe sent him a letter of encouragement toward this endeavor and elaborated on the significance in engaging in this realm of the Torah too. He mentioned his own affinity to aggadah and included some of his own insights along with some *chiddushim* which he had heard from his *rebbis*, which were printed in this publication.

Through these pamphlets, Rav Moshe made acquaintance with a number of well-known *talmidei chachomim*. Sometimes, a *rav* would voice his opinion on a certain subject, and in the following issue, somebody else would submit his opinion

refuting the first. If Rav Moshe considered the truth to be with the opinion of the first *rav*, he would then submit his view, along with proof, in defense of the first. Occasionally, he would receive a letter from *rabbanim* thanking him for supporting their view. There actually exists a letter that Rav Yoel Margaretten, a *dayan* in Erlau, sent to Rav Moshe, thanking him and praising him for publicly defending him within the annals of *Vayelaket Yosef*.



Rav Yehudah Kraus

There were countless *rabbanim* who demonstrated great admiration of his opinion and held him in high esteem. With time it became common for authors of a *sefer* to ask Rav Moshe to peruse their work and give them his opinion and constructive criticism.

One close friend of his was Rav Mordechai Fried, the *rav* of Martinsburg (Gyorszentmarton in Hungarian) in the Györ district. He held Rav Moshe in high esteem and corresponded with him in writing. When he authored his *sefer Baruch Mordechai* on *Maseches Berachos*, he sent him a copy for review and requested his comments. In his writings, Rav Mordechai describes his pleasure at the attention Rav Moshe paid to his words: "I was delighted to see that the *gaon* Rav Moshe Konig read my words and commented on them."

Overall, Rav Moshe held written correspondence with many great scholars and *rabbanim* from communities across Hungary. One noteworthy acquaintance of his was Rav Shlomo Zvi Schick who was the *rav* of Karczag, a town in the vicinity of Debrecen. Rav Shlomo had studied under his relative the Maharam Schick and under Rav Chaim Zvi Manheimer of Ungvahr. In 1869 he became *rav* in Karczag and served there for forty-seven years until his death in 1916.

Rav Shlomo Zvi was a tremendous *talmid chachom*; however he displayed wide knowledge in worldly subjects. He would often apply his worldly knowledge for the interpretation of concepts in Torah and *minhagim*. He wrote extensively, and over the course of his lifetime authored several *sefarim* and published numerous articles in the Jewish newspapers and periodicals, including many written in German and Hungarian languages.



Rav Shlomo Zvi Schick

Though Rav Moshe appreciated Rav Shlomo's extensive knowledge, he didn't always concur with his conclusions. In one instance, Rav Moshe and Rav Shlomo held an interesting correspondence on the subject of identifying certain animals and plants mentioned in the Torah. Rav Moshe wrote to Rav Shlomo concerning his understanding of a particular animal, "I am familiar with the animal you describe; I saw it on a visit I paid to the zoo in Vienna. Nevertheless I am of the opinion that this is not the correct interpretation of the one mentioned in the Torah."



בעזהי"

סדור המנהגים

והוא

ספר המנהגים

מקרב הנאסף בהוצ'ם בחור רשת פרח יצחק אייזיק סודרוא יחי'ל

עם שני ביאורים הנקראים

וכרון אשר ותולדות אסתר

ובהם סקור כל מנהג ומנהג מראשית השנה עד אחרית השנה ע"פ

תלמוד בבלי וירושלמי מדרשים ופוסקים

מאתי

שלמה צבי שיק

רב בק"ק קארצאג וחגליל יצ"ו

חלק שלישי

ממנחג סלח עד סוף השנה

ברשות הרה"ת מרה אנחם בלייזר נ"י שר מונקאטש יצ"ו

בשנת תרחם לפ"ק

MUNKÁCS

Gedruckt bei PINKAS SLAYER, 1889

One of Rav Schick's sefarim owned by Rav Moshe

For a number of reasons there were many *rabbanim* and scholars who were bothered by Rav Schick's mode of thought. This was specifically in light of the havoc which had been wrecked in Hungary and other eastern European countries by the

so-called "Enlightened Jews," the reformists. The *rabbanim* were wary of any original thinker and would keep away from any individual veering even slightly from the universally accepted path. Likewise, Rav Moshe occasionally took him to task for his novel ideas, particularly when his words contradicted the opinions or explanations of the accepted authorities.

However on a whole, Rav Moshe had a positive rapport with him and admired his tremendous knowledge, even though he didn't always agree with his innovative interpretations. In turn Rav Shlomo also had warm feelings toward Rav Moshe and upon publishing his *sefarim* he would present them to Rav Moshe. Rav Moshe studied them regularly and filled their margins with his comments.

25 Rav Moshe's Mode of Torah Study

In conforming to the conventional approach of *talmidei chachomim* throughout the generations to grow in Torah, Rav Moshe spent his days toiling in Torah study, with his chief aspiration to attain wide-ranging erudition and familiarize himself with all segments of the Torah. Indeed, due to his tremendous diligence, he amassed extensive knowledge in all areas of the Torah.

Aside from his fluency in Shas and Midrash, he applied a great deal of effort in studying and clarifying the works of the *Rishonim* and of later authors. Whenever any fundamental *sefer* came his way, he would peruse it from cover to cover and delve into its words, often filling the margins with his many comments. For years Rav Moshe amassed a large library of *sefarim.* The walls of his study were lined with his many holy books in which he had attained a remarkable fluency.

Sometimes he displayed a unique approach in clarifying certain aspects of reaching halachic decisions. There were works of certain authors to which he adapted himself and on whose teachings he had absolute reliance with no compunction. He would study such *sefarim*, hence attaining proficiency in their content.

Sefarim He Studied Regularly

Interestingly, one author whom Rav Moshe was especially attached to is the Rabbeinu Bachya on Torah. In his writings, Rav Moshe reveals amazing mastery of his works, quoting them frequently and using his words to explain many otherwise unclear aspects in Torah. He would even sometimes reach conclusions in matter of halachah based on Rabbeinu Bachya's interpretations, even though Rabbeinu Bachya's *sefer* is basically a commentary on verses and commandments of the Torah and not a halachic work. Rav Moshe would have no qualms in arbitrating halachic debates and could quote two disagreeing opinions on a certain matter and then incline to one of the sides on account of Rabbeinu Bachya's explanation of the commandment under discussion.

He also appreciated explanations of Rabbeinu Bachya consistent with the kabbalistic approach. It is apparent from Rav Moshe's writings that he had a command of Kabbalah. Additionally, even though he wasn't a follower of Chassidic masters, and Chassidism hadn't at the time reached the Oberland region, nevertheless he shows a particular affection to Chassidic works he came upon. In one instance he writes: "My heart filled with joy that Hashem privileged me to chance upon the holy *sefer, Bnei Yissaschar,* of the holy Rebbe of Dinov." There are actually a number of times in his writings where he quotes excerpts of the *sefer Bnei Yissaschar.*

The Writings of the Chasam Sofer

Of the more recent authors to whose writings he attached himself, are the works of the Chasam Sofer, to which Rav Moshe understandably had exceptional

admiration and affection, and to whose opinion he would relate to as the bottom line on any halachic matter. As a matter of fact, this was the accepted norm by most Hungarian *rabbanim*, as the Chasam Sofer was considered the undisputed leader of Hungarian Jewry. Rav Moshe would delve into all of his writings, be it his explanations on Shas or his halachic responsa, and even where his words are quoted by other authors. Thus he gained a perceptible fluency in his *sefarim*.

Sometimes, after Rav Moshe would render his decision on a complicated subject where there were others who disagreed with him, he would voice his hesitancy to his ruling being relied upon. If he would later discover that the Chasam Sofer had already discussed the subject and had rendered his judgment on the matter, however, he would proclaim that all his previous doubts have disappeared and all can follow the ruling of the holy Chasam Sofer with a clear conscience.

An example of this occurred one year on Sukkos, when there was a dearth of *lulavim* in the vicinity of Kobersdorf. The question arose whether it was preferable to use a dry *lulav* from the previous year, or a new *lulav* that had a specific blemish on it. A debate arose in the village over whether that particular blemish rendered the *lulav* unfit for use. There was one scholar in the village who declared vehemently that it was not kosher, whereas Rav Moshe was inclined to permit its use rather than using the dry one. After Yom Tov he publicized the debate in one of the Torah journals, along with his own reasoning, asking the public to relay their view on the matter. Some time later however, he found that the Chasam Sofer had discussed this exact issue and had also rendered it kosher. Thus, Rav Moshe wrote, "Now that I see that the Chasam Sofer has revealed his opinion on the matter, there is hence no doubt as to the correct ruling and the debate is closed."

Incidentally, he took it for granted that all *talmidim* of the Chasam Sofer would have complete proficiency in their *rebbi*'s works. Indeed there are a number of times in his writings where Rav Moshe expresses his astonishment of certain *talmidim* of the Chasam Sofer who seemingly missed a quote within his works.

In one instance, he cites a subject discussed in the *sefer* of the *rav* of Shuran, Rav Chizkiyahu Feivel Plaut, and then comments, "This author was a close disciple of the *gaon* the Chasam Sofer; how could he not recall the words of the Chasam Sofer in a responsa where he addresses the discussed subject?"


ספר

ליקוטי חבר בן חיים

חלק ראשון

פרעסבורג

Sefer of the rav of Shuran

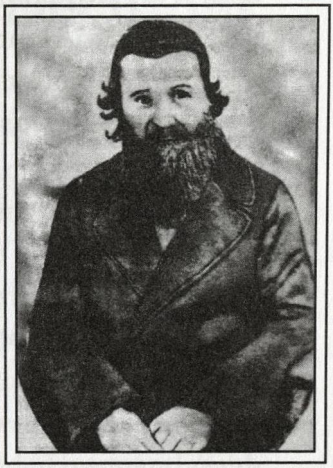
As a matter of fact, the works of the *rav* of Shuran were very popular at the time, in view of the fact that he recounts many facets of the Chasam Sofer's lifetime and records a great number of the customs he had abided by and inculcated. Rav Moshe had a great appreciation for his works, often relying on him for sources to various customs, and would frequently quote his words in his writings, commenting and expounding on them.

The Maharam Schick

On another occasion, Rav Moshe took issue with Rav Moshe Schick, the *rav* of Chust, for overlooking a remark of the Chasam Sofer. After quoting a question of Maharam Schick, he writes, "I was taken aback, as the Maharam Schick was a close talmid of the *gaon*, the Chasam

Sofer, thus it surprises me that he doesn't mention that this question has already been asked by the holy Chasam Sofer."

It would be worth mentioning that Rav Moshe Schick was an especially close pupil of his *rebbi* the Chasam Sofer. The Chasam Sofer appreciated his erudition and his sharp mind, and already, when he was only a young *bachur* studying in the yeshivah in Pressburg, the Chasam Sofer had invited him to dine at his own table, an arrangement which held up for three years.



Maharam Schick

Later the Maharam Schick was appointed as *rav* in Yergen, a village near Pressburg, and while serving in that position he had ample opportunities to maintain his connection with his *rebbi*. The Chasam Sofer used to visit Yergen from time to time in order to benefit from its clear air. During these visits, the Maharam Schick tried to honor the Chasam Sofer by offering him his own place at the eastern wall of the shul, as well as other forms of honor, but the Chasam Sofer would decline, insisting that he not relinquish any of his own privileges as *rav*.

The Maharam Schick's esteem for his *rebbi* and his teachings was to such a magnitude, that his students recounted he would never begin a discourse without first repeating one of his *rebbi*'s teachings. Similarly, in his responsa, answering halachic queries, he persistently quotes from the writings and the teachings of his *rebbi*.

Ultimately he was recognized as one of the leading halachic authorities of Hungarian Jewry. Even while still in his position in Yergen, a very small community, he was highly regarded by his contemporaries, and was considered one of

the leaders of Orthodox Jewry of the land. As a matter of interest, there exists a letter penned by the *rav* of Cracow, Rav Shimon Sofer, son of the Chasam Sofer, where he writes in his humility that being the *rav* of Cracow doesn't in any way illustrate the status of its *rav*. (Cracow was one of the largest and most prestigious of European communities.) He cites proof from the fact that even though the village of Yergen is a tiny community, its *rav* is one of the most eminent scholars of the land. Thus evidently, the Maharam Schick's writings were often related to as a transmittance of his rebbi the Chasam Sofer's teachings.

26 Rendering Halachic Decisions

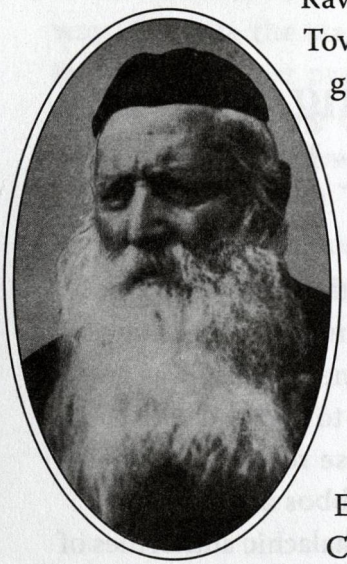
Rav Moshe's tenure as *dayan* was during a period when the world at large experienced much progression and saw great technological advancement. There was much uncertainty in the Torah world as to how to contend with these innovations. Many halachic *shailos* arose relating to the use of these new inventions, mainly on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

Rav Moshe, in tandem with the other halachic authorities of the time, invested much effort to clarify these issues. He wrote extensively on these subjects and corresponded frequently with contemporary rabbinic authorities of the land in the effort to reach the correct halachic ruling.

Technology and His Halachic Opinions

Of the subjects he discusses, one example is the use of electricity on Shabbos. A number of halachic authorities at the time deemed the use of electricity on Shabbos problematic. They held that the attendants at the power stations were doing work for the Jewish consumers by adding fuel for their use. One of the more famous opponents of the use of electricity on Shabbos was the renowned *dayan* of Szighet, Rav Shlomo Leib Tabak who wrote about it

extensively in his work *Tshuras Shai*. Rav Moshe also discussed this issue at length, and while his conclusion is to permit its use, he didn't deem it a clear-cut decision.



Reb Shimon Sofer of Erlau

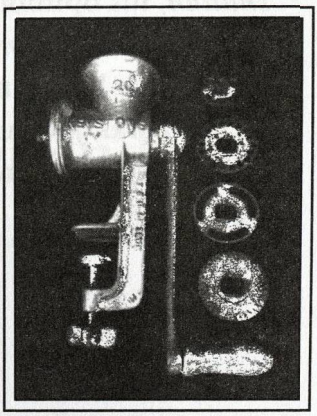
Rav Moshe also discussed the use on Yom Tov of the newly invented mechanical meat grinder. He suggests a number of concerns which would be a rationale for disallowing its use for the preparation of food on Yom Tov. One deliberation was concerning attaching the parts of the machine, whether this could be included in the prohibition of fixing an item on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Discussion of the subject can be seen in the printed responsa of the *rav* of Erlau, Rav Shimon Sofer, grandson of the Chasam Sofer. He begins his discourse with quoting Rav Moshe Konig's view of the subject and then discusses the issue with its pros and cons.

As a result of Rav Moshe's tremendous *yiras Shamayim*, there was no such thing as automatically permitting a new invention without delving into the matter accordingly. Even when the idea of affixing wheels to a baby's crib, known today as a stroller, was invented, Rav Moshe researched the issue thoroughly, in unison with other halachic authorities, until reaching the conclusion to permit its use on Shabbos and Yom-tov. A letter to him on this issue is printed in the *sefer* of his former pupil Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald of Tzehlem.



A nineteenth century baby stroller

In addition, when the citron presser was invented, Rav Moshe delved into this issue to determine in what manner it could be permissible to be used on Shabbos and Yom-Tov.



Vintage meat grinder

In addition to the above-cited issues, he would utilize his expertise and proficiency for many other issues affecting the Jews of that era. There were a number of other imperative subjects which Rav Moshe delved into and brought up for discussion with the *gedolim* of his time.

An interesting topic which concerned the *gedolei Yisrael* of the period that Rav Moshe discussed was concerning the use of *esrogim* for the *arba minim* from Corfu, a Greek island. Two issues were at hand: 1) whether the *esrogim* were kosher at all, and if there were, 2) whether using *esrogim* from Eretz Yisrael was preferred.

Rav Moshe added an ideological reason as to why one should avoid using the Corfu brand. Since Corfu is a part of Greece, he said, it is illogical for the wicked Greek nation to benefit from our mitzvos after they caused so much suffering to our nation over the generations. Rav Moshe thus encouraged esrog merchants to deal only with *esrogim* imported from Eretz Yisrael.

In *Vayelaket Yosef*, Rav Moshe praises the editor, Rav Yosef Schwartz, who was an esrog dealer and endeavored to distribute only *esrogim* originating from Eretz Yisrael. He writes, "Rav Yosef is an *ehrliche* dealer who deals with integrity and honesty," and adds that those who purchased his *esrogim* displayed great satisfaction with the quality of these *esrogim* as well as being pleased with the good prices and service provided.

All this was in addition to his duties as *dayan*, answering

the routine queries referred to him from within his own community. Occasionally, when villagers presented him with a *shailah*, his opinion differed from that of the *rav* or of other *talmidei chachomim*. In such cases, he would submit the query along with his own reply and that of his adversaries to one of the Torah journals of the time, with a request of scholars worldwide to submit their outlook on the matter.

27 The Öberlander Yidden's Advocate

The Diverse Lifestyles of the Öberland Versus the Unterland

The custom and lifestyle of the Jews in Hungary was diversified according to the region of their residence. Those living in the Öberland region were distinct in their manner of dress and custom from their brethren residing in the Unterland region. To grasp this concept and for the rationale behind this disparity, a short introduction would be in order.

Hungary prior to World War I was about three times bigger than it was after the war. Due to the treaty of Trianon, Hungary was forced to relinquish almost two-thirds of its territory to its neighboring countries: Serbia, Czechoslovakia, Romania and then later Austria. Accordingly, part of what is now Slovakia to the north and of Austria to the west was then all part of Hungary.

The Burgenland region to the west, as well as Pressburg and its environs to the north, which was on higher land, was called Öberland. The section of the country further to the

east, basically from the eastern banks of the Danube River and onwards, was known as Unterland.

In Unterland, which was close to Galicia and to the area of the Carpathian Mountains where the Baal Shem Tov and his students had left their mark, the Jewish residents were influenced by the ways of the Chassidim. The *tefillos* were commonly conducted in *nusach Sefard* with many other customs and rituals of the Chassidim being the norm for the Jews of these regions. Indeed a significant number of well-known Chassidic dynasties have their roots in this part of Hungary. In contrast, the Jews of the Oberland region typically davened in *nusach Ashkenaz*, and their *minhagim* were similar to those of the German communities.

Furthermore, there were many disparities in the lifestyle of the inhabitants of these two sections of the country. In the Unterland region, the spoken language among the Orthodox Jews was Yiddish and in most of these communities its members were distinctive in their mode of dress. It was rare to see someone in these areas with a shaven or even a trimmed beard and they took great care not to impair their appearance distinguishing themselves as Jews.

On the other hand, the lifestyle of the Jews of the Öberland section was influenced by the style of the Askenazic Jews, of Germany and nearby Austria. The spoken language in this region was German, or Yiddish with a German dialect, and the mode of dress of many of the Jewish residents there was similar to that of the general populace. It was common there to see people who, although outstanding in their piety and adherence to halachah, shaved or trimmed their beards.

Justifying the Öberlanders

In approximately 1905, a scholar residing in Warsaw, Poland, Rav Avraham Chaim Danziger-kron, came to the conclusion that shaving one's beard, even if not done with a razor, is an outright prohibition of the Torah's command. He embarked on a mission to make his view known to Torah Jewry worldwide. He took to the means of publicizing his judgment by submitting written discourses on the subject to a number of the popular Torah journals of the time. He expounded on the matter at length, bringing proof to his opinion and spelling out, according to his conclusion, the utmost severity of this prohibition. He wrote that a *shochet* who cuts his beard must be dismissed from his post; he is not worthy to serve in a religious profession.

Understandably, such an intense condemnation was an affront to the pious Oberlander *Yidden* who did shave or trim their beards, even though they clung faithfully to every aspect of the Torah's commandments. Rav Moshe stood up to their defense and compiled an extensive essay, clarifying that the Torah's prohibition of cutting one's beard is only when done so with a razor. He refuted Rav Danzinger-kron's proofs to the contrary and concluded that there is no reason whatsoever to dismiss a *shochet* who shaves within the realm of halachah.



A typical pious Öberlander Jew

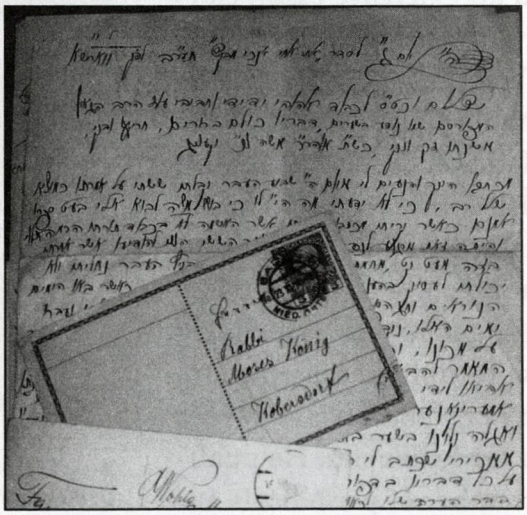
However this did not resolve the matter. Rav Danziger-kron made a counterattack, responding with a long discourse to uphold his opinion, and concluded that the prohibition is as severe as ever with no room for leniencies. He publicized his essays to a number of periodicals and

additionally published and disseminated a pamphlet to promote his opinion.

The give-and-take continued, with additional *rabbanim* and scholars submitting their outlook on the matter. With time, the periodicals discontinued printing commentary on the subject, but Rav Moshe upheld a private communication with him via the mail. They continued writing to one another with each of them providing evidence of his position. The ongoing correspondence evoked in each of them tremendous respect toward the other, since each one discerned through the letters the great command of the Torah his adversary possessed.

There is one very interesting letter in which Rav Moshe writes his personal outlook on the matter. He explains that in no way does he disregard the significance of refraining from allowing a blade of any sort to come in contact with one's beard. He goes on to recount an episode (mentioned in Chapter 5) from his youth:

"I would like to recall a time, when I sat in the *shiur* of my master my *rebbi* the g*aon* Mahari Assod [in Szerdahely]. One



Some of the letters to Rav Moshe from the rav in Warsaw

day before the start of the *shiur*, the Rebbe brought a kabbalistic *sefer* into the *beis midrash* and showed us therein a picture of how a beard would have to appear in order to fulfill all kabbalistic requirements. I recall the pang I felt at the time due to the fact that my beard didn't match those requirements, as it hadn't yet fully grown. Rav Yehudah Assod then commented that he envied the town's *dayan*, Rav Volf Bondi, whose beard fit the picture exactly."

Rav Moshe then states, that ever since he had taken great caution not to tamper with his beard in any manner. He explains that he only disputed the stringency of the issue, since there were many pious Jews in his region who do trim or shave their beards and he couldn't tolerate their denouncement.


ספר
זקן אברהם
וואַרשא
СЕФЕРЪ ЗКАНЪ АБРАМЪ
ВАРШАВА. 1913.

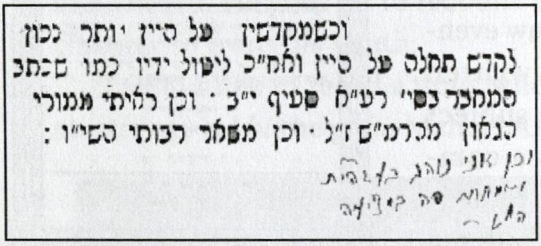
Sefer of the rav from Warsaw

The actual dispute didn't stop there. The *rav* from Warsaw eventually compiled all his written correspondence on the subject and published them as a composition *Z'kan Avraham*. Shortly thereafter, Rav Sinai Schiffer, a *rav* in Germany, authored a *sefer*, *Tiferes HaZakan*, counteracting all of his claims. He began the introduction to his *sefer* as follows: "Rav Moshe Konig the *dayan* of Kobersdorf has already taken the author of *Z'kan Avraham* to task, but given that Rav Moshe has left room for a more forceful refutation, I have undertaken to do so myself." Thus the controversy ended with each camp clinging to his own opinion and continuing to serve Hashem in the manner taught to him by the Torah leaders of his region.

As an aside, although most of Rav Moshe's conduct followed to the Askenazic custom — as was the norm in his region — there were specific rituals he chose to perform in a manner contrary to the accepted fashion of the Askenazic Jews.

One example of this is concerning the order of Kiddush and washing hands for *Hamotzi* on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Jews of German origin have the custom to wash for *Hamotzi* prior to the recital of Kiddush and then to partake of the challah immediately after Kiddush. This custom was enacted by the Rema (*Orach Chaim* 271:12), whose words are followed by Askenazic Jews to the letter. Rav Moshe, however, chose to conform to the custom put forth by the Beis Yosef — to recite Kiddush first and then wash hands — which is accepted by Chassidic and Sefardic Jews.

It seems that initially he had qualms on the matter, but his mind was put at ease when he found a *sefer* written by a student of the Maharam Schick. The author wrote that the Maharam Schick's custom in this matter was to wash after Kiddush. Rav Moshe added his own notes in the margin of that *sefer*, commenting that he was particularly pleased to see this testimony, since he had conducted himself in this manner and now sees that it was an acceptable practice.



Rav Moshe's comment on Maharam Schick's minhag

28 Fighting the Enemies of Torah

During the nineteenth century, Torah Jewry endured much harassment by those who considered themselves enlightened Jews. They sought to weaken the Torah's stronghold on the Jewish way of life and were the result of much devastation to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. After the reformists had wreaked much havoc on the Jewish communities of Germany and Mahren, they tried to gain a foothold in Hungary as well.

The Torah leaders of Hungary fought these sects with much power. Notably among them was the Chasam Sofer and his descendants, with their *talmidim* continuing in their footsteps and expending a great deal of effort to minimize the secularist influence and preserve Torah lifestyle.

Rav Moshe utilized his oratory skills and delivered many sermons encouraging the masses to remain true to the Torah way of life. He also publicized essays in the Jewish newspapers and in Torah journals disclaiming the practices of the so-called enlightened Jews and imploring the people to remain true to the ways of their forebears.

One subject he wrote extensively about was against the non-believers who sought to cast doubt upon the basic belief of *techiyas hameisim*. Unfortunately, their way of thinking had begun making inroads, and there were people who left

instructions to cremate their bodies. Rav Moshe publicized many articles, quoting numerous sources to prove the emptiness of their warped claims. He was even inclined to prohibit burying these people's remains in a Jewish cemetery, since by this request they were betraying a basic Jewish tenet.

Whenever the modernists sought to introduce changes concerning religious practice, Rav Moshe would always publicize long rebuttals refuting their way of thinking, interweaving his words with *pesukim* and quotes from the Midrash, thus encouraging his readers to adhere to the Torah-true way of life.

At one time a certain scholar publicized a discourse trying to prove that the accepted method in conducting a *bris milah*, with the *mohel* performing *metzitzah b'peh*, is not obligatory. He even went so far as to recount an episode when the Chasam Sofer allowed a sponge to be used instead. Rav Moshe was among the many devout *rabbanim* who spoke out vehemently against this suggestion, and he publicized numerous articles refuting these claims. He declared it totally erroneous to allude such a notion to the Chasam Sofer, explaining that if in a particular instance, in a case of illness, it was necessitated to be performed in such a manner, in no way does this indicate the general outlook of the Chasam Sofer.

He concludes, that in no doubt this entire notion stems from the Neologists, those trying to undermine the Torah's hold on the manner of performing the mitzvos, and thus to eventually do away with the commandments altogether. He clarified that he felt an obligation to speak out so vehemently on the subject, since a certain minister had recently proposed to declare it illegal to perform *metzitzah b'peh*. He laid the blame for this on the Neologists, who had been advocating the minister to propose such a law.

Indeed during that period, the modernists aspired — and

to a certain extent were successful — in sowing uncertainty on this subject. The Orthodox Rabbis all united against them on this issue, and in 1900, a proclamation, signed by some two hundred Orthodox community *rabbanim*, was publicized stressing the importance for the procedure to be done in its time-honored manner. The *rav* of Kobersdorf Rav Moshe Lipschutz was among its signatories, as were the *rabbanim* of the other Sheva Kehillos.

Overall Rav Moshe displayed his great consternation of the sad phenomenon of individuals with modern leanings who were holding rabbinic positions. This was a source of tremendous anguish for all pious Torah scholars, as it resulted in a great deal of confusion among the unlearned populace when they saw purported Rabbis acting in a manner contrary to the accepted tradition.

Rav Moshe once quoted from a certain *sefer* relating to the *yetzer hara*, whom Chazal dubbed "the old foolish king." The *sefer* writes, this old king is satisfied to recline on a three-legged throne. One leg is the insincere *chazzanim*, the cantors who adapt the tunes and characteristics of the non-Jews, thus preventing their congregants' prayers to ascend to the Heavens. The second leg is the corrupt *shochtim*, feeding the multitudes meat that wasn't slaughtered according to halachah. The third is the dishonest *mohelim*, who circumcise without appropriate vigilance, which results in those children not growing up in purity. Rav Moshe added sadly: in the present day and age, the foolish king can sit in comfort on a throne with four legs, with the fourth being unscrupulous Rabbis assisting the *yetzer hara* in his vocation, uprooting the Torah.

In general, Rav Moshe would beseech the public to observe the mitzvos with all stringencies and perform their good deeds with pure intentions. He would preach and write about the importance in enhancing the quality of the mitzvos, entreating

the people to serve Hashem in private as in public, out of fear of Hashem and not out of fear of one's fellow man.

He spoke against those Jews who closed their stores on Shabbos, not daring to open their business out of fear of repercussion, but in the privacy of their homes they did not live at all according to the spirit of Shabbos.

He would also take issue with those who'd spend large amounts of money on their *esrog* for Sukkos, since it is a mitzvah observed openly, whereas for mitzvos kept away from the public eye they wouldn't invest anything close to such sums and effort.

The endeavors of Rav Moshe and other *rabbanim* bore fruit. Very many Jews were encouraged by their warm rebuke to adhere to the Torah-true way. The *kehillah* of Kobersdorf kept up the traditional way of life from its inception till its decimation.

29 Extreme Humility

Even though Rav Moshe was revered by all his townspeople, and although he was fierce and powerful when it came up to standing up against the enemies of the Torah, Rav Moshe generally displayed extreme humility. From the way he portrays himself in his correspondence with other *rabbanim*, it is evident that he considered himself most simple.

He would rarely grant *semichah* to young scholars. In his humble opinion, no use would be derived from a *semichah* written by him. In the one instance when he did give a student *semichah*, he wrote that he is deviating from his usual practice only in this case, due to the tremendous erudition of this particular student.

Similarly, he wouldn't write approbations to *sefarim* for the same reason. On one occurrence when a certain author from Poland, who held Rav Moshe in great esteem, requested an approbation letter to a *sefer* he intended to print, Rav Moshe penned him a long letter. First he wrote, "After seeing in your manuscript your amazing knowledge in all areas of the Torah, who am I compared to your honor?" He then wrote, "Concerning your request that I write an approbation letter for your work, I don't see what gain you will have from it." Although he didn't send an approbation, the author printed this letter instead, as it shows Rav Moshe's approval of the *sefer*.

In the above letter, Rav Moshe noted, "One thing I must comment to you, concerning what I noticed on page 80 in your *sefer* where you quote something in my name, crowning me with the title '*gaon*.' You must either delete that word or add a disclaimer. I am no *gaon*, I am just a simple *lamdan*, and I don't want readers of your *sefer* to have a false opinion of me."

Often, after publishing a Torah thought in one of the Torah journals, someone would later try to refute his *chiddush*. Rav Moshe would have no qualms about retracting his original words, publicizing in a subsequent edition, "Rav So-and-so commented on my words... and asks if I agree with his remark. What can I say? I surely agree with him. Would I then be a fool to deny the truth...?"

Even in cases when no one commented on an insight of his, but he himself reconsidered his words and found that he was mistaken, he wouldn't just hope that no one noticed his oversight, but he himself would publicize in a later edition, announcing, "What I had previously written was a mistake." He then went on to express his surprise, "How is it that none of the scholarly readers of the journal brought this to my attention?"

This was his manner of conduct in everything; he always behaved with the utmost humility. He would never force his opinion on other scholars; instead, he always requested of them to inform him of their view on the matter, and would have no problem submitting himself to the opinion of others. Even in cases in which he saw fit to dispute others' opinion, he would do so with utmost humility, writing, "I know that I am not worthy of voicing a decision on this matter, but this is the way of the Torah, to big and to small one shall listen and everyone has the right to voice his opinion..."

30 Rav Moshe's Final Years

Following the turn of the century, the Jewish population of Kobersdorf began to dwindle considerably. At that time, the community numbered only around 250 individuals, less than half of what it had been half a century earlier. With this, Rav Moshe's responsibilities were less than in the past, and consequently his income also dwindled accordingly.

Kobersdorf as a Holiday Resort

The village experienced a mini-revival in the summer with the many vacationers that frequented the village. They came to enjoy the tranquil atmosphere and to



An old photo of vacationers in Kobersdorf

benefit from the clear air and the fresh mineral water of the springs in and around the village. This was known in the local language as "Sommerfrische."

Some eminent *talmidei chachomim* also would vacation in Kobersdorf and Rav Moshe took pleasure in meeting them and discussing Torah topics with them. One summer, sometime after the turn of the century, the village merited a visit from the venerated Satmar Rebbe. This was actually long before he ascended to the position of *rav* of Satmar, then being only a young *rav*. However his greatness was apparent already at this stage and the locals were delighted to have him in their midst. They drank from his wellsprings of wisdom, and all the villagers, young and old, flocked to his lodgings to bask in his light and to receive his blessing.

It seems that the Rebbe was somewhat familiar with Rav Moshe Konig. Among those who came to him for a blessing was Rav Moshe's youngest daughter, who went along with the flow of people flocking to his abode. It must have been quite a pitiful sight; a young girl entering the Rebbe's abode, barefoot. This was common practice among the poor villagers — in order to prevent wear and tear on their shoes, they simply didn't wear them whenever it wasn't absolutely necessary. When she came into the Rebbe's room and requested a *berachah*, the Rebbe received her amenably and he demonstrated his esteem for her father, remarking, "*Die host doch a groiser tatte* — You have a great father," indicating that she has an illustrious father who is himself worthy of bestowing his blessing.



The Satmar Rav as a young rav

Indeed Rav Moshe had by that time gained the respect of many of the country's *rabbanim* and Torah scholars who recognized his superior virtues. However, as much as he would have liked, he no longer had the strength to apply himself wholly for the sake of the community as he had done previously. While over the course of his lifetime he had prevailed even while suffering various ailments and hardships, by now, in his later years,his body was weakened significantly.

His Strength Begins to Wane

Though he persisted in his learning and continued writing and disseminating his *chiddushim*, he didn't have the strength to toil in his study and teaching as before. He bemoaned this fact in a letter to an acquaintance: "Due to my many sins, my body has weakened and I don't have the strength to toil in Torah as in my younger years."



His handwritten will

In 1909, when he was sixty-five years old, he wrote his will, instructing his offspring as to how to treat his body after his death. He wrote the will in Yiddish, the spoken language, in order for it to be clearly understood by his wife and daughters.

Therein, he warned his descendants severely against eulogizing him. Additionally he requested that no words of praise be inscribed on his tombstone, and even disallowed respectable titles to precede his name. He requested that only the following appear on his *matzeivah*: "Here lies Moshe the son of Perel, known to all as Moshe Konig," and the only detail he permitted to be added was that he suffered pain and anguish during his lifetime.

He then went on to request of his offspring not to follow his body during the funeral, explaining that if the children



Rav Moshe surrounded by family members.
Right to left: Yaakov Dov with his daughter; Zissel Ehrenthal with her son Yaakov; Krendel with her son Binyamin Zev; and Krasl. Apparently this photo was taken in Vienna where he lived toward the end of his life when he needed to be in proximity to medical facilities

don't follow the *aron*, it is a great *segulah* for the *niftar*. He also requested that the *chevrah kaddisha* members immerse themselves in a mikveh before tending to his body.

Some two-and-a-half years later he attached to the above a fifth request, stating that he wanted to be buried in the section of the cemetery where stillborn babies and young children were buried. This was near the edge of the cemetery.

As he grew older, he became extremely weak and required medical care which was unavailable in Kobersdorf. The family moved to Vienna to be in proximity to the famous medical facilities situated there. With the understanding that the stay in Vienna was not going to be a short one, they rented out their house in Kobersdorf to one of the local families.

With time, Rav Moshe was admitted to the hospital in Vienna, and remained there until he passed away on 14 Adar 1914. Among much sorrow his holy soul returned to its Creator and his body was taken back to Kobersdorf to be buried there, near the edge of the cemetery — in accordance with his will — near the children. Also on his tombstone, there was no mention made of any accolades aside for the fact that he endured hardship and privation. It was written there that this was done in accordance with his instructions.



Rav Moshe's kever

After Rav Moshe's passing, his widow, Perel, returned to their house in Kobersdorf. She resided there with her three unmarried daughters, Krasl, Sarah and Esther.

To earn a living, she continued with her work as a needle woman, sewing *kittel*s and shirts for men. As the community

dwindled, so did the orders she received and there were times when she was very short of money. In order to supplement her income, she took in boarders during the summer months, so with this she had the means to make it through the winter.

She carried on with her life as before, resuming her kind deeds and continuing to volunteer for the benefit of her fellow villagers, which included serving on the *chevrah kaddisha*, and availing herself to visit the sick and apply assistance to women in need.

31 World War I and Its Aftermath

Just a few months later, Europe was thrown into turmoil with the outbreak of the Great War. Hungarian Jewry was greatly affected by the events of these years. Many able-bodied men were drafted into the Hungarian armed forces and sent to the front, and many regrettably did not return after the war. The poverty during this period was rampant and claimed many victims as well, particularly among the young and the elderly who succumbed to hunger and disease.

As much as the Jews of Hungary suffered during this time, the fare of Galician Jewry was far worse. They underwent horrific persecution at the hands of the Russians who had conquered their country. Tens of thousands of homeless, penniless Jews had to flee their country. A large number of these escapees arrived in Vienna.

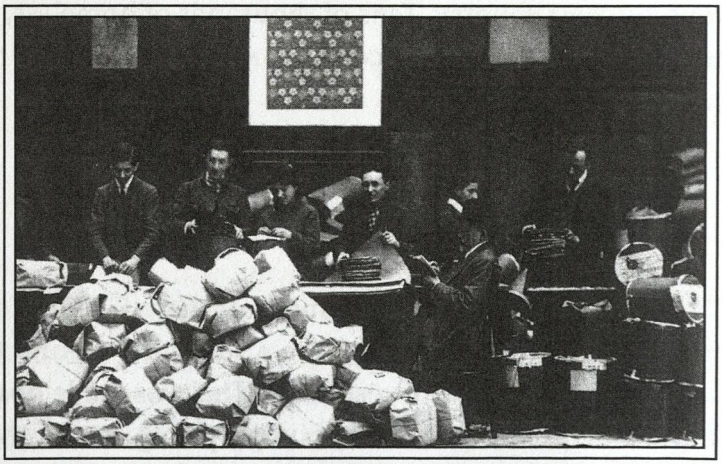
Vienna Becomes a Haven

Even after the war ended, many of these Galician expatriates chose to stay there and make Vienna their permanent place of residence. This was made possible with the collapse of the Austro-Hungary Empire and the fall of the ruling noblemen of the House of Habsburg, as all

restrictions for the Jewish residency were lifted. Since many of these refugees were destitute, having left behind all their worldly belongings, the community of Vienna established a number of welfare programs to take care of these families.

The influx of so many refugees greatly impacted the whole region. The thousands of pious Galician Jews who chose Vienna for their permanent dwelling caused a drastic transformation in the makeup of Jewish life there. Among these emigrants were several world-famous *talmidei chachomim*, prominent among them was the *gaon* Rav Yosef Engel of Cracow who remained in Vienna until his passing in 1920. He was buried in the local cemetery. Some Chassidic masters also chose to settle there. Most well-known of these are the Rebbes of Ruzhin, those of Chortkov and Boyan, who settled there permanently and were subsequently buried there.

With the culmination of the war, the constituent of Hungary in general underwent drastic changes. Hungary, which found itself in the losing faction, along with Austria, Germany and Turkey, was forced by the winning nations to concede large parts of its territory to its neighboring countries, in what

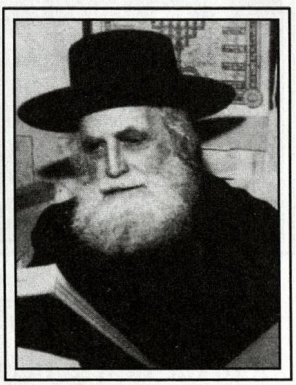


Preparation of packages of matzah for the poor of Vienna, 1921

was known as the Treaty of Trianon. The country was thus reduced in size to a third of what it had been previously. In the north, most of its sovereign was relinquished to neighboring Czechoslovakia, and the east and the south to Romania and Serbia. From 1921 and onwards, Kobersdorf with the rest of the Burgenland region became part of Austria.

The Effects of War on the Torah Centers

With the installation of these new borders, travel and communication from one section of the country to the other was somewhat diminished, and each section was required to adopt the spoken language of its sovereign country. Nevertheless, even though the residents' homes and the Torah centers were often on the opposite sides of the border, the sound of Torah continued to reverberate in the large yeshivahs. No border whatsoever could squelch the thirst of the pious *bachurim* coming to drink from the wellsprings of Torah from the leaders of the generation, and no physical barrier could deter these boys from reaching the yeshivah wherein they felt they could attain their desired spiritual heights.



Rav Akiva Sofer

For example, despite the fact that the yeshivah in Pressburg, which was then headed by Rav Akiva Sofer, was now in Czechoslovakian territory, it still continued to attract hundreds of students from far and wide and its student body grew in leaps and bounds. It continued as before to produce leading scholars with many going on to head Jewish communities the

world over. Rav Akiva was recognized as one of the foremost Torah leaders of the region during this period.

In addition to Pressburg, there were other famous yeshivahs in Slovakia which attracted students from far and wide. One which was well known was the yeshivah in Nitra, which in the interwar period, following the passing of Rav Avraham Aharon Katz, son of Rav Moshe Katz and grandson of Rav Menachem Katz-Prostitz, was headed by Rav Shmuel Dovid Ungar. He was assisted in running the yeshivah by his son-in-law Rav Michoel Dov Weissmandl, who was later famous for his heroic efforts during the war on behalf of European Jewry.

There was also a popular yeshivah in the town of Shuran (Nagy-Surany) which attracted hundreds of students from many different locales. This yeshivah was headed by Rav Meir Leib Frei who gained renown as one of the greatest disseminators of Torah of his time. These are only a few examples, as the country was home to many reputable yeshivahs. Thousands of pious and learned individuals developed in these yeshivahs, and the Torah continued on through them to the next generation.



Rav of Shuran surrounded by students

Additionally there were the famous Chassidic yeshivahs which were situated in the eastern part of the country, chiefly which was then in the section under Romanian sovereign. Some of the better known ones are those of Satmar, led by Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, as well as the one in Sighet and the Vizhnitzer yeshivah which was established in Groswardein. (This is only a fraction of the list; in pre-war Hungary, there were scores of noteworthy yeshivahs from wherein the sound of Torah went

forth. They have been brilliantly chronicled in R' Avraham Fuchs' *HaYeshivot B'Hungariyah*, Jerusalem 1979.)

These famous yeshivahs attracted students from all parts of the country, Oberland as well as Unterland, and also from the neighboring countries, Galicia and Romania. *Bachurim* from all streams of European Jewry would come to hear Torah from these *rabbanim* who gained fame as giants in Torah, regardless of whether their culture was similar to the yeshivah's culture. Consequently the yeshivahs comprised a mix of students from various backgrounds and of diverse cultures, and *bachurim* often picked up new customs and ideas from their friends and their *rabbeim*.

To some extent, this resulted in a change to the structure of some of the communities. Certain customs and rituals which had originally been unique to one region were later taken on in other parts of the country. This came about via the *bachurim* who had picked up these practices in yeshivah and later introduced them to their home community.

The Spread of Chassidus

The spread of Chassidus in Hungary was another effect of this fact. It was common for young men who had been influenced to Chassidic lifestyle to later introduce these standards in the community where they settled. At times this would even be cause for a split in the community.

Throughout the history of European Jewry, all the Torah-true residents of the towns and villages were united in one single community. The idea of segregation was only introduced so that the pious and the righteous could isolate themselves from those whose ways did not conform to the Torah's values. In recent years however, a number of communities saw splits

within the religious camp as well. This was a result of diverse cultures being introduced, which made it difficult for two sides to coexist in harmony with each other.

This conclusion was reached after consulting with the Torah leaders of the generation. Prominent among these was the eminent Rav Shimon Grinfeld of Senmihaly, who was considered a leading halachic authority in pre-war Hungary, along with Rav Yeshayah Zilberstein of Weitzen and Rav Mordechai Leib Winkler of Mád. They were periodically approached for guidance in cases of disagreement within communities, and the accepted consensus was usually as mentioned, to coexist peacefully in two separate communities. (Printed responsa on this issue can be found in *Shu"t Maharshag* of Rav Grinfeld, Vol. 5.)

For example in Szerdahely, in the period before the war, there existed two separate Orthodox communities. The first was led by Rav Hillel Weinberger who was a son of the town's previous *rav*, Rav Shmuel. His students and constituents strictly clung to the Ashkenazic ritual and customs.

However though there were many in the community who had been acquainted with him from his childhood and had grown up together with him, there were some who found it difficult to be subservient to his authority. Adding to these were the young men who had tasted the way of Chassidus and felt the *rav*'s way in serving Hashem to be lacking in fervor and religious zeal. Thus quite a number of the townspeople disconnected themselves from the central community and established a community of their own. They appointed Rav Anschel Katz, who had until then served the townspeople in the capacity of *dayan*, to become their *rav*. In his yeshivah the *tefillos* were held in *nusach Sefard* and followed Chassidic customs.

It must be noted though, that although each of these

communities performed their davening and learning separately, with each in a shul and a yeshivah of their own, nevertheless as regards to the other community matters and amenities, the two were united. Both *rabbanim* would meet from time to time to take care of community affairs. They related to each other with due respect and each took care to uphold the honor of his contemporary.

Even the small community of Nagy-Megyer was affected by such changes. All through the years of its existence, there was one single community in town which was strictly observant. However, in its later years preceding World War II, some younger members of the community separated themselves from the community and conducted their services in the classrooms of the Talmud Torah. They didn't have a *rav* of



The two rabbanim of Szerdahely:
Rav Anschel Katz (c.) and Rav Hillel Weinberger,
surrounded by their students

their own, but they were directed by a young man named R' Moshe Buxbaum. Having been a follower of Rav Aharon Roth in Satmar, where he had led his followers before emigrating to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Aharon had attracted many young men who were enamored by his fiery devotion to the service of Hashem. R' Moshe Buxbaum, his student who settled in Nagy-Megyer, eagerly promoted his Rebbe's ways among the local youth.

The Situation in the Sheva Kehillos

In the western part of the country, in the vicinity of the Sheva Kehillos, which was now under the jurisdiction of Austria, the Jewish communities also underwent visible transformation during this period. From the seventeenth century until recent times, Jews were only allowed to reside in Vienna under certain restrictions. A heavy tax was levied on any Jew who settled there, and consequently, it was mainly the affluent and well-connected Jews who had the ability to reside



A group of students from the Mattersdorf yeshivah

there. Religious life in Vienna prior to World War I didn't do particularly well; the Enlightenment was prevalent there.

With Jewish life in Vienna flourishing, a significant number of inhabitants of the area's smaller villages opted for an urban lifestyle and relocated to Vienna. Consequently, the majority of the Sheva Kehillos began to experience rapid decline. Mattersdorf and Tzehlem were the only communities that continued to thrive as before, due to the outstanding institutions in these villages. Both those towns housed prestigious yeshivahs, and students from far and wide attended the yeshivahs.

Fighting outside Influences

The existence of all these large Torah centers, as well as the smaller yeshivahs which existed in many towns and villages across the country, were a vital element in upholding Yiddishkeit in Eastern Europe. They served as a fortification to safeguard Jewish youth from the various detrimental winds which were blowing across Eastern Europe during that period.

At this time there were many outside influences with which Hungarian Jewry, similar to the rest of their Eastern Europian brethren, had to contend. Numerous sects had sprouted, conforming to new-fangled ideas, such as socialism and Zionism, and countless young people were attracted to these vanities.

Additionally, during that period, sports had become a major focus in the national newspapers in Hungary. Soccer had been introduced to the country and the youngsters followed the games with great fervor. The papers were full of reports and updates on the games and recognition of the accomplishments of the players. These publications were very appealing to the religious youth, but could have a negative influence on them.

The communities' *rabbanim* had to contend with these issues, among others, which were having a detrimental impact on the Jewish youth. *Roshei yeshivah*s had to take great care to secure their institutions from all outside influences. Indeed in most instances, a student who was caught occupying himself with these notions was immediately expelled from the yeshivah. Thus the Rabbis protected their students and constituents, shielding them from these unfavorable influences, and working to instill in them Torah and *yiras Shamayim*.

Those boys who spent their time within the yeshivah environment were protected, on a whole. On the other hand, the youth of the smaller villages, those who for some reason didn't leave to learn out of town, didn't have the essential protection required to safeguard them from these problems. Thus it was unfortunately a common occurrence for such boys to be swayed in the wrong direction.

The *rabbanim* and leaders of the Jewish communities of the country allowed themselves no respite on the issues of concern to the continuity of the Jewish nation. In addition to applying themselves fully for the benefit of their constituents, they would convene from time to time with their contemporaries to explore avenues available for the preservation of authentic Yiddishkeit.

32 Kobersdorf during the Interwar Period

With the outbreak of the war, the residents of Kobersdorf suffered, just as the rest of the Hungarian communities did. Many of the able-bodied males of the village were drafted to the Austrian army and those remaining suffered from the overall trying situation which prevailed during that period. The *rav* of the village at the time, Rav Moshe Lipschutz, tried his utmost to support his constituents and come to their assistance during this trying period.



Rav Moshe Lipschutz

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Hungarian Fascists tried to hold on to the Hungarian dominion, and they sowed terror among the populace whom they considered disloyal to the Hungarian nationality. Of course, those who suffered the most were the Jews, who were considered to be unfaithful to the national cause. Tragically a number of Hungarian Jews lost their lives to these hoodlums and many Jewish homes and shops were ransacked during this period.

These ruthless thugs specifically targeted the Jews of the Burgenland district. The Fascists claimed that the Jews were

displaying treachery to the Hungarian sovereign, as their spoken language was German. In Kobersdorf, a gang of these ruffians entered the village and forced Mr. Tachauer, a wealthy member of the Jewish community, out of his large home. The vacant home became their headquarters. They roamed the streets and sowed terror among the villagers; the *rav*'s family was also victim to their assaults. His eighteen-year-old son, Herschel, a student in the Sopron yeshivah, was attacked while visiting the village. He was beaten so badly that he had to spend over two weeks recovering in the hospital.

This chaos came to an end only with the agreement signed in France, the Treaty of Trianon, between the rulers of the countries, which conceded the area to Austrian sovereignty. Those who suffered particular damage during the period of terror were granted reparation, and the *rav* as well as Mr. Tachauer received a large sum of compensation funds.



Pinkas of chevrah kaddisha, 1925

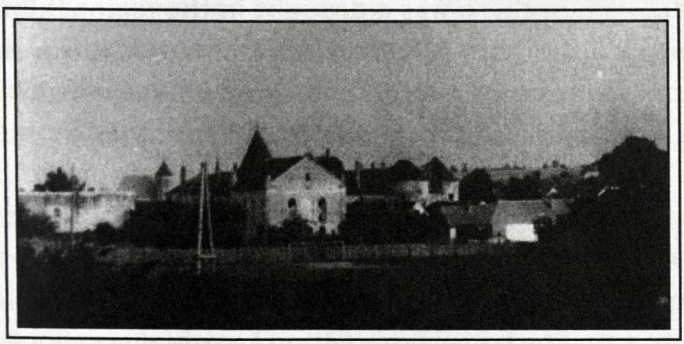
Nevertheless, before the treaty was signed, a large number of families escaped the harassment and left the district for safer zones. Thus in the years subsequent to the war, the Jewish population of Kobersdorf, similar to the rest of the Sheva Kehillos dwindled considerably. A number of community members moved to Vienna. In general the character of the community underwent noticeable change as the population dwindled, yet the shul as well as the community from within, continued to function in accordance to Jewish custom, with no modifications whatsoever. Throughout all it

travails, the community maintained its traditional ambiance and clung to its religious values in compliance with all the time-honored customs. Even the *shamash* maintained his daily rounds with his hammer to rouse the villagers to davening, as in days of yore.

The *rav* of the village, Rav Moshe Lipschutz, held full jurisdiction over community matters, and the entire congregation continued to accord him due respect. He tried his utmost to take care of the religious needs of his constituents and to encourage them in upholding the laws of the Torah in the time-old manner.

In the same manner, all the Sheva Kehillos of the region remained true to the Torah way and free of the secularists' and assimilationists' influence. All members of the community — including the youth, regardless of their level of observance — accorded due respect to the *rav* and to Yiddishkeit in general.

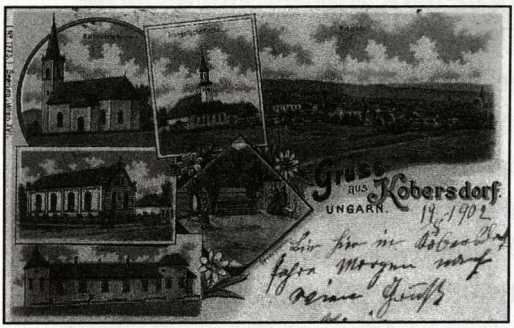
Though many of the villagers were unlearned, they were extremely pious and devout in their adherence to the mitzvos. The majority worked very hard for a living, either as cattle merchants or as peddlers and often spent the whole week on the road, only coming home for Shabbos. Yet they held onto



A later photo from the rear of the Kobersdorf shul. The Esterhazy castle is across from the shul.

their Jewish identity with pride and distinction, making no attempt to assimilate with their non-Jewish neighbors.

The Jews had a cordial relationship with the village's general population; anti-Semitism generally was very uncommon. A traveler who visited the Jewish communities of the region made note of these pleasant circumstances. In his diary, he noted that unlike the vandalism to Jewish places of worship he had noticed in Vienna, in Kobersdorf there was not a single shattered window in the shul. He attributed this phenomenon to the manner in which the local Jews adhered to the way of the Torah; with a bold, unapologetic attitude, which in turn garnered the respect of the non-Jewish population.



A postcard from Kobersdorf 1902. The shul is included in sites of importance to the general public.

Indeed, the local non-Jews had their unique interpretations of the Jewish rituals. For example, when the month of Elul came and the sound of the shofar was heard in the village, the non-Jews would comment, "Oh, the Jews are welcoming the autumn." When there was a drought in the region, after the Catholic priests performed their ceremonies in unsuccessful attempts to induce the rainfall, they would respectably turn to the local Jews and ask them to pray for rain.

The Village Youths' Education

However, the atmosphere in general wasn't at all as before. This was primarily due to the departure of the influencial members of the community, as well as the lack of structured education for the village youth. The school still existed, but very few children studied there, not enough to be divided into separate grades. Residents who had the option and the means to do so would send their children to study in Vienna. The pious members of the community sent their sons to learn in the yeshivahs in the vicinity, some to nearby Tzehlem and others to Sopron in Hungary. There were occasional *bachurim* who even traveled further.

Kobersdorf had its fair share of youth who were not within a structured society and engaged themselves in futile pursuits. Consequently, a group of Kobersdorf's village boys formed a Jewish soccer league. One of these boys, Luria, was known for his skill and expertise in the game. The *rav*, who tried hard to instill his constituents with worthwhile and correct values, spoke to this youth and made him undertake not to play together with non-Jews, thus he would spare himself the temptation to play on Shabbos. The boy heeded the *rav*'s bidding, although this angered the local non-Jews. They even once tried to physically harm Luria; however, it didn't deter him from heeding the *rav*'s ruling.



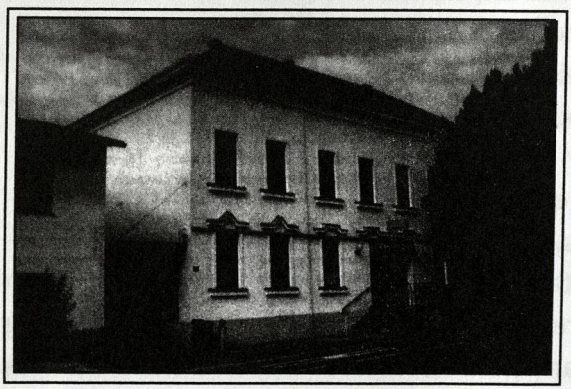
Kobersdorf Jewish soccer team. Luria is third from left in the back row.

In the late 1920s, Mr. Klein, a pious member of the community, decided to take action for the benefit of the education of the village children. First he established a library, stocking it only with books and literature fit for a Jewish child. He was

also vigilant regarding the teachers in the Jewish school and made sure the children wouldn't be exposed to individuals who may indoctrinate them with ideas loath to Jewish values. He himself taught the Judaic studies, and on Shabbos afternoons he would discuss topics in the weekly *parashah* with the children.

I was a student in the Kobersdorf school at that time, and I recall a personal experience I had with him. This was following 1933 when the Nazi party rose to power in Germany. Similarly in Austria there were elements within the population who agreed with the Nazi dogma. The school employed a non-Jewish teacher to teach general studies, and when he took out his handkerchief, I noticed that it was embroidered the Nazi symbol. After the lesson I approached Mr. Klein to tell him about this, and he immediately fired the teacher.

Around that time, a very unsettling incident occurred which affected almost everyone in the village. The local bank, which, as mentioned, had been established by a respectable leader of the Jewish community, Mr. Moshe Riegler, and was run in collaboration with his cousin, Mr. Luria. With the passage of time the bank widened its clientele and began servicing residents of other villages in the vicinity. After Mr. Riegler's death in 1919, his son Shmuel took his place managing the bank, and eventually he took in a third partner.



The bank (sparkasse) in Kobersdorf

At one point, this partner, hoping to increase the bank's capital, began dabbling in stocks and currencies, buying and selling on the American and Western European stock markets. Things were stable for some time, but with the Wall Street crash in 1929, the bank of Kobersdorf went the way of many of the American banks and lost a considerable amount of its capital. The partners tried to keep it going for a few years but eventually they conceded with the reality and declared bankruptcy.

Since almost everyone in the village had their money deposited in the bank, they were all affected by this and much bitterness was resulted from this affair. My family, too, was affected. My Aunt Sarah used to make frequent visits to the bank to deposit her and my grandmother's hard-earned money, yet it all vanished with the bank's closure. The families associated with the ownership of the bank left Kobersdorf out of humiliation.

With time membership in the community continued to decrease and by 1934, there were only 170 Jews still living in Kobersdorf. That year, the *rav*, Rav Moshe Lipschutz, relinquished most of his duties in the Rabbinate to his son-in-law Rav Shimon Goldberger, who from then on, was considered the official *rav*. He had studied in the yeshivah of Rav Mordechai Leib Winkler in Mád, and was indoctrinated accordingly true to the Torah values, clinging devoutly to tradition. Like his predecessors, he worked in tandem with the other *rabbanim of* the Sheva Kehillos in matters pertaining to Yiddishkeit. There actually exists a proclamation from 1938, requesting assistance for the *shemittah* observers of Eretz Yisrael, on which he is undersigned together with the rest of the *rabbanim* of the region.

During the summer every year, the village experienced a slight revival. Many visitors would come to vacation there and

benefit from the clear air and the fresh mineral water of the springs in and around the village. Among the vacationers were some very well-to-do individuals, and the holiday season was a source of income for many of the villagers. Locals supplied for the needs of these vacationers, provided lodging and transport, amid other services. There was even a Jewish-owned hotel and restaurant for the affluent visitors, established by a gentleman named Gerstl.



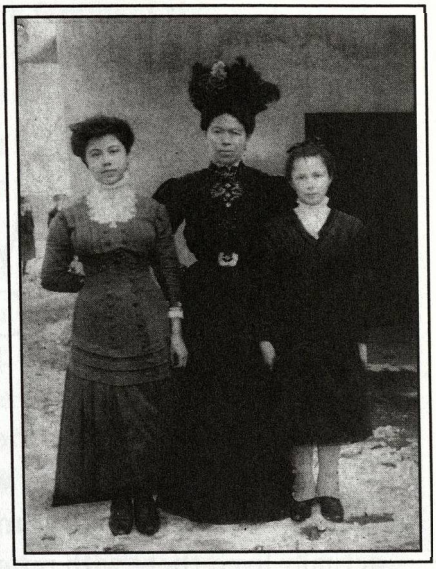
Guesthouse in Kobersdorf under Jewish ownership

Perel, Rav Moshe's Widow

Perel Konig, Rav Moshe's widow, and her unmarried daughters had, as mentioned, resettled in Kobersdorf following the Rav Moshe's passing. The villagers knew her as a *tzaddeikes* and recognized her for all her noble deeds. Visitors to the village also knew to call upon her when requiring her assistance. It was common for people to come to the village to visit the burial sites of family members in the local cemetery. These visitors would often call upon Perel for assistance in finding their relative's *kever* and she would accompany them to the cemetery.

Perel's oldest unmarried daughter, Krasl, known to the family in her Hungarian name Karoline, was by now well into her twenties. She left her mother's home in the period following the war and went to live in Vienna. Her mother had taught her the craft of needlework and she excelled in this vocation. In Vienna she opened a little shop and worked as an official

seamstress, earning a respectable living. She would spend her summers in Kobersdorf with her mother and two sisters, Sarah and Esther. While visiting, she was often commissioned by the villagers to sew dresses for them — the wife of the village burger-meister (mayor) was one of her clients. This stopped sometime in the late 1930s. The mayor's wife told Karoline that her son had joined the Nazi youth-movement, which prohibited employing Jews, so she had to stop giving her work.



Perel, Rav Moshe's second wife, with their two youngest daughters, Sarah and Esther

33 My Childhood

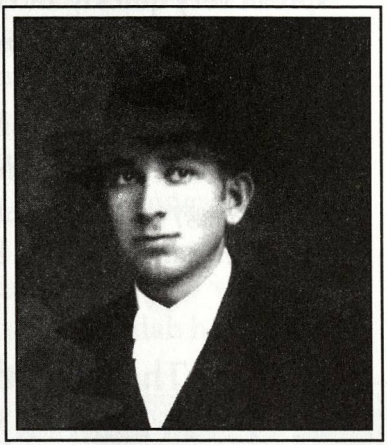
I have very pleasant memories of the time I spent in Kobersdorf. Although I wasn't born or raised there I would visit often and spent much time there. At one point, I actually lived there with my grandmother for about six months and studied in the local school.

My Parents' Marriage

My grandmother, Perel, and her daughters maintained a connection with their relatives in Nagy-Megyer, including the family of a wealthy uncle who had lived there. Often during the summer, the girls would vacation in Nagy-Megyer and stay with these relatives. On one such visit, a *shidduch* was suggested for Esther (my mother) with a local boy, Michoel Fischer (my father). His father, Dovid, was a pious member of the Nagy-Megyer community, and had moved there recently from nearby Dunajka-Streda (Szerdahely), where his family resided. Michoel was a student in the Nitra yeshivah.

Upon hearing this suggestion the family discussed the *shidduch* idea and accepted the proposal which led to their engagement, and marriage in 1924. Since my grandmother was

a widow and not very well-off, the family of this rich uncle undertook to assist with the wedding expenses and supplied the dowry. Sarah chose not to get married in order to stay with her elderly mother and assist her in running her home.



Michoel Fischer at his marriage

After their marriage, my parents settled in Nagy-Megyer. My father worked in a menswear retail shop and also ran a market stall, while my mother supplemented their income by teaching needlework in the local Jewish school. I, their oldest child, was born in the summer of 1926. Eighteen months later my brother Moshe Dovid was born, he was named Moshe after his illustrious grandfather Rav Moshe Konig and Dovid after my father's father.

At that time the Jewish population numbered about five hundred individuals, with Rav Shmuel Shatin leading the community as he had been appointed for the position to take the place of his father-in-law, the previous *rav*. The community held on firmly to its dedication to Yiddishkeit through all the years of its existence.

There were two grades in the Talmud Torah, one for the younger children and one for older ones, and the community employed two *melamdim* to teach these classes. The *kehillah* also maintained a basic school where general studies were taught; two teachers were employed to teach there.

There isn't much I remember from that period, as we moved away from Nagy-Megyer when I was only four years old. I do recall when a fire broke out in the village. We were all awakened in the middle of the night and the entire neighborhood

congregated outside while the firemen worked to extinguish the blaze. Since the roofs were made out of straw the fire spread very quickly and unfortunately about half of the village houses burnt down. *Baruch Hashem*, our house wasn't one of them.

In 1930, my family moved to Rimaszombat (Rimavska-Sobota in Slovakian), which was about a four-hour drive from Nagy-Megyer. My father had been offered a better job there, and his financial status began to improve.

The Structure of Rimaszombat

The Jewish community of Rimaszombat was not a very old one. Jews only received official permission to reside in the town beginning in 1840, and the community was established in the 1850s. In 1886 the town's large shul was built.

The town was built with attractive one-story detached houses with pretty gardens in the front. The homes were made of brick and had tiled roofs, and were heated either by coal or with firewood. Some of the residents owned their houses while others rented, we rented our house as my father wasn't particularly well-off. Transport consisted mainly of horse-and-buggy, though in the winter people got around in sleighs and toboggans, or on skates. There were some taxis but very few people owned cars; trains were used for intercity travel.

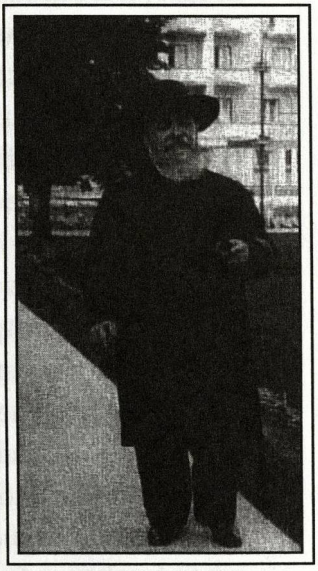


Shul in Rimaszombat

When traveling along the route of the Danube River, people often went by boat.

At the time my family moved to town, around 250 Jewish families, close to a thousand individuals, resided there. Many of the town's Jews held places of prominence among the general public. There were some doctors, lawyers, a chemist and other businesses under Jewish ownership, and one of the local Jews even served as a member of the Austro-Hungarian government.

The community *rav* was Rav Elazar Singer, who was born locally in 1888, as his father Rav Shlomo Yehudah had served there as *rav* before him. He was a student of the Pressburg yeshivah. Personally he held on to the appropriate Orthodox standards, but unfortunately many in the community aligned themselves with the Neologists. Individuals belonging to all streams of Judaism attended the same shul and were all united in one single community. Thus the community of Rimaszombat was considered "status quo."



Rav Elazar Singer

The *rav* was a great *talmid chachom* and a gifted orator. He was highly regarded by all segments of the population. Not only the local townspeople, but also the Jews residing in the smaller villages in the district were under his jurisdiction, and he was respected by all for his erudition and his keen insight. Even the community members who had distanced themselves from the Torah way of life revered him and would frequently approach him for his advice on diverse matters.

The town maintained a small Talmud Torah which was

attended by some of the older boys of the town. However the majority of the town's children attended the non-Jewish school. This is where my brother and I studied. Besides for Sunday, which was our day off, we had to go to school every day of the week, even on Shabbos. The town's *rav* made a special arrangement with the school administration to release the Jewish children from any act which would be a desecration of Shabbos. Thus all we had to do was sit and listen to the lessons and were spared from taking part in all writing exercises. Additionally we were granted special permission to leave our books in the school before Shabbos to prevent us from having to carry on Shabbos.

On Sundays when there was no school we were given lessons on Jewish subjects, as well as twice during the week after school. We were taught Chumash and the translation of the daily *tefillos*. The *rav* invested much effort to ensure that the children should be educated in halachah, and would sometimes come to the non-Jewish school to give lessons to the Jewish children.

The community employed a *frum shochet*; his name was Shmuel Teitelbaum, and he also served as the *chazzan* of the *kehillah*. My mother would sometimes send me and my brother to him with a chicken. I recall that we couldn't bear to watch the actual *shechitah*, so we would dash out of the room as soon as the *shochet* took the chicken from my hands, only returning later after he finished his job.

All in all, life during that period was relatively tranquil. My father had successfully established his tailor shop and earned a decent living. My mother assisted him in the shop. From time to time we had market day, when the farmers from the region would come sell their wares. We were often harassed at these times by gypsy caravans who would come into town and steal items from the vendors. They could even pilfer live

poultry and hide them under their cloaks. My father would take care to keep his store closed when the gypsys were in town in order not to suffer from their thievery.

Our Summers in Kobersdorf

For vacation we used to travel to Kobersdorf and stay with my grandmother. Additionally when I was twelve years old my mother fell ill, so my brother and I went to my grandmother in Kobersdorf and attended school there. To get to Kobersdorf, we would take the train from Czechoslovakia to Vienna, usually staying in Vienna for a few days. From there, we took a taxi to Kobersdorf.

Upon arriving to my grandmother's home, she would be eagerly waiting for us with some special delicacy. She usually served us home-baked bread smeared with schmaltz and goose liver. Even though she regularly rented out rooms to paying guests, while we visited, she always kept the house empty.

I have very fond memories of these visits and I gained tremendously from spending time with my grandmother. She was a great *tzaddekes* and fiercely guarded the memory of her righteous husband. Many shelves of *sefarim* lined the walls of the room in which he sat and learned, and the room remained untouched after his passing.

I recall once going up into the attic and finding a large bundle of letters in envelopes with stamps from many different locales. I thought it would make a good stamp collection, but when I mentioned it to my grandmother, she scolded me for tampering, explaining that those were from the many letters, *shailos* and *divrei Torah* sent to my grandfather from *rabbanim* all over the country.

While staying with her, we used to help her with household

chores, preparing the food and doing the laundry — unlike nowadays, it was not so simple. It meant lugging the clothes all the way to the river that ran through the village and scrubbing them vigorously on the washing board with a brush and soap. The water for washing dishes and for house-cleaning was drawn from a well which we had in our garden and was shared by a few neighbors.

In the park at the center of the town there was a well with naturally carbonated mineral water. We'd draw our drinking water from this well. We used to go every day to fill up our earthenware jugs. On Fridays, we made two trips to collect enough water for Shabbos. The children's jugs were smaller than the grown-ups so that they would be able to carry the full jugs home.

My grandmother worked hard and prepared all of her food by herself. She kept about four geese in the cellar of her house, and it was my Aunt Sarah's job to go down and feed them boiled corn to fatten them. Every now and then, she would have one of them *shechted*, and each goose provided enough *schmaltz* to last over a few months with which she would make many delicacies. The *schmaltz* was stored in a special container in a cool pantry.

She had two plum trees and raspberry bushes in her garden and she'd make her own preserves and raspberry syrup, which was diluted with water for drinking. Making this syrup was a time-consuming procedure. She would take a large jar and put a layer of fresh raspberries at the base of the jar, then coat those with a layer of sugar and on top of that another layer of raspberries and so on until the jar was full. She left it like this for a few weeks and then would boil it until it developed into thick syrup which was then sieved through a cloth. This syrup would last us the whole winter.

With the plums that we picked, she'd cook make large

quantities of jam, which was called *puvidel.* We had to stir the ingredients for many hours to achieve the desired consistency.

Once a month the village had its market day and traders would come from all over to sell their merchandise. I would anticipate accompanying my grandmother to the market to help her find bargains. The traders didn't fix their prices but would try to eke out as much as possible from the customers who would haggle with them until reaching a price agreeable to both.

The farmers who came from the Sopron district with their produce would discuss with each other whether they should agree to an offered price. They spoke in their native Hungarian, and since the spoken language in Austria was German, they didn't think we understood them. Fortunately I spoke three languages: Hungarian, German and Slovak, so I could understand when they were about to acquiesce, and we were able to walk away with a satisfactory bargain.

All in all, life in Kobersdorf was pleasant and tranquil. We got along even with our non-Jewish neighbors and there was rarely a case of anti-Semitism reported. We knew that the Hungarian Lord (Esterhazy) who lived in the old castle on the main street of the village was very anti-Semitic, but this didn't impact the general feeling of security among the Jewish populace. Later when the Germans took over, his hatred for the Jews became very palpable as he collaborated with the Germans.

Summertime was always a very exciting experience in the village with the many visitors who would spend their vacation there. We would to meet different family members who would take advantage of their holiday period to spend time with my grandmother.

34 The Ehrenthal Family

I will now interrupt the narrative and recount some details of the lifetime of Rav Moshe Konig's three children from his first marriage. He had merited marrying off these children during his lifetime.

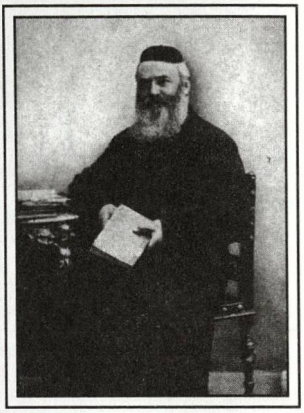
Rav Moshe's oldest daughter, Zissel, was born in 1871. When she was twenty-five, she married a young scholar, Yechezkel Ehrenthal.

Rav Yechezkel Ehrenthal

Yechezkel was born in 1869 to R' Shmuel Ehrenthal from Nagy-Mágyár. Nagy-Mágyár is known by its Yiddish name Magendorf, not to be confused with Nagy-Megyer, Rav Moshe's birthplace, which is known as Medyer.

Nagy-Mágyár was home to a large yeshivah, led by the *rav* of the town, Rav Moshe Katz. He was a son of Rav Menachem Katz, the *rav* of Tzehlem. Yechezkel learned in this yeshivah and developed a close relationship with the *rav*. Even later on after the *rav* left the town and went to serve as *rav* of Nitra, Yechezkel held up the connection. Rav Moshe eventually tested him and ordained him with *semichah*.

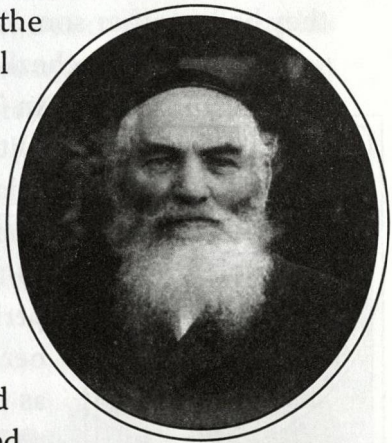
After learning for a few years in his hometown, Yechezkel went on to learn in the Pressburg yeshivah. By that time the Ksav Sofer was no longer alive, and his son Rav Simchah Bunim, known as the Shevet Sofer, was the *rav* of Pressburg and led the yeshivah, until his passing in 1907. Yechezkel was a gifted young man and he excelled in his studies. Additionally he spent some time learning in the yeshivah in Grosswardein (Nagyvárad, presently Oradea in Romania) under Rav Moshe Zvi Fuchs, was one of the greatly respected Torah personalities of that period.



The Shevet Sofer

Another *rav* with whom Rav Yechezkel held a close relationship with was Rav Moshe Pollack from Bonhiad. He held him in such high esteem that even many years later when the descendants of Rav Pollack approached him regarding the printing of a Sefer, Rav Yechezkel kindly donated toward the cost.

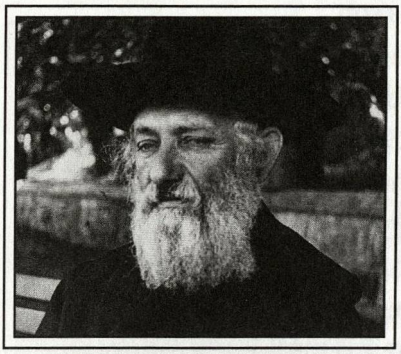
In 1896, when Yechezkel was about twenty-six years old, the *shidduch* was suggested for him with Zissel, daughter of the Kobersdorfer *dayan*.



Rav M. Z. Fuchs

The couple married in Kobersdorf, and Rav Yechezkel continued with his studies as before. He received an additional *semichah* from the *rav* of nearby Tzehlem, Rav Dovid Friedman. Rav Dovid was the son-in-law of the previous *rav* of Tzehlem Rav Menachem Katz, Zissel's step-grandfather, and a brother-in-law of Rav Yechezkel's teacher Rav Moshe Katz. Apparently Rav Yechezkel

took advantage of the acquaintance between the two families in order to receive his additional *semichah.*



Rav Yechezkel Ehrenthal

After their marriage they lived for a few years in Kobersdorf. Rav Yechezkel, as mentioned, assisted his illustrious father-in-law in his obligations as *dayan* of the village and would at times serve as an intermediary for the local villagers in their monetary disputes.

Their Children

About a year after their marriage, their first son was born. They named him Asher after Zissel's grandfather, Rav Moshe's father. Some years later, in 1903, they had another son, Yaakov.

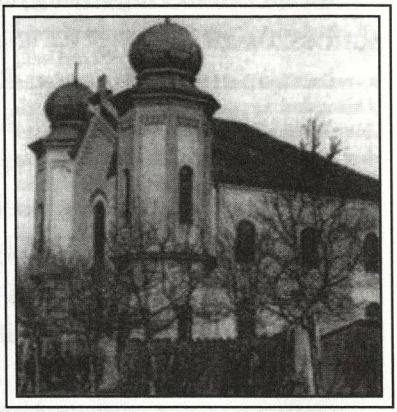
In 1903, Rav Yechezkel was appointed to serve as a *dayan* in Tót-Megyer, a small village in the Nitra region. To supplement his low salary, he also served as town *chazzan.* The tiny Jewish community, according to the census of the pre-World War II period, numbered merely fifty-two members in total, with only seven recorded as tax-payers.



Rav Moshe's daughter Zissel, with her son Asher, taken 1898 whilst visiting her husband's family in Nagy-Magyar

Rav Yechezkel served there for about five years, until 1908 when he received an offer to serve as dayan in Vágsellye. The community there numbered a few hundred members; in 1910 there were 321 Jews in the town, out of a total pop-

ulation of about 4000, and the community continued to grow, until World War II. Almost all of the town's Jews were Orthodox and in the period following World War I, most were affiliated with Agudas Yisrael, although there were a small number of members who were associated with Zionist organizations. The rav of the community during the period leading up to World War I was Rav Yosef Abelles.



Shul in Vagsellye

In Vagsellye, there was an elementary school for the Jewish children, but a yeshivah hadn't yet been established there. This was an improvement to what they had in Tót-Megyer where they had first lived, where not only there was no yeshivah, but even the basic Jewish institutions were nonexistent there. Rav Yechezkel was concerned that his children have an appropriate religious upbringing, so he sent them at a very young age, well before their bar mitzvahs, to learn in yeshivah out of town.



Jewish street in Vagsellye with Shul in background

The older son, Asher, went to yeshivah in Nitra, led by Rav Moshe Katz, under whom Rav Yechezkel had learned while he served in Nagy-Magyar. By that time Rav Moshe was getting on in age and he appointed his son Rav Avraham Aharon to assist him in his obligations and to teach in the yeshivah. Rav Yechezkel was also closely acquainted with him, so presumably he believed that his connections with the *rav* would help his son to acclimate in the yeshivah there.



Yaakov Ehrenthal

The second son, Yaakov, was also sent away from home at a very young age and went to learn in yeshivah in Topolčany (Tapoltchan in Yiddish). The yeshivah in Topolčany was famous, and hundreds of students came to learn there. The yeshivah was established by the town's *rav*, Rav Kalev Feivel Schlesinger, who led the community there for forty years. After his passing in 1911, his son Rav Nachum took over his position as *rav* and rosh yeshivah, and served there until his passing, in 1917.



Rav Kalev Schlesinger

In addition to the main yeshivah in town, Rav Nachum established an institution to cater for younger boys wishing to leave home to learn in yeshivah. This yeshivah, named Machzikei HaTorah, gained much popularity over the years and people from all over Slovakia would send their young boys to study there. The local residents generously supported the yeshivah and indeed it continued to thrive for many years. This is where Rav Yechezkel sent his young son Yaakov to learn Torah.

Unfortunately Rav Yechezkel's actions with his noble aspirations for his children's upbringing didn't produce the desired results. Although Asher was an intelligent and studious boy who saw success in his learning, he didn't acclimate easily to yeshivah life.

This was due to the fact that he was a sensitive boy, and since the yeshivah in Nitra at that time didn't have dining provisions the boys had to make do with what was common in those days, eating "*teg*" at the homes of the townspeople. As mentioned earlier, sometimes the locals weren't very eager to open their homes to the *bachurim* and they did so only in order to fulfill their obligations to the town's *rav*. Consequently, the *bachurim* who ate at their homes would merely receive paltry scraps of food, and this resulted in hard feelings on both sides.

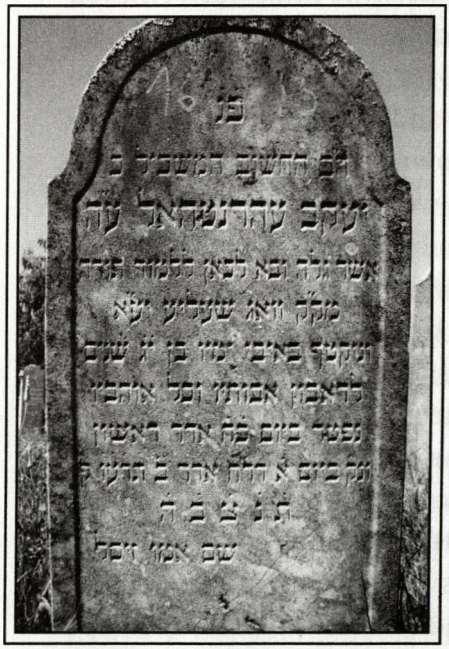
This is what Asher endured while in yeshivah, and since he was a sensitive boy, it had a detrimental effect on him. After learning there for two years, he left the yeshivah. The rosh yeshivah, Rav Avraham Aharon Katz penned him a very warm letter, enumerating his fine qualities and encouraging him to continue learning studiously wherever he chooses to go. He refers to him in the letter as "my beloved student, young and wise, full of Hashem's blessings, Asher the son of my friend, the great light Rav Yechezkel Ehrenthal, qualified *dayan* of Vagsellye."

Ultimately, to his father's great distress, Asher left yeshivah life altogether. In order to avoid causing friction with his father, he would to stay for extended periods at the home of his illustrious grandfather Rav Moshe Konig in Kobersdorf. Rav Moshe's home was a haven for him during his formative years.

Rav Moshe and his wife Perel, Asher's step-grandmother, concerned themselves greatly with his feelings and took care of his needs. They related to him with tremendous warmth and caring. Due to their loving attitude, he preserved his warm

feelings toward Yiddishkeit, even though that period was a very problematic one for a youth who was not in a yeshivah environment. Years later, He would fondly talk about the time he spent there, and would describe the unconditional warmth they showered him with.

His brother Yaakov did not encounter the same difficulties, as the yeshivah in Topolčany had better facilities for their young students. But unfortunately the hopes of Rav Yechezkel and Zissel for him to see success in his learning and grow into a *talmid chachom* were dashed. In 1916, while in yeshivah, he passed away, to the tremendous anguish of his parents and all who knew him. He was just thirteen years old.



Kever of Yaakov Ehrenthal

Since this was a very tumultuous period — the country was in the midst of the Great War — his body wasn't brought home for burial and he was laid to rest in the cemetery in Topolčany. The inscription on his *matzeivah* says that he exiled himself from the community of Vagsellye for the sake of Torah learning and was plucked in his prime to the grief of his parents and all his acquaintances.

Rav Yechezkel didn't have the option of wallowing in his grief as he had obligations to fulfill to his community. Specifically during that period of upheaval, in the aftermath World War I, much work was required in order to restore the community and reinstate its amenities for the service of the townspeople.

In the years following the war, there was no official *rav* in Vagsellye, and the burden of running the community fell upon the town's *dayan*, Rav Yechezkel. Indeed he served the community and took care of its religious services.

A number of years later the family was struck by yet another misfortune. Zissel fell ill and her health deteriorated. They had no choice but to move to Vienna for medical care. Unfortunately she didn't recover. She passed away in 1924 at the age of fifty-two. She was laid to rest in Vienna's cemetery.

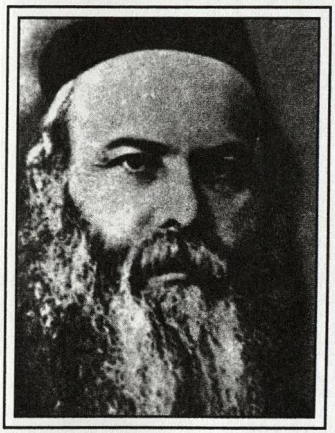


Kever of Zissel Ehrenthal

Shortly thereafter, their son Asher got married and settled in Vienna. He had resided there for some time for his studies and while there he would frequent the home of his mother's younger sister, his uncle and aunt, the Weisses. The Weisses had a neighbor Kalman Willner who had moved to Vienna sometime earlier. His parents Yisrael and Sarah Willner had lived in Brzezow, Poland, and following their death, he and his wife served as surrogate parents to his orphaned siblings. The Weisses suggested a *shidduch* between Asher and Esther, one of Kalman Willner's siblings, and indeed they got married in 1925 and settled in Vienna. They had one daughter, Edith. Asher had a beautiful voice and he served as *chazzan* in Beis Aharon, a shul in Vienna.

Rav Yechezkel's Remarriage

Rav Yechezkel subsequently remarried and returned to Vagsellye. Meanwhile the community had appointed an official *rav* by the name of Rav Mordechai Shtrasser. He was a great *talmid chachom*, a scion of a rabbinic family and a descendant of the Chasam Sofer. His father was Rav Akiva Shtrasser, the *rav* of Tokay, and his grandfather Rav Yaakov Leib was a son-in-law of the Ksav Sofer. In addition to his erudition and his righteousness, he had an exceptionally pleasant demeanor, and by leading the community amiably he gained the confidence of all of his constituents and had a powerful influence on them. He opened a small yeshivah in town to provide an appropriate setting for the local *bachurim* where they could achieve high levels in their Torah studies. Rav Yechezkel continued to serve as *dayan* alongside the *rav*, assisting him with all community matters. Whenever the *rav* had to leave town, Rav Yechezkel would serve as *rav* in his place.

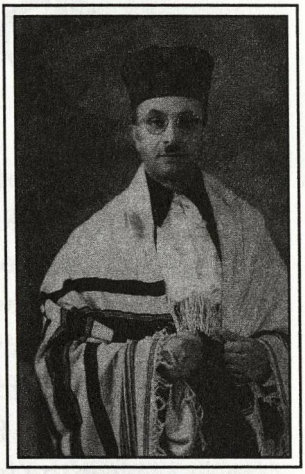


Rav Mordechai Shtrasser

Rav Avraham Yehudah Schwartz was another distinguished scholar who lived at the time in Vagsellye with whom Rav Yechezkel was well acquainted. He was a scion of a well-known rabbinic family, whose father was R' Naftali the *rav* of Mád and his grandfather was Rav Avraham Yehudah Schwartz of Bergsas. He was a prolific author who wrote and edited a number of works, including many biographies. Rav Yechezkel provided him many stories and anecdotes for his biographies. The two scholars were close friends and Rav Schwartz mentioned Rav Yechezkel a number of times in his writings.

The fee which Rav Yechezkel received for his job as *dayan* was miniscule. As it was not enough to provide for his family's needs, he also worked as a glazier. A frightening accident occurred in this job — a piece of glass flew into his face causing him to lose his eyesight in one eye.

Asher held on to his job as *chazzan* in the Beis Aharon shul until November 1938 when the shul was burned down by the Nazis *yemach shemam*. In 1939, he decided to leave Europe and move to the United States. Before their departure, they came to Vagsellye to bid farewell to his father with this being the last time that they saw each other. They left for America and settled in California.



Asher Ehrenthal in full chazzan regalia

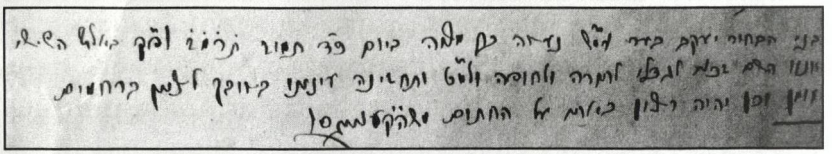
Rav Yechezkel stayed with his second wife in Vagsellye, and suffered there greatly under the Nazi persecution. In May 1944 a ghetto was set up in the Jewish quarter of the town, housing the local Jews as well as all Jews from the various villages in the district. About 850 Jews were crammed into this ghetto, and a month later, they were all deported to Auschwitz, where they perished, *Hy"d.*

35 Yaakov Dov Konig

Yaakov Dov, known during his childhood as Yaakov Ber, was Rav Moshe's only son who survived infancy. As mentioned, he was born on the 24 Tammuz 1874 while Rav Moshe was living in Janoshaza. He was named after his great-grandfathers; Yaakov after his maternal great-grandfather, and Dov after his paternal great-grandfather. (Rav Dov Ber was R' Asher Konig's father.) His bar mitzvah took place in 1887 after the family had moved back to Kobersdorf.

He married Sarah Kaufman in 1900. They settled in Janoshaza, the town where he had lived as a child. Their first child was a girl, Bella, and their second was a boy, Asher — named after Yaakov Dov's paternal grandfather. Subsequently another two daughters were born, Flora and Roiza.

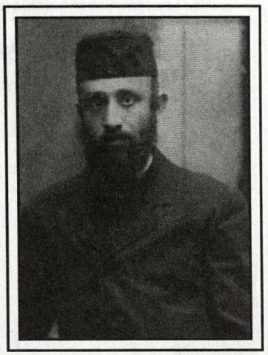
In fact they resided in Boba for a short while, this was a small village about ten kilometers from Janoshaza, which was an important railroad junction and actually had a Jewish station chief. A small cluster of Jews resided there, just about



Rav Moshe's handwriting recording Yaakov Dov's bar mitzvah and his aspirations for him

enough for a minyan, and was under the jurisdiction of the Rabbinate of Janoshaza.

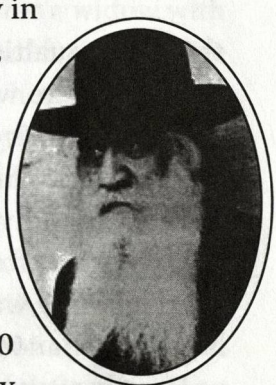
After living for a short while in Boba, R' Yaakov Dov relocated with his family to Janoshaza, and that is where he raised his children.



R' Yaakov Dov

R' Yaakov Dov served as the town's *shochet*. The *shechitah* was done under the auspices of the *rosh hakahal* of Janoshaza, Mr. Jenö Löwinger. He was a cattle merchant; he bought livestock from the farmers of the region and sold the meat to the townspeople. He employed R' Yaakov Dov, who would slaughter the animals in the courtyard adjacent to his house.

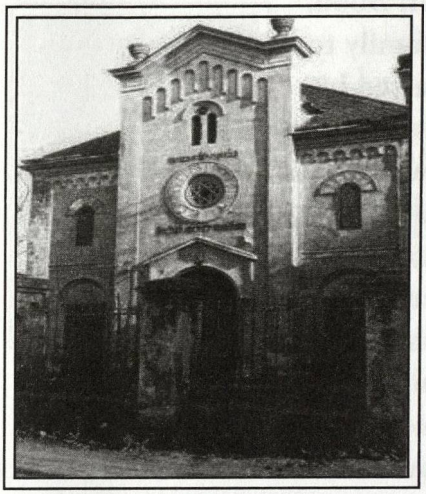
By the time R' Yaakov Dov came to live in Janoshaza, Rav Mordechai Reichenfeld, who had been the rav in Janoshaza when Rav Moshe was living there, had passed away, after leading the community for close to fifty years. The rabbinical post then remained vacant for three years, until 1904, when the community elected Rav Avraham Eliezer Weisz, former *rav* of the Kosztel province in Moravia, to come and lead them. He retained this position until 1920 when he went on to become *rav* of Tapolcsány and to lead the yeshivah there. His position was then filled by Rav Yosef Rubinstein from Kecskemét, who served there up until the war.



Rav Avraham Weisz

Unfortunately, R' Yaakov Dov didn't merit a long life. Just a few months after the passing of his father, in 1914, Hungary fell into chaos with the outbreak of World War I. The conflicts had begun a couple of months before the war, as a result of the assassination of the crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian

Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo. The Hungarian army then carried out a mass conscription, which tore many families apart, as all able-bodied males were sent to the front. At that time, the Hungarian authorities were notorious for singling out the Jews and dispatching them to carry out dangerous tasks, such as clearing out minefields.



The shul in Janoshaza

From the Jewish community of Janoshaza, one hundred and thirty members were enlisted to serve in the Hungarian armed forces. Of these, eleven lost their lives. R' Yaakov Dov was one of the first casualties of the unrest. Prior to the actual outbreak of the war, he was dispatched to do dangerous work at the battlefront. He was injured while on duty and sent home, but sadly died of his wounds shortly thereafter. He was just forty years old. He was laid to rest in his hometown Janoshaza, *Hy"d.*



Kever of R' Yaakov Dov

Shortly after his death another son was born — he was named Moshe after his illustrious grandfather. R' Yaakov Dov's widow Sarah was left alone to fend for herself and her young children.

Life in Janoshaza

Life was not easy during those years in Janoshaza. Following the war, in Hungary there was a failed attempt by the communists, headed by Bela Kun, to overtake and run the country as a Soviet Republic. They succeeded in ruling the country for four months until they were overthrown. Counter-revolutionary mobs sowed terror across Hungary in what became known as the White Terror, and since there were a number of communist rulers who were Jewish, the mobs particularly vent their wrath against the Jews. In Janoshaza one of these mobs plundered Jewish shops and beat several Jews; two members of the community lost their lives.

During the interwar period, it became difficult to earn a living in town, as the main commercial routes in the region bypassed Janoshaza. This was particularly so for a widow with five young orphans, and thus Sarah often found herself in dire financial straits. Nevertheless, she overcame her sorrows and struggled valiantly to raise her children with *yiras Shamayim*. She succeeded in marrying off her two oldest children, Bella and Asher. Asher had one child, a boy.

During World War II, the fate of the Jews of Janoshaza was the same as the rest of Hungarian Jewry. The 343 Jews who were then living there were rounded up in May 1944 and placed in a ghetto which encompassed three streets in the town, along with other Jews from the vicinity — 1,129 individuals in total. The ghetto was liquidated in June 1944 when its occupants were transferred to Sárvár concentration camp. From there they were deported to Auschwitz in early July. Sarah and her three daughters, as well as Asher's young wife and child, perished along with most of the Jews of Janoshaza, including the *rav*, Rav Yosef Rubinstein, *Hy"d*.

Remarkably I met one of the daughters in Auschwitz. I

approached a girl to inquire about my cousins from Janoshaza. As we spoke, we discovered that she was my cousin Flora Konig. We didn't even recognize each other, as without our hair and the way we were dressed, we looked like scarecrows. I actually had never met her before, but we had corresponded by mail and she had sent me photos of herself. She was a very good-hearted girl, and I wanted to stay with her. She was there all alone as her mother and sister had been sent to a different camp. We spoke that whole afternoon and I decided that the following day I would try to exchange places with another girl. But unfortunately, her group was taken away that night. Somebody said that they went to work near Krakow, but we never heard again from anyone who had gone with that transport.

Asher Konig

Asher was drafted into a labor brigade to work for the Hungarian army. These brigades were called the munkatabor. In the beginning, the Jewish men wore Hungarian army uniforms with a yellow band on the arm. The Jews in these units were sent to do perilous jobs for the war effort, such as clearing out minefields and digging trenches at the front. Thousands were killed while at these duties.

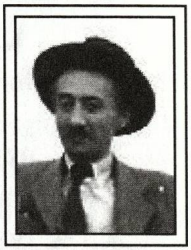


Asher Konig in the army

Later Asher was sent to the camps where he endured tremendous suffering. By the grace of Hashem he survived, but he rarely spoke of his experiences, thus very few details are known. After the war he remarried and lived for a short while in Budapest, where he worked in

a textile company. He had three children in Hungary: two boys, Yaakov Mordechai and Aharon; and a daughter Sarah Kaila (Judith). After his children were born he returned to Janoshaza and lived there for seven years.

A small cluster of survivors had returned and settled there and Asher joined the newly restructured community. There was a pious Jew among them named Yerachmiel Löwinger who took the young children of the survivors under his wing and taught them basic Jewish studies.



Asher Konig after the war

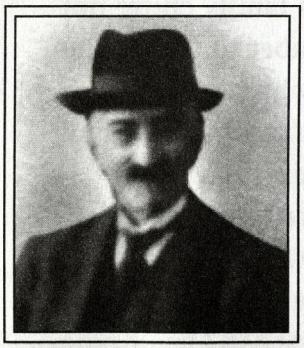
Their life continued in this set-up for a few years, until the Hungarian revolution in 1956, when communists took over the country. They forbade all acts of religion and the Jews suffered much oppression under their rule. Most of the Jews still living in Hungary tried to escape; many smuggled themselves over the borders. Asher and his family chose not to use this method of escape as a large number of those who took this route were caught and subsequently imprisoned. They eventually were able to leave legally when family in England arranged for them to be granted British citizenship.

It was in fact my husband (Yosef Frischman) who was active in orchestrating their escape. At the time, he had a partnership in a factory that manufactured leather bags. He wrote a letter to the British authorities informing them that Mr. Otto Konig of Hungary had a unique method for cutting leather, noting that it would be worthwhile to grant him entry into the United Kingdom. On these lines he was granted British citizenship for himself and his family, and thus they could leave Hungary in a legal manner.

36 The Weiss Family

Rav Moshe's youngest daughter from his first marriage was Krendel, born in 1878. When she was about twenty-six years old, a *shidduch* was suggested for her with Moshe Dovid Weiss.

The name Dovid was added later since there was some hesitation when the *shidduch* was proposed. The *bachur*'s name was identical to that of his intended father-in-law and there are opinions that one ought to avoid a *shidduch* of this nature.



Moshe Dovid Weiss

Rav Moshe was asked whether this is reason to withhold their marriage. He replied that this is a fitting match and it would be a pity to withhold it, but he added, that if the *bachur* would not object then it would be recommended for him to take on a second name. Indeed, he added the name Dovid* before he got married. The wedding took place

* Ed. Note. Even though Rav Moshe himself was son-in-law in second marriage of R' Moshe Roth, there are opinions who say that this interdiction is only relevant when three generations — father-in-law, son-in-law and in turn his son-in-law — have the same name. Additionally there are those who state that when the son-in-law doesn't live in the same town as the father-in-law, then

on 15 Av 1905. After their marriage they lived in Kobersdorf for a short while, then moved to Vienna and settled there. They had two children. They named their son Binyamin Zev after Moshe Dovid's father, and their daughter, Krasl, after Krendel's mother, Rav Moshe's first wife

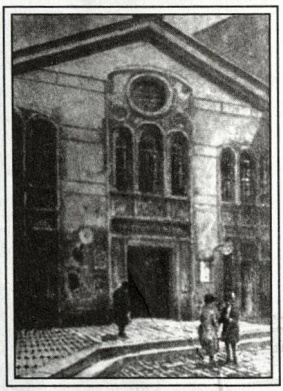


Krendel (Gisela) Weiss

Moshe Dovid owned a haberdashery store and earned a respectable living. He was known to be a pious *baal habayis*, scrupulous in his deeds with set times for his Torah study. He served as the *baal korei* in the famous Adas Yisrael shul, known as the Schiff shul, and for a time he also served as a *gabbai* there.

The Schiff Shul

The Adas Yisrael shul was the well-known center of Torah and piety within the modernity of the city. It was built in 1864 by a pious group of some two hundred families who were Pressburg expatriates, having left their hometown during the unrest following the failed uprising of the populace against the Austrian sovereign in 1848. Initially, the shul had difficulty functioning due to the community's precarious

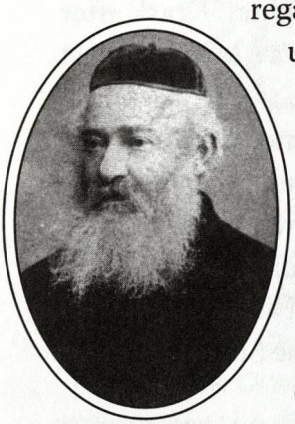


Schiff shul, Vienna

there is no necessity to refrain from such a marriage. Third of all, there is an opinion that this doesn't apply if the son-in-law is a recognized *talmid chachom.*

financial situation. However this was alleviated thanks to a generous grant from Yitzchak (Ignatz) Schiff, a wealthy benefactor. Hence the name "Schiff shul."

The community called upon Rav Zalman Shpitzer, a son-in-law of the Chasam Sofer to lead them. He was highly regarded and respected by all, and over the years, used his fiery oratory to ensure that the community adhered to authentic Orthodox conduct.



Rav Zalman Shpitzer

The passing of Rav Zalman in 1894 was a tremendous loss for the community, and they needed an influential personality to take his place, in order to stem the tide that was leaning toward the modern influences. Indeed after a short while they appointed Rav Shaya Fuerst as *rav* of the community and *av beis din.* He had studied in Pressburg under the Ksav Sofer, and after his marriage had



Rav S. Fuerst (R) accompanying the Rebbes of Antiniye and Sochachov

settled in Eisenstadt, near his father-in-law, the *rav*. Immediately upon his arrival in Vienna he applied himself to unite all expatriates from the nearby countries who sought to lead their lives in accordance with the Torah. He invested much effort toward the education of the youth, and arranged *shiurim* in the shul for *bachurim* and laymen. Over time, he earned the respect of the Torah leaders of the generation and was considered an influential personality, chosen frequently to address public gatherings, and was consulted by his contemporaries for assistance in communal matters.

Rav Shaya appointed a number of well-versed *talmidei chachomim* to give these *shiurim*. Prominent among them was Rav Yosef Baumgarten who had studied, and later settled, in Mattersdorf. He served on the local *beis din* and gave regular *shiurim* in the shul. The community members, particularly the yeshivah *bachurim*, grew very attached to him, due to his Torah knowledge, his kind heart and his *yiras Shamayim*. An additional two *dayanim* who taught the community were Rav Pinchas Breuer and Rav Meir Fleishman. A number of learned laymen would also frequently give *shiurim* in the shul.



Rav Yosef Baumgarten

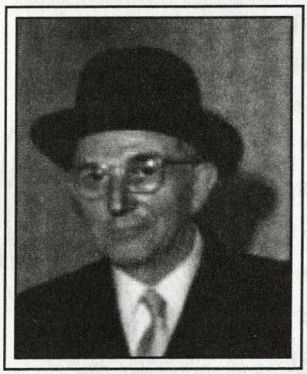
Accordingly the shul developed into a nucleus for those wishing to live their lives in piety, and many eminent Torah scholars spent their days in the shul toiling over their studies. Local *bachurim*, upon returning from their studies in the famous yeshivahs, felt very at home in the Schiff shul, where they could continue their studies on a similar level to which they were accustomed from their years in yeshivah.

Moshe Dovid involved himself with this community, eventually becoming one of the leading laymen of the *kehillah*.

The Weiss Progeny

Their daughter Krasl, known to the family as Camilla, married a local scholar named Mordechai Schechter. He was a son of R' Zvi Ephraim Schechter, originally from Kolomaya in Galicia. They relocated to Vienna during World War I, along with a great number of Galician Jews who fled from their homeland due to the Russian persecution, and they lived there henceforth.

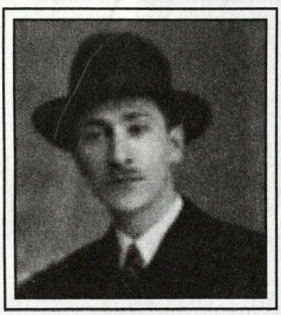
R' Zvi Ephraim was a distinguished Viznitzer chassid and when the Viznitzer Rebbe, Rav Yisrael of Viznitz, visited Vienna, he stayed at their home. The son Mordechai didn't leave town for yeshivah, but studied in the company of a group of *talmidei chachomim* in one of the local shuls and there he made great strides in his learning. He later became active in the local Agudah and was a leader of Zeirei Agudath Israel.



R' Mordechai Schechter

Shortly before World War II, the family immigrated to England. This was in 1939 following the Anschluss of Austria to Germany, when many understood that there was no future for Jews under German domination.

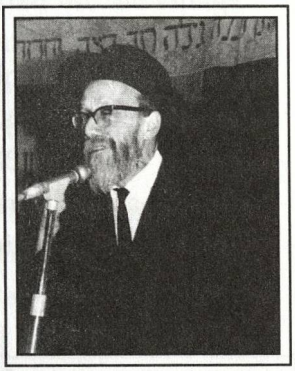
Moshe Dovid and Krendel with their daughter, Camilla, traveled directly to England, whereas their son Binyamin Zev together with Mordechai Schechter traveled with the kindertransport arranged by Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld. They served as accompanying adults for the children and helped take care of their needs. Since they themselves had reached adulthood,



Binyamin Zev Weiss

the British didn't grant them entry to the country. Upon reaching the British shores they were transferred to other locations under British sovereign. Binyamin Zev was interred in the Isle of Man, whereas Mordechai was sent to Australia. Eventually they were granted entry into England and were reunited with their family.

Moshe Dovid continued in London with his exacting standards, in conformity with his lifestyle in Vienna. As in Vienna, where he had a close connection with his *rebbi* Rav Yosef Baumgarten, when arriving in London he joined the community of his son Rav Shlomo Baumgarten. He was an active member of Rav Baumgarten's shul on 69 Lordship Road, and he served there as the *baal korei*. Rav Shlomo had relocated a number of years earlier to London, where he continued the sacred work of his father, teaching and disseminating Torah, and many Oberlander refugees who came to London during and after the war felt comfortable in his community. Moshe Dovid passed away in London on the first day of Sukkos 1948. Krendel passed away three years later, on 22 Elul 1951. They are both buried in the Enfield cemetery in London.

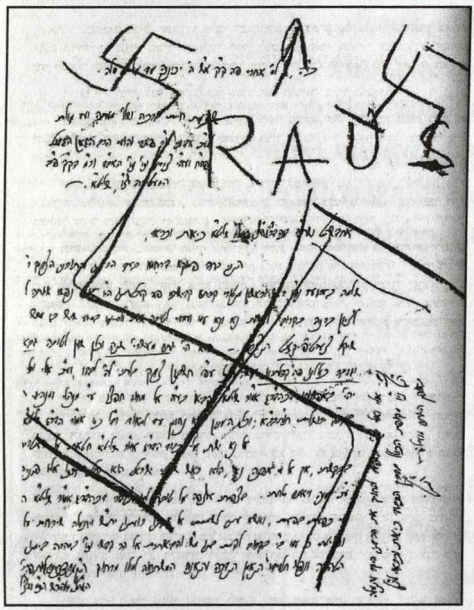


Rav Shlomo Baumgarten

37 The Decimation of the Sheva Kehillos

Back in Kobersdorf, Rav Moshe's widow and single daughter's tranquil life came to an abrupt end on 13 March 1938, with the annexation of Austria to Germany, known as the Anschluss.

I didn't experience this firsthand as we were then living in Rimaszombat, Czechoslovakia. At the time, we heard rumors that the Germans had invaded Austria and were harassing the Jewish population. We received letters from my Aunt Sarah, who lived in Kobersdorf with my grandmother. All mail went through German censors, so our relatives couldn't write openly, and the letters didn't provide us with an accurate description of their situation.



Defaced letter from Rav Schlesinger to rav of Pressburg

The Germans not only censured the letters sent by the local Jews, but if they came across a letter concerning matters of religion, they

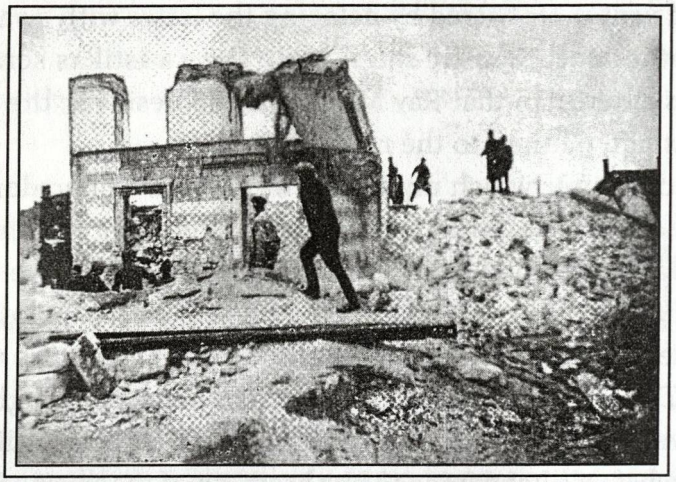
would vent their hatred by defacing the letter with swastikas and other anti-Semitic slurs. Note the swastikas scrawled across letter than that Rav Mordechai Schlesinger, the *rav* of Eisenstadt, penned to the *rav* of Pressburg.

In one letter which my aunt sent us from Kobersdorf, she wrote about a beautiful fir tree in the forest near Kobersdorf. This large tree had seven wide branches; hence the locals had dubbed the tree *"Der Sieben Brueder,"* meaning the seven brothers. She wrote that a powerful storm had hit the village and *"Der Sieben Brueder,"* the tree, had been hit by lightning and was felled. I'm uncertain, but she may have been indicating as to what was happening to our brethren of the seven villages, i.e. the Jews of the Sheva Kehillos.

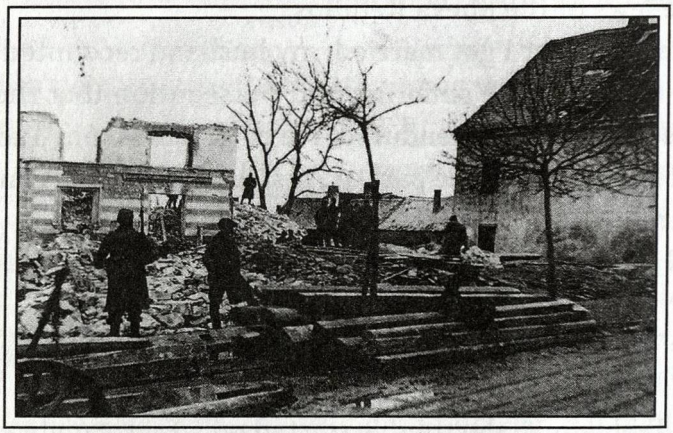
Later on, after I got married, my husband recounted some of the details of the suffering and persecution that the Jews of these communities endured. He originated from Tzehlem, which had also become part of Austria, and thus his fare was similar to that of my family in Kobersdorf.

Destruction Reaches Tzehlem

In Tzehlem all the trouble started on a Friday night shortly after the Germans entered the town. The *rav* was in his home surrounded by his students, conducting a *tisch* as he did every Friday night. Suddenly a commotion was heard and a stone came flying through the window. Thankfully nobody was injured, but the community leaders became aware of the danger they were in. Immediately after Shabbos, the yeshivah was disbanded and the *bachurim* were all sent to return to their hometowns, out of concern for their safety. Over the next few days the Germans increased their harassment of the Jews, pillaging their belongings and confiscating the community-owned



The German assault on the shul in Tzehlem



property. Within a short time, they ordered the townspeople to leave the town with barely a few essential belongings.

My husband described some of the terrifying sights which he beheld during that difficult period, of the German soldiers brutally attacking defenseless Jews in the streets and harassing them ceaselessly. One episode he related was when a band of soldiers stormed his family's home and pillaged all their valuables. They then took his father out of the room, leaving behind the bewildered children and their mother, who was

terrified as to what would come next. Suddenly the sound of a gunshot was heard. The soldiers returned and sadistically told his mother to come out and see her husband's body. In reality, they hadn't shot him but it was just their way of tormenting the family.

Over the next period, the Germans did all they could to eradicate any Jewish vestiges in the whole district. This included demolishing the shuls and uprooting many of the Jewish cemeteries. In Tzehlem for example, there existed a number of Jewish buildings and a large Jewish cemetery wherein many great luminaries were interred, however within a short time there remained no vestige of its rich past.

The shul of Kobersdorf is the only one in the whole Burgenland that survived these acts of violence. It is recounted that the elderly retired mayor of Kobersdorf, who still remembered the illustrious Rav Avraham Shag, couldn't bear to see his shul go up in smoke. It was he who prevailed upon the Germans to spare it from destruction. The German foreman, who was appointed to oversee the demolishing of the shuls, may have had an additional motivation to discontinue his sordid job, for during his previous mission, while demolishing another one of the shuls, his son, who was assisting him in overseeing the work, was killed by a work accident. It may be that this also persuaded him to unfetter the Kobersdorf shul from the decree.



Burial site of sifrei Torah in Kobersdorf cemetery

The Germans continued their persecution of the Jews with intensity until the situation became intolerable, and all the Jews of the province were forced to leave their homes. The Jews of Kobersdorf, with the perception that this wasn't simply a passing phase, took the thirteen Torah scrolls, which were

in the possession of the community, and buried them in the village cemetery before departing, and with this was buried the village's rich heritage.

The majority of the districts' Jews made their way to Vienna, thus already at the beginning of 1938, the towns and villages of the Sheva Kehillos had been made Judenrein.

Similarly the situation in Vienna was also tough. As soon as they had overrun the country, the Germans began their harassment of the Jews and confiscated Jewish property. They humiliated the community leaders by forcing them to clean the streets with hand brushes. A number of influential Jews were transported to Dachau concentration camp, never to be heard of again. Then on the night of November 1938, which became known as Kristallnacht, the Germans went on a rampage, pillaging and burning down many shuls and other Jewish-owned property.

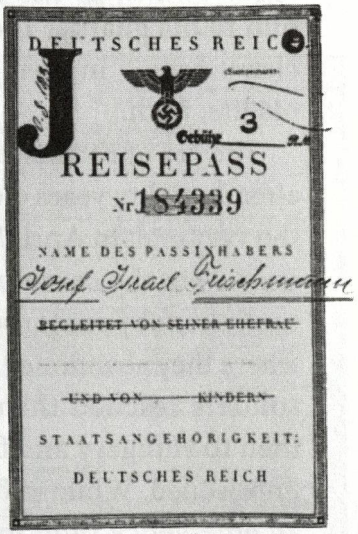


Humiliation of Jews in Mattersdorf, forcing them to clean the streets

The Destiny of the Rabbanim

By that time, it was fairly clear that there was no future for the Jews in Austria. Leaving the country, however, was no simple matter. The Germans didn't issue passports easily, and those issued were marked with the letter J. Furthermore, the Germans added the name "Israel" on every Jewish male's passport, and "Sarah" on those of the women. However, anyone who had the option, emigrated to England or America. Some went to Eretz Yisrael. During that period, over eight thousand Jews left Vienna every month and moved out of the country.

Most of the *rabbanim* of the Sheva Kehillos left Europe during that period. Rav Mordechai Schlesinger of Eisenstadt was the first to leave so he wasn't there to witness the actual destruction of the communities. Since Eisenstadt was officially considered the leading community, the Germans informed him that they expected him to assist him in their diabolical agenda of making these towns Judenrein. The *rav*, realizing that it was a matter of life-and-death, made a quick getaway and escaped to Hungary. From there, acting on the advice of his *rebbi* Rav Akiva Sofer of Pressburg, he continued on to Eretz Yisrael. He was soon joined there by the *rav* of Lakenbach and the *rav* of Frauenkirchen.


DEUTSCHES REICH

J

3

REISEPASS

Nr. 184339

NAME DES PASSINHABERS

Josef Israel Fischmann

~~BEGLEITET VON SEINER EHEFRAU~~

~~UND VON KINDERN~~

STAATSANGEHORIGKEIT:

DEUTSCHES REICH

My husbands passport

Shortly after the Anschluss, the elderly *rav* of Kobersdorf Rav Moshe Lipschutz also moved to Eretz Yisrael and settled in Yerushalayim. However, he passed away approximately

two months after his arrival. He was buried on Har Hazeisim. Interestingly, he lived in Eretz Yisrael for seventy-two days, equaling exactly to his age — a day on the Holy soil for each year of his life.

After being driven out of Kobersdorf, his son-in-law Rav Shimon Goldberger, opted to return to his hometown in Hungary and unfortunately he perished in the war, along with his wife and five children. An eyewitness who was with him in Auschwitz related how even in those deplorable conditions, he did his utmost to cling to the mitzvos, and wouldn't give up even the halachah of washing *negel vasser* every morning. He would fill his boots with water every night and keep them in his bunk. One morning, however, some water dripped down to the bunk below him, and the person occupying that bunk, apparently suspected him of relieving himself and reported him to the guards. The Germans, due to their obsession with cleanliness — in their own style — punished him for this with his life, *Hy"d.*

The *rav* of Kitzee Rav Zvi Hersh Perls, who by this time was already eighty years old, remained with his *Kehillah* right until the very end. In April 1938, a group of SA men seized fifty-one Jews from the community, confiscated their possessions and took them by motorboat to the middle of the Danube River, where they abandoned them on a sand island. Eventually Czech soldiers rescued them and ferried them first to Pressburg, then to Hungary and finally back to Austria, where they were imprisoned. While in Pressburg the benevolent Jews organized an emergency fund for the benefit of these unfortunate refugees. As it was Pesach, they brought the prisoners matzah and other necessities for their Yom Tov.

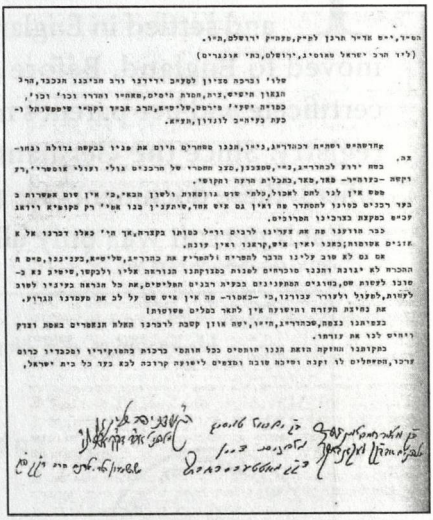
After witnessing the dismal end of the community which he had faithfully led for fifty years, he relocated first to Pressburg and then to the town Novo-Meste (in Yiddish; Ir Chadash)

in Slovakia. He lived there for three years until he passed away at age eighty-three. His rebbetzin, who was younger than him, stayed there until the Germans overran the country and was taken along with the rest of the area's Jews to Auschwitz where she perished, *Hy"d.*



Tzehlemer Rav and Mattersdorfer Rav in America

The *rav* of Tzehlem, Rav Levi Yitzchak Greenwald, left for America shortly after the Anschluss, where he reestablished the Tzehlemer institutions, as did the *rav* of Mattersdorf. It may be noted that even though the situation in Europe was becoming precarious, it wasn't always so straightforward to immigrate to another country. Many countries had a closed-door policy, sealing their borders in face of the many Jewish refugees seeking relocation. The Tzehlemer Rav was only allowed into America after his brother Rav Amram, who had already settled there previously, lobbied extensively for arranging an entry permit for him.



Letter from rabbanim of Sheva Kehillos who had left Europe, describing their dire situation

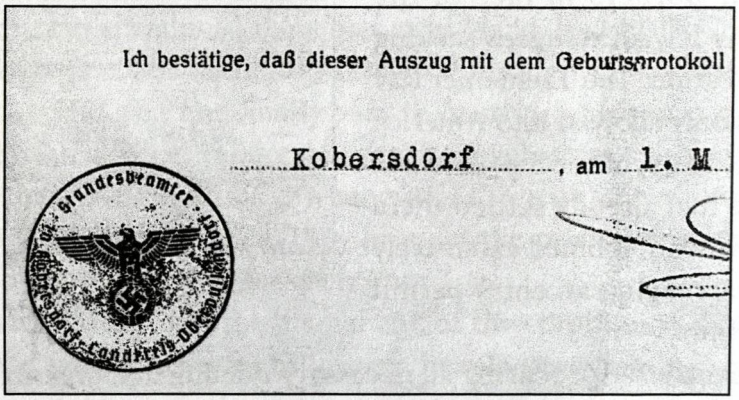
Even after procuring all necessary documents, organizing the travel arrangements and undertaking the voyage, it was

not at all simple to arrive in a foreign country, penniless with no one to turn to for assistance in acclimating to the new circumstances. The refugees often found themselves in desperate conditions, with nothing to eat and no roof over their heads. There actually exists a letter penned by four surviving *rabbanim* from the Sheva Kehillos living in Eretz Yisrael, those from Eisenstadt, Lakenbach and Frauenkirchen, as well as a *dayan* from Mattersdorf, which they sent in 1940 to Rav Yeshayah Fuerst in London describing their dire straits and begging him for support.

My Family's Destiny

Those of my family who could leave did so. My uncle, Moshe Dovid Weiss, as mentioned, left with his family and settled in England. My Aunt Karoline (Krasl) also moved to England. Before she left, she retrieved her birth certificate and her parent's marriage certificate from the local registry. Since the Germans had overtaken the government offices, these documents are all stamped with the Nazi insignia.

Each person was only allowed to take a limited amount



Nazi insignia on the corner of Krasl's birth certificate

of luggage. My aunt did a very noble deed by opting to leave behind her personal belongings, and using her baggage space to bring her illustrious father's notebooks, his Shas and other *sefarim*, which were full of his annotations in the margins. It is due to her selflessness that these *chiddushim* survived.

After the war she assisted her surviving relatives, helping them immigrate to England and aided them in settling down. She died in Sivan 1973, but she didn't leave behind any children.

After the Anschluss, my grandmother, Perel, was well into her seventies, too old to undertake the journey abroad, so she stayed behind in Vienna. Her daughter Sarah stayed with her to assist her and became trapped there with the outbreak of the war. They were then shipped off, along with the rest of Vienna's Jews, to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz, where they perished. May Hashem avenge their blood.

38 My Hometown, Slovakia

Until this time, our region of Slovakia had been a part of Czechoslovakia, however it now became a part of Hungary, as the Germans gave it to them for helping with the war effort. Soon after, the Jewish people started feeling the effects of anti-Semitism, which hadn't existed in the former Czechoslovakia. Under President Masaryk and President Benes we had had a very peaceful life as it was a democratic country.

At that time many German and Austrian Jews still had time to escape. We heard a lot of rumors about the Polish, Slovak and Lithuanian Jews, but we did not quite believe all the horror stories, such as that they were put in trucks and were then gassed. Only later, when our transport arrived, the reality hit us, and we then believed what we had heard.

From the part of Hungary where we first lived, they took away some Jewish families who were not born there and didn't have documentation to prove local nationality. We heard that they were taken to Poland, but we never heard from them thereafter. As soon as the Germans marched in, we heard that they deported the Jews of neighboring Slovakia, but we didn't know where to.

In the beginning, we managed to keep our textile business open, as we had all our papers and they allowed six percent of the Jewish shops to continue operating. Then in May 1942,

my father was taken when they called up all the Jewish men between ages 16-45 for work in the army.

My Father's Sufferings

My father was taken on a transport to Kiev, near Russia. They were forced to work very hard in the battlefields, digging trenches and clearing fields for warplanes. They were not provided with clothing and they hardly received anything to eat. He stayed there for about two years under these terrible conditions.

On one occasion, the Germans collected 10,000 Jewish people from the Ukraine, among them the elderly, infirm, women and children. They were taken to a large field at the edge of a forest, where they were forced to dig their own graves. Then they were lined up near the graves, and Ukrainian soldiers, working for the Germans, shot at the crowd with machine-guns, and most of the people fell into the graves. Heartlessly they layered down earth on top of the people, but they observed that the earth was moving because many of the people were still alive, so they put dynamite on top and blew up the whole thing. This happened near my father's workplace, with him and his friends witnessing this distressing event yet being unable to do anything to help their brethren.

I recall him recounting a miraculous episode. It was a few days before Rosh Hashanah, and with no shofar, *talleisim* or a *sefer Torah* in sight, their mood was gloomy and downcast. Just before Yom Tov, one of his workmates discovered a *sefer Torah* and a shofar while digging. Their spirits were greatly lifted by indisputably perceiving Hashem's kindness to them. The Yamim Tovim were spent in a joyful frame of mind and the Hungarians left them to daven in peace.

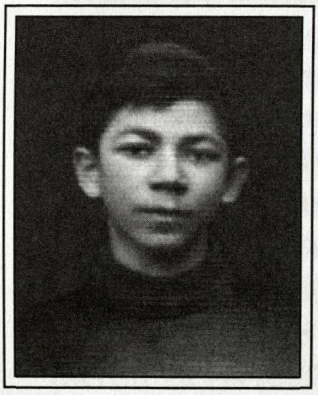
They would frequently come upon religious articles, money and gold that the local Jews had hidden before being banished from their homes. Besides for the *talleisim*, their overseers seized everything.

My father's group tried to keep up their spirits with jokes and songs. One typical joke was, our clothes are like on Purim, our dwellings are like a sukkah and our food is like on a *taanis*.

The Deportations

As of 1939, from when Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia, the tranquil life which we had known until then came to an end. The Hungarian government gradually began imposing anti-Semitic laws, similar to those in Germany.

With all the able-bodied males drafted to serve the war effort, life in the towns and villages were very unpleasant.



My brother Moshe Dovid shortly before the war

There were actually many Jewish boys who managed to hide and evade the draft, but they had to keep a low profile in order to avoid being detected by the authorities. There were a number of yeshivahs in the country, which continued their studies unabated, even during this trying period, ignoring the upheaval and the chaos which had befallen the world. The army would frequently send gendarmes to these yeshivahs to seize the draft-evaders; unfortunately, they often caught *bachurim* unaware. Others managed to outsmart the gendarmes time and again and avoided being sent to the front.

At home, my mother continued to run my father's shop, as

we had received a permit to keep it open. My brother and I tried our best to help out and make the best of the situation. After serving in the army for a year-and-a-half, my father returned home, and our lives resumed in relative normalcy. This was all until 1944, when the deportations began.

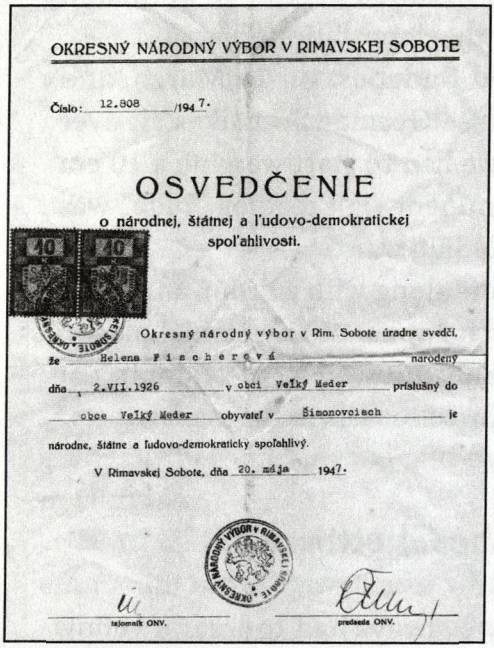
The German army entered Budapest on 19 March, and within a few days one could see German swastikas all over Hungary. A few weeks later, we had to start wearing a 10 cm yellow Jewish star, and a prominent sign reading "Jude" was hung on all Jewish shops including ours.

One day, the town crier came along with a drum, announcing, "The Jews are forbidden to appear at any official places, including schools, and are only allowed to go shopping at certain times. Nor are they allowed to walk in the main streets."

Life in the Ghetto

If we were allowed out, we always had to wear a yellow star, including babies and young children. From day to day our situation worsened. Everybody started working, so that they should not have an excuse to take people away for being "lazy." After a few weeks we all had to move to the ghetto; the entrances were guarded by policemen day and night. Several families were crammed together in one room, where we were each allowed one mattress, and a backpack with some bedding, clothes and food in a bag. Despite these conditions we were grateful that at least the whole family was still together. Two weeks later they took away the men aged sixteen to sixty as Arbeitsdienst, to work for the army. From day to day our situation worsened. Initially some Hungarian gendarmerie came and took away all our documents, with the excuse that they wanted to look through them, though they

never returned them to us. Then some detectives came and started questioning the affluent among us, prying them as to what they had done with their valuables and to whom they had given their property etc. People who didn't answer them properly were beaten terribly.



OKRESNÝ NÁRODNÝ VÝBOR V RIMAVSKEJ SOBOTE

Číslo: 12.808 /1947.

OSVEDČENIE

o národnej, štátnej a ľudovo-demokratickej spoľahlivosti.

Okresný národný výbor v Rim. Sobote úradne svedčí, že Helena Fischerová narodený dňa 2.VII.1926 v obci Veľký Meder príslušný do obce Veľký Meder obyvateľ v Šimonovciach je národne, štátne a ľudovo-demokraticky spoľahlivý.

V Rimavskej Sobote, dňa 20. mája 1947.

OKRESNÝ NÁRODNÝ VÝBOR V RIMAVSKEJ SOBOTE

tajomník ONV. predseda ONV.

My birth certificate, replaced after the war

A few days later, the gendarmerie came back again and looked through our meager belongings. They searched for gold, jewels, money and other items of value. They even took away some of our dresses and shoes. In the end, basically all we were left with was the clothing on our backs.

On the evening of 8 June, at 10 o'clock, police, gendarmes and detectives surrounded the ghetto. They gave us half an hour to pack and ordered us out. We had to walk down to the railway station where we were forced into cattlecars. In every wagon they squeezed about seventy to eighty people. We only had room to sit very close together but still had no idea where they were taking us. The next day we arrived in Salgotarjan, Hungary, which was a collective ghetto. They collected thousands of Jews together from several towns, and there were already some 6000 Jews — mostly elderly, women and children — from the districts of Salgotarjan in the ghetto. Every family had a small living area, a wooden hut with straw on the floor, but luckily we still had some blankets or duvets

to cover ourselves with. On one side, this primitive hut was completely open so we hung a tablecloth to have a bit of privacy. We ate from a communal kitchen, but to be able to wash and drink we had to fight for a bit of water, as there was only one sink. It was very primitive and was truly unpleasant.

Our Fateful Journey

On the third day, 12 June, at about 12 o'clock, German soldiers and Hungarian gendarmes surrounded us, ordering us to immediately get ready, but to leave all unnecessary food and clothing behind, as they were taking us to work. After quite a long walk, we arrived at the station. We waited for about half an hour, until we heard an engine and whistling and saw a long cattle-train arriving. Seventy to eighty people were pressed together like sardines with one bucket for a toilet. The carriages were originally for cattle; they were dusty and it was dark and scary. We sat on our backpacks with just enough room to sit, unable to stretch our legs out. They locked the carriages, leaving a crack of about 10 cm open.



Rav Elazar Singer

We traveled for three days in these pitiful conditions. Though the train stopped a few times, we couldn't leave the cars.When the train stopped in Miskolc, one woman saw her husband but was forbidden to talk to him. If we disobeyed we could have been shot or hit with a rifle as the gendarmes were very nasty to us. The *rav* of our town,

Rav Elazar Singer *z"l* was in our carriage, and when he tried to look out of the tiny window, a gendarme saw him and hit him with his rifle.

At one of the later stops, some gendarmes came into our carriage and seized most of our luggage, telling us we wouldn't need our belongings in the near future, and besides, the Germans would confiscate everything anyway. Then they told us to bid farewell to our country, as we Jews will never see this country again.

39 Arrival at Auschwitz

On 15 June 1944, the train stopped at its final destination: Auschwitz. We peeped out through holes in the carriage, and observed numerous men with striped shirts (like pajama tops), and many barrack-like buildings. I experienced a horrible feeling that we had arrived at a terrible place.

We were kept waiting on the train for a while until being directed to disembark. Upon alighting some SS soldiers approached and told us to leave everything in the wagons and stand beside the railway line. Indeed the Hungarians had been right, and eventually we had nothing left from home. We were commanded to line up five abreast and start moving forward.

After moving only a few steps, a German SS soldier stopped us, later we found out that this was the notorious Josef Mengele, *yemach shemo*. First he selected the men and the older boys and sent them to the right; my brother went with this group. He then asked each individual how old they were. He asked me first, so I answered "*Ich bin achtzehn jahre alt* — I am eighteen years old." I was not quite eighteen yet, but I had overheard one Polish man asking another, "Shall we tell them that they select women between eighteen and thirty?"

Then the German SS soldier asked my mother her age but she didn't answer, so she was sent to the left side with the

young children, and the mothers with babies. Of this group we heard that there were no survivors; they were all killed in the gas chambers. *Hy"d.*

At the entrance to Auschwitz there was a gate with the words *"Arbeit macht frei,"* Work makes you free. Auschwitz was a vast camp. We met with Polish, Slovak, French, Italian, Greek and Hungarian men and women. There was also a Gypsy camp a short distance from where we were.

Our camp was very primitive and was not quite finished yet — some of the roofs had only the rafters. This camp was known as a "Vernichtungs-Lager," a death camp. It was surrounded by an electric wire fence and at night was floodlit with German SS soldiers guarding it from watchtowers.

We had to stand in rows of five, where SS women soldiers started counting us. This was called *"Zahlappell".* We were 1,500 girls, mostly from our district — Rimaszombat, Rimashecs and Salgotarjan. They told us which block or barrack was ours, but they left us standing for hours in the boiling hot sun, without giving us anything to eat or drink. There were already a few thousand girls in the other blocks from Komaron, Csallokoz and Dunatul. I met a cousin from Szerdahely, but only for a few minutes because she was taken away that same day.

In the late afternoon we got some bread and a little piece of margarine which melted in our hands. The bread was shaped like a brick and tasted like sawdust. In the evening, they told us to go inside. Three Slovak Jewish women were appointed to look after us, and we had to listen to everything they told us or else we were punished. The punishment was usually having our food rations withheld.

Our Daily Routine in Auschwitz

They woke us up at 3:00 am, announcing, *"Los, Heraus, Zahappel."* This meant we had to stand five in a row, next to our block, where we were counted by the German SS "Aufsacherinen" over and over again.

Once they finished counting us, we were given our breakfast which consisted of black coffee (ersatz coffee) or herbal tea. After breakfast we lay down on the dust and tried to have a short rest. Then we went from one block to the other in search of any relatives or friends; although I had a few friends, they were not very close. We were instructed to remain outdoors the entire day, except when airplanes flew overhead, when they selected other blocks for work or when a new transport arrived.

A few hours later, they blew the whistle and we had to queue up again for dinner. We had no cutlery or crockery at all. We had to drink, like in the morning, from the same pots, one after the other.

During the afternoon we tried to sleep outside in the dust, but as the sun was beating down on us we couldn't get much rest. Instead, we spent the time reminiscing about our lives at home. After a few days I discovered that there were several cousins of mine from Gyor, Hungary in Block 5a. So I went to join them in their block.

Every night we heard the train engines whistling as they brought more transports. When a new transport arrived, the Gypsies had to play on their violins to drown out the screams of the people being taken to their deaths in the gas chambers.

In the evening we were counted again by a Polish girl. Then along came the Lageralteste, Lagerschreiberin and Lager Kapo — Jewish girls followed by German SS women and men. They also counted us, and then they left. Afterwards we were

given our daily bread rations. We were not allowed to talk during Zahlappell, and if someone forgot and spoke, she was punished either by not getting supper or being made to kneel on stones holding one or two bricks in her hands. That is how our days passed and we were slowly becoming very weak and downhearted.

After a few days, they took us from Block 5a to Block 10 and I stayed with the Grunsweig girls, my cousins from Gyor. Their grandmother was my grandmother Perel Konig's sister. They were three sisters: Hindi was my age, Jachi a bit older and Hancsi was fourteen years old.

Some of the girls who had been on my transport told me that they had met my brother by the showers, but I never saw him. As soon as we had arrived, we had tried to inquire about our families, but when the German soldiers noticed us trying to speak to other people, they sent their Alsatian dogs after us or they beat us.

First they took away all the infirm, mentally ill, and pregnant women. We later learned that they were all sent to the gas chambers. Then they converted Barrack No. 1 to serve as the Revier (hospital), but people were reluctant to be admitted there, as we knew that whoever would enter there had a very scant chance at coming out alive.

Young girls of fourteen claiming to be eighteen came over from the C-Lager to inquire about relatives and friends. They were a terrible sight; they looked like walking skeletons.

It was common for a girl to locate members of her family, and then try to change places with someone in our camp and stay with us. The problem was, that there were times that they didn't find anyone to switch with, and they would stay anyway. Of course the Zahlappell wasn't correct and we had to stand for hours on the Lagerstrasse until they found out who the culprit was and she was then beaten ruthlessly.

Behind our Block (10a), there was a Polish work camp, where the men worked mainly as carpenters and the women as machinists. Sometimes they gave us a little of their food, which was better than ours. Everyone tried to go near the fence but when the Germans saw us there, they started hitting us with sticks and terrorizing us with their guns and Alsatian dogs.

Sometimes we were assigned jobs around the camp, such as carrying bricks, clearing the road or emptying the dirty buckets into the carts in the outer part of the camp. Once, I was told to carry a bucket, but I was so weak that I could hardly lift it, so when nobody was looking, I left it behind Block No. 4 and ran away. Luckily I wasn't discovered.

During the daytime, the girls often gathered together to sing Hungarian or Yiddish songs, to attempt to keep their spirits up. I still remember one of the songs which some of the girls composed in Yiddish:

איך ליג דא אין פייער, וואס ברענט ארום מיר. פאטער געטרייער
איך שטארב דא ארים מיין געצעלט, עס גיס'ן זיך טרערען אויף
דער גאנצע וועלט. ג-ט וויל איין קרבן, זינגט שוין אללע מיט.
דע גוף איז שוין געשטארבען, די נשמה אבער נישט. די האנט
אוי אין קייט'ן, שוואך ווי איין עוף. די אויגען אזוי בעטען, געב
שוין א סוף. לעש שוין אויס דאס פייער, מען גיסט פעסער
אויל. פאטער געטרייער, שמע ישראל. ג-ט איז איינער, זינגט
שוין אללע מיט. עס ברענען שוין די ביינער, די נשמה אבער
נישט. עס גייט שוין אויס דאס פייער, עס גייט שוין אויס מיין
הארץ. פאטער געטרייער, איך שפיר שוין מער קיין שמערץ. דו
האסט געגעבען, דו נעמסט צוריק. שוועך איז דאס לעבען, צו
שטארבען איז א גליק.

The following is a loose translation:

I lie here in fire, which burns around me. Father,
O faithful one, I'm dying here, around my form.

Tears pour from the whole world, Hashem wants an offering, sing along everyone! The body is already dead, but the soul lives on. The hands are in chains, weak as a bird. The eyes plead desperately, bring an end already, put out the fire. They're pouring barrels of oil. Father O Faithful One, Shema Yisrael, G-d is one, sing along everyone! The bones are burning already, but the soul lives on. The fire is already burning out, my heart has almost stopped. Father O Faithful I don't feel any more pain. You have given, you take back. Living is so difficult, to die is a treat.

Then the selections for work began. First they selected from Barracks 1, 2 and 3, then from 10 (my block) — five hundred girls all together. Now we had to go back again to 5a where we were given the job as Esskomando (food carriers). This required two girls to carry 40-80 kg urns full of food. As we had no strength, we pulled it along the middle of the road, even if it was raining; or through the deep mud after it had rained. Some other girls from Block 7 were chosen to go to the Familienlager, the kitchen — they lugged the urns from there to our camp gates, and we took over.

From day to day, my body weakened and I became very depressed. They actually had Slovak and Polish girls play music on violins and sing some beautiful songs in order to cheer us up, but our overall situation was very bleak and not much could be done to lift our spirits under these circumstances.

As time went on more and more girls were selected for work. Some of the girls hid behind the blocks to avoid being selected, but I decided that I would try to go with the next selection. I came to the conclusion that wherever they took us, it couldn't be to a worse place than Auschwitz, and if they

would take us to our deaths, then that would also be a relief for us.

While awaiting the selection, barrage balloons appeared in the sky, signifying an oncoming enemy aircraft attack, and we all had to go inside. The following day, Shabbos, we were selected for work.

First the Blockelteste blew a whistle, and we had to stand five in a row as usual and march toward the gate. We had to pass in front of SS Rotten-fuhrer Dr Josef Mengele *yemach shemo*, dubbed the angel of death. He chose about 1,000 women. After this inspection, we lined up again. Many girls tried to run back to the camp as their sisters or other relatives were left behind, with the hope of exchanging places with another person. If they managed, they were lucky, but if the Germans noticed anything, they were beaten until they were half dead.

A Slovak girl told us that we should try to get away from Auschwitz as soon as possible, and that it was our only chance of survival, for the sick and weak would all get killed in the Crematorium. The pregnant women, the elderly or sick were all sent back to our camp.

40 From Auschwitz to Allendorf

At last, they opened the Lager gates and we started to walk along the road. First we stopped at the opposite camp, which was called the Czech camp or Family camp. That's where the kitchens were situated from where they brought us our dinner. We had to sit in the dust under the hot sun beating down upon us mercilessly, wondering where they were going to take us.

We soon had to line up again and after quite a long walk we arrived at another camp, where we met a number of Slovak girls. Here they wrote down our names and dates of birth. Then they counted us and again, and we were inspected by a doctor.

Soon it became dark and we still didn't know where we were going to sleep. For the time being we just sat down in the dust outside the shower room. I had almost fallen asleep, when I noticed that some girls were allowed inside the building so I followed them in. A Slovak girl gave us some water and warned us that if she heard the slightest sound we would have to go back outside and some other girls would come in instead. We didn't speak, and we all lay down on the stone floor which was very damp, but was still better than sleeping outside in the dust.

On one side of the room was written in German that whoever had lice would be killed. "*Sauberkeit und disciplin is das*

wichtigste" — Cleanliness and discipline is the most important; that was their slogan.

After breakfast, we sat down again, waiting and talking and wondering about our future. Meanwhile, we saw some women and children arriving with their meager belongings. They told us that they were Polish, and they were taken to a camp opposite us. We also met a lot of Slovak and Polish girls rushing to work.

Later we learned that the shower room and the building in which we had slept the night before, was a gas-chamber. When they turned the water off, they could open the gas cylinders.

Once a week we were allowed to shower and then we were given a fresh dress. Once I was wearing a dress that a girl named Gestetner recognized as her own. I offered to exchange this with the dress that she was wearing, which she greatly appreciated, as the feeling of wearing something that actually "belonged" to her made her really happy.

Now we lined up again to be counted and we were marched through the Lager gate to a railway station. Here fifty-five girls were sent in each cattle-wagon. German soldiers gave us some bread, margarine and one piece of salami. A lot of girls did not eat, but some girls claimed we had to eat everything in order to survive. In every wagon there was a German guard accompanying us. The cattle-trains stopped at many stations along the way, and we frequently heard sirens and planes flying overhead.

We traveled on a three-day journey through Auschwitz, Katowitz, Dresden, Leipzig and Weiman until arriving at Allendorf-bei-Marburg. We traveled through beautiful country-side, through the Thüringen forests, but we weren't really able to enjoy. We kept asking the guard where we were going, and what we were going to do. He told us that we shouldn't worry — we were going to work in factories and we would

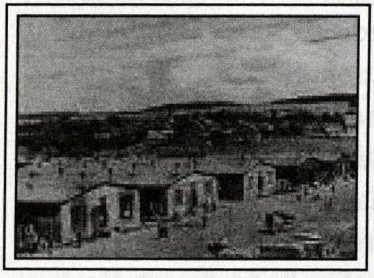
have a good life. On Wednesday 16 August, we reached our destination, Allendorf-bei-Marburg, after having been in Auschwitz for ten weeks.

From the station, we walked a long distance through a forest to the camp, and then the gates of our new camp opened. We, 1,000 Jewish girls, had arrived at Munchmuhle Lager Allendorf.

Arrival to Allendorf

For the first two weeks we were treated very well. We had plenty of food and slowly recovered our strength. We had two German SS woman soldiers as "Aufseheinen" to keep control of us.

They chose a Jewish woman as a Lageralteste (Camp Leader) and two girls to assist her, six Blockelteste (Blockleaders), Stubendienst (a cleaning supervisor), kitchen staff, laundry workers and machinists. Seven girls were chosen for the Revier (hospital), two were doctors and the others nurses. Then they divided us into groups of 140 girls for each block (barrack). I was placed in Block 6 where most of the girls were from Meskoves, Ozd and Miskolc. I was the only one from my town in the whole camp.

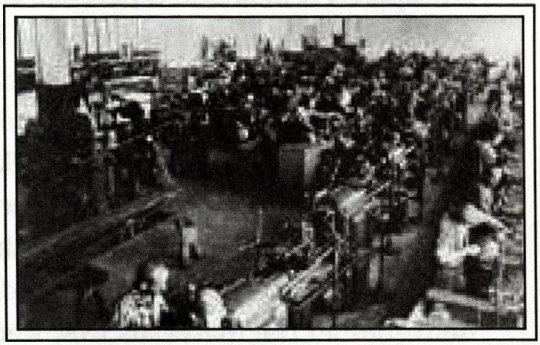


Barracks in Allendorf labor camp

The big difference between Auschwitz and this camp was that this was a work camp (Arbeits Lager). Here in Allendorf the living conditions were slightly better than those in Auschwitz. In every room there were seven bunkbeds, one large table, some stools and two closets. There were straw mattresses on the beds and everyone had two

grey blankets. We were also provided with one spoon, one mug and a plate.

After two weeks, they chose 140 girls for the B munitions factory day shift, and another 140 girls for the night shift. I was nominated together with my roommates for this job. Then 140 girls were chosen for X factory day-shift. The rest of the girls were selected for outdoor work; building roads, clearing ditches, and the like.



Inmates at Allendorf munitions factory

It was to our surprise when during our first meal we sat down at tables in the dining-room, and ate properly from plates with a spoon and like human beings. This seemed miraculous after our ordeal at Auschwitz.

At first we had plenty to eat, but gradually the rations became smaller and smaller, because, as we heard, the kitchen staff and the German leadership were stealing as much food as they could. They were growing fatter and fatter, while we were starving, especially since the poison we were working with was eating away at our stomachs.

"*Arbeitskommando antretten*!" (Workforce, line up!) With these words we started walking toward the gate where they made a Zehlappel (roll call) and then continued on to our workplace.

Along the way we noticed that there were a lot of munitions factories hidden in this forest which were camouflaged among small trees, grass and flowers. On the side walls there were huge yellow question marks painted with the word *Giftrauin* (poison) written underneath. The air was stifling and it smelled

of rotten eggs, which later we found out was the smell of sulphur. Throughout our walk we did not see or hear any birds; they probably couldn't survive in the poisonous air.

Our workplace was called B. Fuhlstelle. Every morning after Appell, we walked 4-5 km to the munitions factory, our workplace. It made no difference if it was raining, snowing or freezing outside. The factory was hidden under a small hill, and some small trees, grass and flowers were planted around to camouflage it.

The first few days we didn't work very much, as the factory was not properly finished, but afterwards we made up for it. I was chosen together with three other girls to work at the lift.

A French and a Dutch prisoner of war came with a cart and delivered all the materials that were needed to manufacture bombs, hand-grenades, and the like. (60kg Natron Salpetert, 80-100 kg Calksalpeter in paper sacks, 50 kg sacks Penta-hidrat, and some cooking salt.) They also delivered 83 kg H. salt and 70 kg tri-explosives in boxes.

We were given wheelbarrows, and we had to use them to load these items into the lift in a few shifts, to get them to the boiler-house. We used all our strength to do this work.

Our Work Day

We were woken up at 3:30 am, we drank some black coffee, and sometimes we were given soup. Then the whistle was blown, which meant we had to stand five in a row. After counting us, we started walking to the factory, accompanied by German SS women who shouted orders all the time. Their favorite words were; "*Los, los tempo*" (Hurry up! March faster!), "*Mund halten*" (Be quiet!), "*Reihe besser anhalten*" (Keep those rows straight!), "*Verdamtes,*

verfluchtes, Judische volk" (confounded, cursed Jewish people), "*Judische banda*" (Jewish bandits).

Our uniforms were navy cotton trousers and jackets on top of our grey prison dresses, though the Meister wore a gas-mask and gloves for work as he did not want to become contaminated by the poisonous chemicals. In late December, they distributed coats for us to wear. When it was freezing cold or raining, we took our blankets along, so in the evenings we had nothing to cover ourselves with, as they were still wet.

We began working at 7:30 am. At first my job was very tough but then I was given the tedious job of sweeping the floor. Others had to fill bombs and grenades with the hardened stuff that came from the boiler-house. I was kept very busy when they had to fill large mines, as many pieces fell to the cement floor and had to be swept up all the time. After work I had to wash the floor down with a hose pipe.

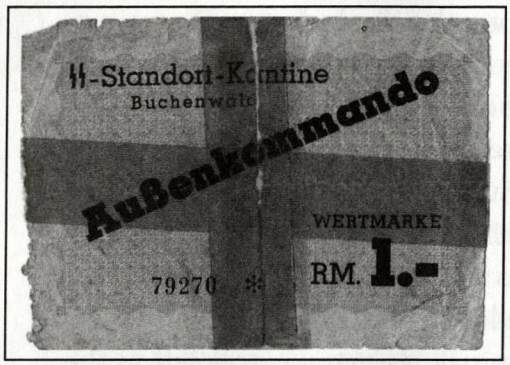
We had it a lot easier during the night shift, for we would take turns hiding behind some large radiators where we tried to sleep on the stone floor.

We had a forty-minute lunch break during the day. We were given two pieces of bread, thinly spread with margarine, and one cup of black coffee without any sugar.

After the break, a bell rang which signaled to us to begin working again. We finished our jobs at 5:30 pm. At first, we did not have to work on Sundays, but after a while, we had to work Sundays too.

It was quite late by the time we got back to the Lager every evening. During the winter months we left in the morning when it was still dark; by the time we got back at night, it was already dark again. The only daylight we ever saw was on every second Sunday, which was our day off. When we had to work during the night as well, we were also given the other Sundays off.

On these free Sundays we had to queue five in a row to be counted by the Lageralteste. As we stood and looked at each other we noticed that our hair had a ginger tint to it, our faces were bright yellow and our lips were purple. This was the result of the chemicals that we worked with.



Coupon given to inmates

After the Zahlappell we had supper which consisted of a clear soup, some turnips, carrots and sometimes a few potatoes. Every day we also had half a liter of milk. We were told that it would work as an anti-toxin against the poisons that we were exposed to.

On our free Sundays, we had to stand for hours and listen to the Germans giving us lectures on how lucky we were to get milk as even the German mothers and babies hardly had any.

The Revier had two doctors, one of them really a dentist from Hungary. Five girls, who were relatives or friends of the Lageralteste (Kapo), were chosen to be nurses. At the Revier, they treated the girls very badly, and as soon as they became slightly better they had to help the nurses with all sorts of little jobs. They received very little food, and while the kitchen staff and the nurses became fatter, the patients were almost on a starvation diet.

Food and clothing were getting scarcer by the day. Not only did the Germans steal whatever they could lay their hands on, but the Jewish girls who were in a higher position tried to get what they could as well. Some of the girls used to find potato peels and sometimes they managed to get a potato or a carrot.

Anyone caught stealing was locked in a cellar beneath the

kitchen, which was full of rats. They had to remain there for a few days with only a small amount of water and bread. Part of the punishment was also that their hair was cut off completely.

If they caught girls taking some wood from the factory back to the camp, they received the same punishment. Additionally, if they took some string or pieces of paper or if anyone spoke to a Serb, Italian, French or Russian prisoner of war, they were punished in the same way.

In December, when some articles of clothing arrived from Auschwitz, the Jewish leaders of the camp had first choice. They found some jewelry and gold hidden in some of the corsets and shoulder pads. Then the remaining coats and dresses were given to the factory workers. The girls who worked as seamstresses had to cut out about 20 cm from the back of the coat, and replace it with a different color material. Then, with red oil paint, they had to paint the letters K.Z. in big on the back. At least we did not have to use our blankets any more to keep out the cold.

When it became extremely cold we were granted permission to collect wood from the nearby forest after work, but it was very difficult for us to walk to the forests as we were so terribly tired, and there were no paths to follow.

Working at night was very difficult, as the "Aufsacherinen" — the German SS women — often woke us up during the day time when we tried to sleep. They would blow a whistle and shout, "Control." Then they would come in and search for any objects that we might have brought back from the factory. They even looked in the straw that the mattresses were filled with.

They had an obsession with cleanliness so our room had to always be spotless. Their slogan was "*Sauberkeit und disciplin is das wichtigste*," Cleanliness and discipline is the most important. A girl was once punished for the great "crime" of

dropping a small piece of paper outside our barrack. She was forced to clean up the whole yard by hand, even the small bits of straw.

As we walked to the factory, we sometimes sang in Hungarian. The Serb (Yugoslav) prisoners of war who we met on the way understood our language, so they encouraged us, telling us to keep our spirits up; the war would soon end, and then we would be free.

The Beginning of the End

At last, we started hearing all sorts of reports. Next to our camp there was an Italian prisoner of war camp. They had secretly listened to the wireless (radio), and now they shouted the latest news to us —the Russians were already outside Berlin and the Americans were heading in our direction. Consequently the German SS women and the Vorarbeiter (manager) in the factory became very nasty to us.

At this point we had no more work as the supply of raw materials had diminished. Nevertheless, we had to go to the factory to clean up every bit of rubbish, even the tiniest pieces, both inside and outside the factory.

We heard many warplanes flying overhead and once a bomb fell on the Revier. It began to burn and we had to extinguish the flames with sand and water.

The SS started spreading rumors that since there was no more work for us at the factory, they would take us to Buchenwald. A German SS man, A. Schulte who was second-in-command, mocked us, saying that no matter what happened, he would always have time to kill us all.

When December 25th and the secular new year arrived, they treated us somewhat better. We did not have to go to work

and we received double portions of bread. Some of the girls had beautiful voices, and they had to entertain the Germans with songs and with violins.

On the Move Again

One day the Lageralteste (Jewish woman camp leader) told us in secret that the Germans had an order to evacuate us from the camp. The Italian prisoners of war had told us that the Americans were already in Marburg, which was 35 km away from us.

Soon Pesach arrived, and I celebrated the first Seder night with my cousins, the Grunsweig girls. The three sisters, Jachi, Hindi and Hancsi, came from Szedres. The Seder was led by a Rebbetzin who knew quite a lot of it by heart. We had some potatoes and greens for our meal, and, despite our hunger, we decided that we would abstain from eating any bread over Pesach.

The next morning, the Germans told us to pack our things and get ready to move on. We heard that we would be leaving later that night, so in the afternoon we decided to eat something. We stole some potatoes from the kitchen. Then we broke up some bed boards and chairs — we would not need them anymore — and made a fire to roast the potatoes. In the evening, they blew a whistle and signaled to stand three in a row. Wishing to be on the same transport as my cousins I made sure to stay together with them.

On the second Seder night we started walking toward the gate. As we left the camp, the Italian prisoners shouted to us that we should not be afraid of the Germans, as the war was almost over, and the Americans were very close.

We were a group of approximately fifty people. We walked

through sleepy villages, forests and roads. That night, we walked 35 km. During the march I felt that I could not continue any further. I dejectedly told my cousins that I did not care, and that I was going to stay where I was. However, they encouraged and begged me to carry on, especially Hindi, saying that I should have more *bitachon* and that we would soon be free. I later heard that the girls who could not walk anymore were shot. Accordingly, I have ever since felt indebted to Hindi for saving my life during that difficult time. She later moved to Eretz Yisrael and married Rav Yisrael Klein, a distinguished Belzer Chassid.

In the morning we arrived in Neustadt. We walked through the town, and on to a small village, Homberg, where we rested in a barn. Afterwards, we walked further without food or drink although sometimes we dug up sugar beets from the fields.

We noticed that the German soldiers and also some civilians were walking away from this place. The next village we went to was Zigenheim where we stopped to rest in a large barn.

Gradually, we realized that the Germans were disappearing, leaving us fifty girls by ourselves. The next place that we came to was Wabern, about 25 km from Kassel, where we rested in an outhouse

We then came to Melsungen, and just after crossing over the bridge it exploded before our eyes. This frightened us, as we realized that our lives were still in danger. We decided to go to a nearby forest so that we could have a rest and decide on the next plan of action.

41 Liberation and Beyond

Suddenly it dawned on us that we were free, and that we could go wherever we liked and do what we wanted, but it wasn't so straightforward. We decided that we were going to stay in the next village or town.

Searching for a Place to Settle

On the way we met a lot of German soldiers. We were terrified of the soldiers, yet they did not even glance in our direction. They were too preoccupied with their efforts to escape from the Americans.

The next village was Gehau. They allowed twenty-five girls to stay there, and the other twenty-five decided to find accommodation in the next village. Among the twenty-five girls that stayed were my three cousins, but I went with the other group of girls. We walked about 3 km, but we recurrently needed to take cover in the ditches by the roadside as the airplanes overhead started shooting at us.

As we approached the next village, we noticed that it was burning from the American bombings, so we had no choice but to turn back. Back in Gehau, the Burgermeister (Mayor) didn't allow us to stay as he had enough with the previous

twenty-five girls. We decided that the best option for us was to split up into smaller groups, so fourteen girls went with me and the rest separated from us.

We decided that in the morning we would try to get through the burning village. We managed to get a small amount of food from the villagers who were mainly elderly women. On our way we met some Russian prisoners of war who still had some German guards with them. One German man called after us telling us that we should go to Eschwege, which was the nearest town where there was a camp, and we would probably find a place to stay. We didn't answer him as we had had enough of camps to last us a lifetime.

The next place we went to was Waldkappel. On the way we met twenty girls who told us that the whole place was in ruins and it would be too dangerous for us to stay there. We didn't listen to them; we just carried on. Waldkappel was really a sorry sight, the whole town was burning and in ruins; we realized that we would not be able to stay there, so we continued further.

Then we arrived at Bischhausen. It was quite large for a village, and we met some Russian, Belgian and German soldiers there. The Burgermeister told us that there wasn't any room for us, and that we would have to move on, as in the morning the Americans would be arriving. We met another 10 girls who had also managed to walk this far and the Burgermeister told them the same thing. We didn't know what would become of us. We had already been walking for six days and were feeling terribly exhausted.

We tried knocking on a few doors, but the villagers would not even allow us to stay in their outhouses, stables or barns. At long last an old woman told us that we could sleep in her small shed where she kept her garden tools. We had just enough room to sit down, but could not stretch our legs.

At about 4:00 am the woman woke us up with "*Los*, march, *heraus*!" The Americans were very near and she didn't want us to stay. She began hitting us with a broomstick until we left.

We found a large field near the village, so we decided not to go any further as the Americans would soon be here. We knew we had to hide somewhere, but where?

On 2 April 1945, the seventh day of Pesach, we looked around and noticed a sheep-pen near the surrounding forest, so we decided to hide in there. Shortly thereafter a commotion broke out in the area. Planes were roaring overhead, and as they came very low, they started shooting. Suddenly it occurred to us that we were in a very dangerous place; we were in the middle of a cross-fire. There were German soldiers hiding in the forest, and they were shooting at the American planes. The sheep-pen began rattling and shaking and without warning they began shooting at us and wounded two girls.

We thought that this would be the end of us. We had suffered so much from the Germans, and now with the Americans so close we would not be able to survive. We began to recite the Shema and excerpts of *Avinu Malkeinu* which we knew by heart, as we did not have a siddur.

Suddenly silence reigned as all shooting ceased. We peeped through loose boards in the pen and could not believe our eyes. Three tanks were approaching. Following the tanks were soldiers on foot; they appeared to be holding hand grenades and they were walking very slowly toward the next village. We realized that this group must be American soldiers. So what were we supposed to do now?

We decided to request for help for the two wounded girls and tell them who we were. Raising our voices we cried out in unison "S.O.S. Help! Help!" The soldiers advised us to return to Bischhausen, the village that we'd just come from, as it had already been liberated, and we may be able to get some help

there from the Red Cross or the military police. We decided that two of us would run back to the village and get some help.

In Bischhausen, the Germans had already put out white flags. As soon as we noticed some American soldiers we asked for help. At last, with great difficulty, they understood what we wanted from them. They got a car with a Red Cross on it and told us to jump in and show them where to go. Then we all returned to the village.

Now we were finally free, and we hoped we would soon be reunited with our families and return home. This day, 2 April 1945, the seventh day of Pesach will forever be etched in my memory. I often retell this story to my children and grandchildren.

After Liberation

At the end of the village, some American soldiers stopped us and after questioning us they led us to a hotel where we remained for a few days. We then went to the Burgermeister (who had previously thrown us out), to find accommodation for us. He let us use the village school, and there we found the ten girls whom we had previously met in the village. Gradually we regained our strength.

When the American soldiers and the military police left after a few days, the Burgermeister, who was a hardened anti-Semite, started getting very nasty again, and he ordered us to leave the village immediately.

We found out that the next town was Eschwege, and that the Americans were occupying it, so we decided to try and get some help from them. We arrived at the U.S.A. headquarters where they provided us with a letter stating that the Burgermeister was obligated to give us food and clothing.

He emptied a store-room for us and gave us the uniform of the Hitler-Jugend; navy-blue skirts and white blouses, with suede light brown leather jackets.

One day the Burgermeister called us into his office and said that he had instructions that we must go to Eschwege immediately, or else we might miss the Hungarian transport which was going to leave in a couple of days' time.

He provided us with a horse and wagon, and a villager for a driver. The driver took us to the Hindenburg barracks which was a former German army barracks. Here we found some Russian, Belgian, Dutch, French, Polish and Italian prisoners of war. There were some Italian and French girls as well.

It was there that we found out that the Burgermeister had tricked us, as nobody knew about us. The driver didn't care, and said that he was returning to the village, as his instructions had been to leave us there.

We asked around and we were told that it would be best to speak to the French Commandant who would arrange things for us. Indeed he provided us with food and accommodations.


Ungarn

MILITARY GOVERNMENT OF GERMANY

TEMPORARY REGISTRATION — Zeitweilige Registrierungskarte

Name / Name: Helene Fischer — Alter / Age: 19 — Geschlecht / Sex: weibl.

Ständige Adresse / Permanent Address: Dimavska-Sobota Mechanizovana — Beruf / Occupation: Verkäuferin

Jetzige Adresse / Present Address: Grifte

Der Inhaber dieser Karte ist als Einwohner von der Stadt Grifte vorschriftsmäßig registriert und ist es ihm oder ihr strengstens verboten, sich von diesem Platz zu entfernen. Zuwiderhandlung dieser Maßnahme führt zu sofortiger Arrest. Der Inhaber dieses Scheines muß diesen Ausweis stets bei sich führen.

The holder of this card is duly registered as a resident of the town of Grifte and is prohibited from leaving the place designated. Violation of this restriction will lead to immediate arrest. Registrant will at all times have this paper on his person.

Legitimations-Nummer / Identity Card Number: Helene Fischer

Unterschrift des Inhabers / Signature of Holder

Right Index Finger

Name und Rang / Name and Rank: Maj JA. Dawes Jr

Mil. Gov. Officer, U. S. Army

ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

MILITARY GOVERNMENT OFFICE

Datum der Ausstellung / Date of Issue

Signature

Date: July 11th 1945

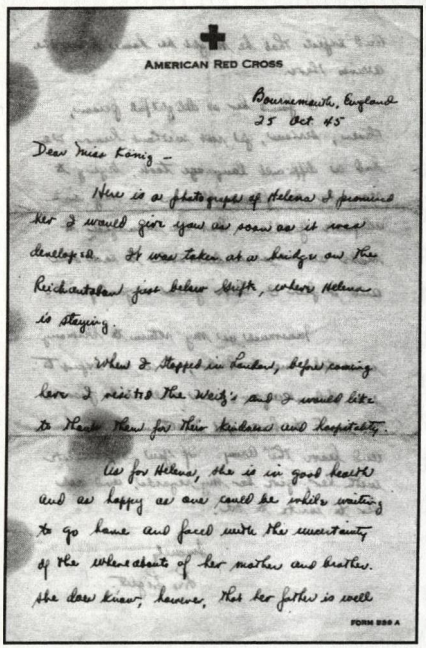
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(Dies ist kein Personal-Ausweis und erlaubt keine Vorrechte)
(This is not an identity document and allows no privileges)

Temporary identification card issued after the war in Grifte

A few days later we went for a walk in the town and I was reunited with my cousins. They informed me that they had decided to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael, as they had heard that their whole family had been killed by the Germans.

We remained in the barracks for a short while until a Hungarian woman, who had been the doctor in our Revier in Allendorf told us that she was responsible for all the Hungarian girls; so we would be divided and sent to a few villages to be placed in homes which Nazis previously occupied.


AMERICAN RED CROSS

Bournemouth, England
25 Oct 45

Dear Miss Konig –

Here is a photograph of Helena I promised her I would give you as soon as it was developed. It was taken at a hostel on the Reichsautobahn just before Night, where Helena is staying.

When I stopped in London, before coming here I visited the Welfs and I would like to thank them for their kindness and hospitality.

As for Helena, she is in good health and as happy as one could be while waiting to go home and faced with the uncertainty of the whereabouts of her mother and brother. She does know, however, that her father is well

FORM 850 A

Letter which the American soldier delivered to my Aunt informing her of my survival and..."faced with uncertainty concerning the whereabouts of her mother and brother".

The following day, a truck took us to Grifte (Bes. Kassel), where we were provided with lodging. We spent several months there.

One evening as we listened to the radio, we heard the Red Cross reading out a list of survivors. You can imagine my delight when I heard my father's name announced — Michael Fischer from Rimavska Sabota, Czechoslovakia. I decided that at the first opportunity I would go back to Czechoslovakia to meet my father. There was no news of my mother and brother.

A few weeks later we had another surprise. The two girls that had been injured came back to us in an American truck. They told us that they had been kept in hospital until they had fully recovered. It's difficult to describe the reunion. There were tears in everyone's eyes. They had worked very hard

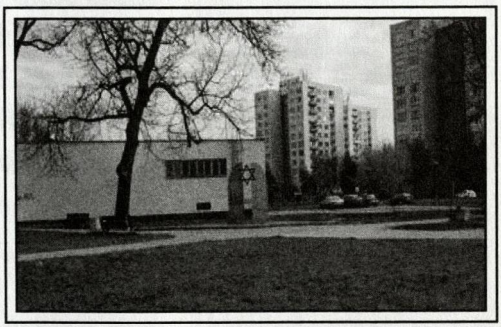
to find us, as there still was no communication between one place and another.

Once, an American Jewish soldier came to our place and said he was a journalist from New York, and that he was traveling to London. I asked him if he could take a letter to my relatives. "Of course!" he said. I quickly wrote a few words, and I later heard that true to his word he personally delivered the letter to my aunt. She was very pleased to hear that I was alive and well.

Reuniting with My Father

A while later, I returned to my hometown in Czechoslovakia. Even though I had been offered an opportunity to go to London, once I had heard that my father was alive, I dearly wanted to be reunited with him.

Upon reaching Czechoslovakia I perceived for the first time the horrific devastation that had taken place there. There was no sign of the thriving Jewish communities which had existed there until recently. Most of the shuls had been demolished and many of the Jewish graveyards uprooted.



Memorial to Rimaszombat shul

A number of pitiful survivors were trying to reconstruct what had once been. I made enquiries among them as to my father's whereabouts and they gave me his address, which was in the basement of a Jewish home. Although we had been apart for more than a year, and despite all we had been through, we recognized

each other instantly and were immensely overjoyed upon seeing each other.

My father later remarried and had a son. My mother and only brother never returned. *Hy"d.*

42 Leaving Eastern Europe

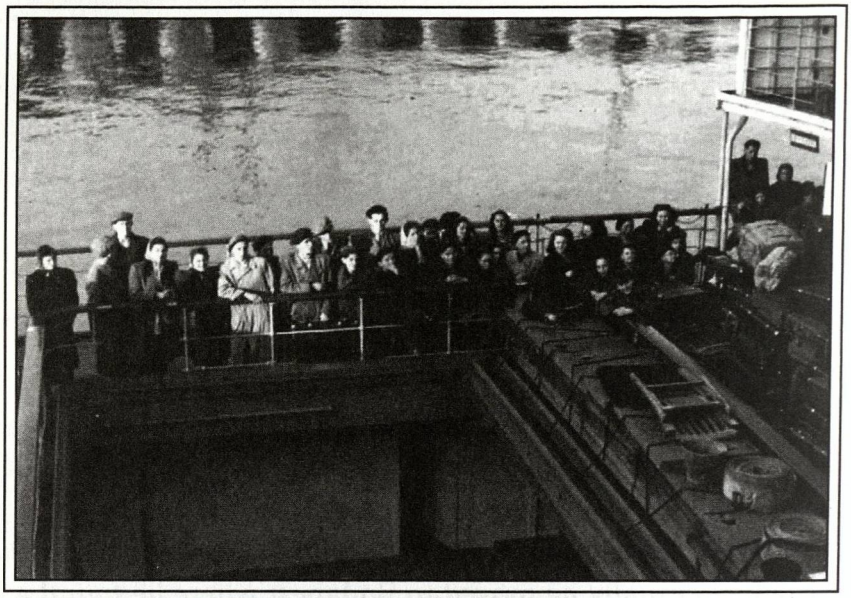
After all the suffering my father had endured during the war, he became somewhat disenchanted and lacked the stamina to uproot himself to begin his life anew. He chose to stay in Czechoslovakia, where he remarried and settled. Eventually he moved to Budapest where he found a job, and lived there until his departure from the world in 1973, and was buried there.

This placed me in a dilemma. On the one hand my father was all I had left of my immediate family. On the other hand, however, there didn't seem to be much of a future for me there, since almost all vestiges of Jewish life had been eliminated, therefore the potential for leading an Orthodox lifestyle there was rather bleak. It was a difficult choice to make, but my aspiration to build a family in the ways of my forefathers dominated my inner debate, and with the encouragement of my Aunty Karoline I opted to relocate to London.



My father's kever

I sent a request to relatives living in England to arrange a visa for me so I'd be enable to come and settle there. Meanwhile there was a transport being arranged by Rabbi Dr. Schonfeld



A group of survivors on the Kindertransport.
I am standing toward the far right.

to take children survivors out of central Europe and resettle them in England. This was in 1948, and it was the very last transport to leave post-war Europe. The British government though didn't grant us permission to stay in England, so we went to Ireland and stayed there for close to a year.

In 1949, we were allowed entry to London. There, I found a job with a famous clothes manufacturer, Harella. They made ladies' coats, and my job was working on a sewing machine.

After a while, a cousin of mine, Camilla Schechter (nee Weiss), who was friendly with Rebbetzin Miriam Rabinow (nee Frischman), thought she might have a suitable *shidduch* for me. She told me about Yosef Frischman, a young man who, at the age of twelve, had managed to escape from Eastern Europe just days before the war. His three older sisters had preceded him to England, but his parents and brothers had stayed behind and perished, *Hy"d*.

At that time Yosef worked in a plastics workshop in Manor Road, N16, manufacturing shopping bags and wig boxes; in fact he had recently been made a partner in the business. The other partners were Shaya Gluck, Pinchas Herzka and Avraham Matyas.

My cousin took me to Manor Road to buy a shopping bag and to sneak a look at Yosef. He immediately found favor in my eyes and I decided to follow through with the *shidduch*. Initially we met at Rebbetzin Rabinow's house, and then went out several times. A few months later, on 15 Kislev/6 December 1949, we married. Hashem has blessed us tremendously, and we merited much *nachas* from our six children and all of our descendants. The names of our six children are Esther Chaya (Josephs), Faygie (Gross), Shalom Moshe m. Pearly (Leah) nee Adler, Pearl Sarah (Fuchs), Dovid Yehudah m. Henya nee Peretz and Miriam Rochel (Stobiecki).



Reunion in London some years after the war. Standing (l. to r.): Mordechai Schechter, son-in-law of Moshe Dovid Weiss; Berchie Adler, Rav Moshe Konig's nephew, and Asher Konig, Yaakov Dov's son. Seated (l. to r.): Krasl (Karoline), Rav Moshe's oldest daughter from his second marriage; Mrs. Frischman [the author]; Krasl (Camilla) Schechter, with other descendants born after the war

Appendix

Behind the Scenes:
Sources of Historical Information

The following pages will list the sources for the historical information in this book and how these sources were reached. This may serve as somewhat of a guide to families aspiring to research their roots.

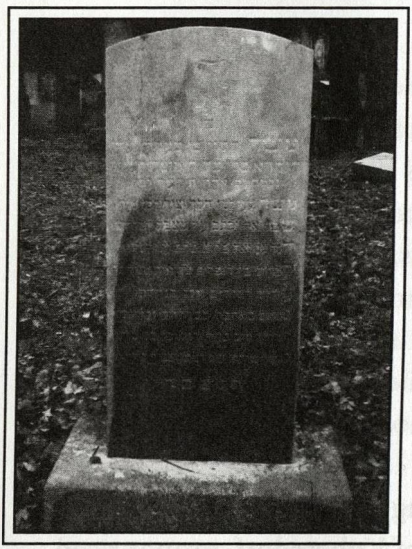
Indeed this was a monumental assignment, creating a full-blown biography of a previously unknown personality who lived over a hundred years ago. At the commencement of this project, all that we had was the childhood memories of Mrs. Frischman (my grandmother), who hadn't even known Rav Moshe Konig personally.

She spoke about him often, telling of her *chashuve* grandfather Rav Moshe Konig, the *dayan* of Kobersdorf, pronounced in her Hungarian accent; Rav Koenig from Koubersdorf. (It is actually usually pronounced as Keinig, as he signed his name קעניג with an ע.) She knew to recount that he was a great person and a tremendous *talmid chachom* and she also recalls other family members, but not much more. There was hardly any substantial evidence of his existence and even his burial site was unknown.

With no doubt, the chief component which made this project achievable, was the tremendous *siyatta d'Shemaya*, clearly visible at every phase.

The first stage was to find his kever. The family recalled that he was buried, according to his request, near the edge of the Kobersdorf, in proximity to the section for stillborn babies and young children. Now, even though the Kobersdorf cemetery was left intact during the war years, the ravages of time have affected the site and the cemetery today is overgrown with weeds and has many overturned tombstones.

A professional undertaker from Vienna was contacted, and he came with some workmen to the cemetery to conduct the search. He later recounted, that after searching unsuccessfully for many hours, with nighttime approaching, he instructed the workmen to give up the search. After they had already taken their tools and placed them in their car, he decided to give one last look. He went back to the cemetery and suddenly stumbled upon a stone protruding from the ground. Thinking that this may be the sought-after tombstone, he called his workers to return with their tools, and after digging and examining this stone he saw that indeed this was the *matzeivah* of Rav Moshe Konig. It was in pristine condition. Being covered in earth for so many years, had apparently served to protect it from the elements.



Rav Moshe's newly erected matzeivah in the Kobersdorf cemetery

Later on, after notifying of the existence of his *kever* to a distinguished historian, who had been convinced that Rav Moshe's gravesite did not exist, the historian mentioned doubt as to whether this is indeed his burial place, since there are no respectable titles inscribed on the *matzeivah* and no mention of

his position as *dayan*. Additionally the day of his passing mentioned on this tombstone contradicted the date mentioned in history books. Somebody then mentioned that he remembered seeing Rav Moshe's will in the home of one of his descendants living in England, and a messenger was immediately dispatched to bring a copy of it. It was discovered that the text on his tombstone corresponded exactly with the instructions in his will, leaving no doubt that the *kever* is indeed his.

The next assignment was to try and determine who indeed this personality was, and how he was viewed by his contemporaries. For this, a search was done in Torah journals and periodicals of his time. A superficial search revealed that he had written extensively and it is apparent from his writings that he was a tremendous *gaon*.

In this aspect as well, the *siyatta d'Shemaya* was clearly evident. A short article was forwarded to the Hebrew Hamodia about the village Kobersdorf, with a request that if anyone had additional information, to please share it. Only one person responded to this request, but with this one individual, a veritable goldmine was obtained.

The name of this person is Mr. Michael Rigler. He is an elderly gentleman who was born in Kobersdorf before the Holocaust, and whose grandfather was the president of the Jewish community there. This gentleman had worked for some thirty years as a head librarian in the National Library of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and fascinatingly he had utilized his position toward memorializing Rav Moshe Konig.

After initiating contact with him — before even telling him what had prompted the request for information, i.e. the quest to glean details about Rav Moshe's life — he asked whether I've ever heard of a *dayan* who had served there named "Rav Moshe Konig."

He then went on to recount that his grandfather had been

in close contact with Rav Moshe and they had held each other in high esteem. Accordingly, he'd had a plan many years earlier to compile a *sefer* by collecting all of Rav Moshe's *chiddushim* that are printed in journals and periodicals of that time. In his job as a librarian he had access to all of these publications. Indeed he had successfully collected hundreds of articles written by him, but, he said, regretfully had never gotten around to arranging them in preparation for print. He then went on to offer me all of these pieces of writing he had put together.

Much information of his personality was gleaned from these writings. In addition to the general *chiddushim* he had written, from which is apparent his erudition in all segments of the Torah, there are a number of articles in matters concerning the Jewish nation and of the struggles endured during his time, and his outlook is presented on these subjects as well. It was also ascertained from his writings in which yeshivahs he had learned and that he had merited learning by three famous luminaries: the Ksav Sofer, Rav Yehudah Assod and Rav Avraham Shag, as there are many quotes in their names.

With time, more written works of his have turned up. Contact with his descendants have brought up a number of manuscripts of his, handwritten notebooks, as well as *sefarim* which were owned by him whose margins are full of his comments. Some of these were discovered in libraries of collectors who had acquired them many years earlier.

A continued search through the *sefarim* authored by Hungarian *rabbanim* during his time revealed a number of responsa written to him, or written concerning his *chiddushim*, from which is apparent the esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries. More letters that had been written to him were uncovered in the annals of the Archive of the Jewish Nation, located on the grounds of the Hebrew University in

Jerusalem. These works are being compiled with the hope to shortly publish a *sefer* with all of his writings.

Now that there was some insight into his character and his personality, it was time for the more difficult mission, of trying to find out about his family and his background. This assignment was made all the more difficult due to the fact that there are so many history books full of inaccurate information. Hence there was the necessity to identify the true facts from erroneous information.

There was some clue to his background, as the marriage certificate of his second marriage exists and is in the possession of one of his descendants. This documents the place of his birth, in the town Nagy-Megyer and details of the family of his second wife, Roth from Györ-Sziget. It also mentions that at that time, in 1884, he already held a position defined as an assistant rabbi.

But for the moment, no names of his siblings were known. Mrs. Frischman did recall that there was one brother of his who had lived in Nagy-Megyer and was very wealthy. There is also mention of an uncle of his, named Rav Itzik Konig who lived in Jerusalem. In his writings, Rav Moshe mentions a written correspondence they had. An additional detail about him was uncovered through a letter to him in the *sefer* of the *rav* of Shuran (*Likutei Chaver*), addressed to "Rav Itzik Konig of Jerusalem, formally of Mezotur."

This was a lead to find out the name of his grandfather. The *chevrah kaddisha* of Jerusalem was contacted with the request to locate the burial site of Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Konig. Indeed his *kever* was located on Har Hazeisim, and on it is inscribed "Rav Yitzchak, son of Rav Dov Ber." This seemed right, as Rav Moshe's oldest son was named Yaakov Dov, apparently with Dov coming from his father's father.

Now to determine the name of his father; in the

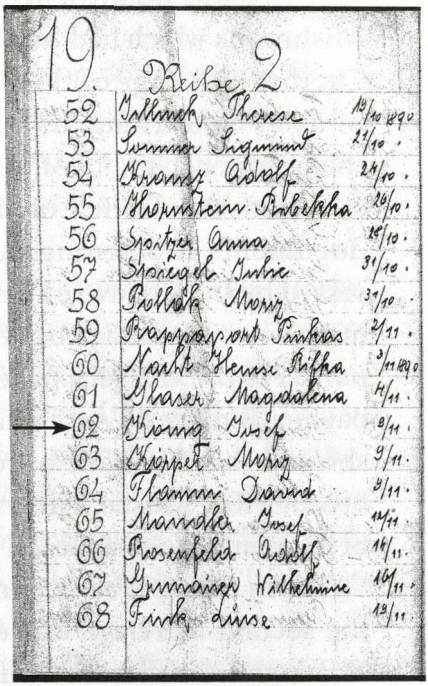
abovementioned marriage certificate, the listed name of his father was Joseph, but this doesn't shed light on his true name, as, since the law required a secular name on official documents, it was common to give a name totally unrelated to the true name.

A small clue was found in the *sefer* of the famous *rav* of Szerdahely, Rav Yehudah Assod. In the sefer, there are a few letters penned to a certain Rav Asher HaLevi Konig in the region of Komaron (where Nagy-Megyer is situated). In one of them, there is mention of a son of this Rav Asher learning in his yeshivah, and as had already been ascertained, Rav Moshe had been a student of Mahari Assod. Indeed these clues were good enough to presume that the name of his father was Rav Asher, but not enough to authenticate the fact. There is additional reason to believe so, as there are a number of grandchildren named Asher, but the fact was only verified after uncovering two additional items of evidence.

The first was through the help of the supreme expert on all matters pertaining to lineage and general history of European Jewry, R' Berish Weber of Brooklyn. Aside for the breadth of knowledge which he has amassed and which he willingly shared with us, he is also exceptional in identifying fact from allusion. He uncovered the birth certificates of several members of the Konig family in Nagy-Megyer. One of them cited the father's name as "Assar Joseph Konig." He found that there was an older brother named Meir Zvi and also a younger sister named Leah.

The second proof was the *kever* of Rav Moshe's father. Interestingly, this *kever* was found precisely on Rav Moshe's hundredth *yahrtzeit*. A clue to find this *kever* was the aforementioned marriage certificate, which gave the place of residence of his parents, Bécs, which means Vienna. A visit to the offices of the old Vienna cemetery and a meticulous search through

their ancient lists, between all the Konigs listed there, brought up a Joseph Konig buried in 1890. This seemed to fit with the sought-out Konig, and a visit to the referred-to plot showed a tombstone with the name Rav Asher Konig. The text on the *matzeivah* included respectable accolades showing that he was a highly regarded personality.


19 Reihe 2

52 Gallmeyer Theresse 18/10 1890
53 Sommer Sigmund 21/10 .
54 Krauss Adolf 24/10 .
55 Bronnstein Rebekka 26/10 .
56 Spitzer Anna 28/10 .
57 Spiegel Julie 31/10 .
58 Rothka Moriz 3/10 .
59 Rappaport Pinkas 2/11 .
60 Markt Henni Rifka 3/11 1890
61 Glaser Magdalena 4/11 .
62 Kiwing Josef 8/11 .
63 Kippert Moriz 9/11 .
64 Flamm David 9/11 .
65 Mandler Josef 14/11 .
66 Rosenfeld Adolf 16/11 .
67 Gumbinger Wilhelmine 16/11 .
68 Finka Luise 19/11 .

Rav Asher Konig listed as Joseph in old records of Vienna's chevrah kaddisha

Adjacent to his *kever* was that of his daughter Leah and her husband Dovid Adler, which informed us of the name of another family member. From this was made aware the identity of a relative whose connection had been previously unknown. The older family members recall an elderly gentleman named Berchie Adler who lived in Jerusalem and died some thirty-five years ago. He kept in contact with the descendants of Rav Moshe Konig, but nobody could figure out what exactly was his relationship. On his *matzeivah* on Har Hazeisim it gives the name Dov ben Dovid, and that clarified his relationship. Later his membership card in the Histadrut (Israeli workers' union) was unearthed which states additionally that his mother's name was Leah, and this confirmed his relationship.

Concerning Rav Moshe's other brothers, Mr. Weber of Brooklyn was very helpful. In addition to uncovering the birth certificate of Meir Zvi Konig, son of Joseph, he also provided a picture of his grave in the Nagy-Megyer cemetery. The wording on his tombstone told of fantastic sums which he gave to

charity, and this confirmed Mrs. Frischman's memories of a rich great-uncle.

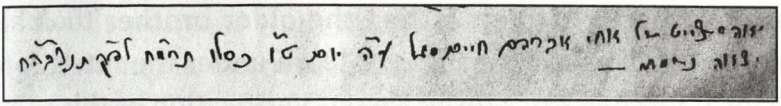
There was no evidence as yet of a second brother, until a Mishnayos which had belonged to Rav Moshe was uncovered. On the front page of this *sefer*, he had jotted down a number of dates concerning his family members. There he writes of the untimely passing of his brother Avraham Chaim.

Additional evidence of him was unearthed while scrutinizing documents concerning the community of Kobersdorf possessed by the Archive of the Jewish Nation in Jerusalem, in the quest for more details on Rav Moshe. In the *chevrah kaddisha pinkas* of the village, a page was unexpectedly found detailing payments made by Avraham Chaim Konig to the *chevrah*. This showed that his place of residence was Kobersdorf near his brother Rav Moshe. Afterwards, Mr. Weber found a record of his marriage to a Gerstl from Kobersdorf.

When trying to ascertain details of Rav Moshe's marriages, the second marriage was easier, due to the existence of the marriage certificate. His wife's parents, Moshe and Finkl Roth, are both buried in the cemetery in Gyor. Finkl's *matzeivah* carries the name of her mother, Chaya Sarah. This verified what had been assumed — she was the daughter of Shlomo Meir and Chaya Sarah Adler of Kobersdorf. This was further verified after Mr. Weber uncovered records of the children of the Adlers of Kobersdorf.

However, there was some confusion regarding his first marriage, as in books on the history and lifetime of Hungarian Rabbis, it is recorded that Rav Moshe was a son-in-law of the Adlers. This didn't seem right for a number of reasons. Also one of the older family members recalled hearing the name Shaya Zolschan.

While perusing through documents in the archive in Jerusalem, as well as documents copied from those in the



Rav Moshe's handwritten record of his brother Rav Avraham Chaim's death

offices of the old community in Eisenstadt, the name Shaya Zolschan, or his secular name Simon, frequently came up on official documents, indicating that he was an important personality. The text on his tombstone affirms that he was also a great *talmid chachom*.

A visit to the Kobersdorf cemetery confirmed that he was indeed the father-in-law of Rav Moshe. In the row of graves of the Zolschan family, adjacent to the *kever* of R' Shaya, is standing a tombstone stating "Here lies Krasl the wife of Rav Moshe Konig, whose soul departed prematurely..." Further along the row is the tombstone of R' Shaya's wife Rachla, upon which it states that in her second marriage she was the wife of the esteemed Rav Menachem Katz, *rav* of Tzehlem. This gives additional indication to the status of the family.

Further verification came with the help of the former mayor of Kobersdorf, Mr. Hausenstiener, who upon request collected details of the family from official records within his reach. He discovered that in 1870, Rav Moshe married the daughter of Simon and Regina Zolschan, nee Adler. He also provided the dates of births and marriages of Rav Moshe's children.

Of Rav Moshe's own lifetime, all that was known was where he was born and where he resided later. Eventually it was perceived that he lived in Janoshaza for about ten years. Reaching this piece of information came through a letter to him in the *sefer Keren LeDovid* of Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald the *rav* of Satmar, where he tributes Rav Moshe as "the mentor of my youth". Now when did Rav Greenwald learn under Rav Moshe?

In the biography of Rav Greenwald's older brother, author of *Arugas HaBosem*, it is recounted, that following the

untimely death of their father, the older brother took his younger siblings to Janoshaza to learn under the tutelage of the local teacher Rav Moshe Konig. Verification of this came upon discovering a *sefer* that had belonged to Rav Moshe in the possession of one of his descendants. On the first page of this *sefer* is a note in Rav Moshe's handwriting that it was acquired in Janoshaza.

The aforementioned biography continues to relate, that afterwards the orphans learned under Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld. This enlightens us as to what period Rav Moshe lived in Janoshaza, as Rav Sonnenfeld left Hungary in 1873. Accordingly, Rav Moshe must have moved there in the early years subsequent to his marriage.

Evidence that he moved back after a few years exists from the text on the tombstone of his first wife. First, the actual fact that she is buried in Kobersdorf indicates that this is probably where she passed away. Then, on the tombstone there is note of the grief felt by the locals upon her passing. This shows that the locals had time to get to know her, and they must have moved there some time prior to her passing. Additionally, the certificate of his second marriage which took place in the same year, 1884, indicates that he had some sort of rabbinic position in the village.

Details of his offspring were attained through birth and marriage certificates as well as other documents, with much input from Rav Moshe's numerous surviving descendants. The Ehrenthals' granddaughter, Edith, daughter of Asher, currently lives in California. As she left Europe in 1938, she managed to retain many documents concerning the family, and she supplied the data which is derived from these documents. She clearly remembers her grandfather Rav Yechezkel, and she also shared her father's memories of the period when he lived in Rav Moshe's home.

On this point as well, Mr. Weber provided invaluable information. He uncovered the *kever* of Yaakov Ehrenthal in Tapolcany. The family hadn't known of an additional son born to Rav Yechezkel. When Edith heard about this *kever*, she suddenly recalled that before her mother passed away in 1959, she had mentioned Yaakov, a brother of her father, who had died young.

R' Yaakov Mordche Konig of London provided details of his grandfather's family, as well as memories of his youth in Janoshaza. The Weisses have a granddaughter living in London, Mrs. A. Gutman, who supplied the data on her family. Additionally, Mrs. Frischman remembered the family from her visits to them in Vienna and their visits to Kobersdorf during the summer, and much of the information came from her.

Even though Mrs. Frischman couldn't bring photos and documents with her from Europe, as the Nazis confiscated all personal artifacts from the inmates in the camps, afterwards she obtained the collection of her Aunt Karoline and from her cousin Berchie Adler. Her son, R' Dovid Frischman of London exerted great effort searching through piles of old documents and photos to find relevant items.

In order to add import to this narrative, additional historical information was compiled, concerning the yeshivahs and Jewish life in Hungary during those years, specifically that of the Sheva Kehillos. This was collected through extensive research, via printed matter and through interviewing elderly people who remember the communities of old and those who have collections from ancestors who led these communities. Biographical information was gathered from introductions to *sefarim* authored by the *rabbanim* of the communities which are portrayed, as well as from memorial books of the various communities.

The following is a partial bibliography of the many Hebrew-language books used in the research:

- ישיבות הונגריה בגדלותן ובחורבנן, אברהם פוקס, ירושלים.
- אגרות סופרים, הג"ר שלמה סופר אב"ד בערעגסאס.
- קורות התורה והאמונה בהונגריה, יקותיאל יהודה גרינוואלד, סיגעט-קולומבוס.
- לפלגות ישראל באונגריא, הנ"ל.
- תולדות הגאון ר' אברהם שאג הנדפס בס' דרשות הרא"ש, ר' אנשיל שוואַרטץ, בורו-פארק.
- כתב זאת זכרון, ר' אברהם שמואל בנימין שרייבר, ניו יארק.
- אהל עולמים, ר' אביגדור הכהן קאטצבורג.
- החתם סופר ותלמידיו, ר' אלכסנדר זושא קינצטליכר בני ברק.
- קהילות הונגריה, הוצאת מכון ירושלם.
- זכור זאת ליעקב, הרב בנציון ראקאב, לודנון.
- תולדות וחי' רבי מנחם כץ פרוסטיץ, טובי' יואל שטיינר.
- ובעוד מהקדמות ותולדות שבספרי המחברים המוזכרים.

Information was also gathered from German-language books on the Sheva Kehillos. Some of these books are: *Gedenkbuch der Untergegangen Judengemeinden des Burgenlandes*, by Hugo Gold (1970); *Die Ehmalige Judische gemeinde Kobersdorf*, by a former mayor of Kobersdorf, Erwin Hausenstiener, who has a great interest in memorializing the rich history of the Jewish community of Kobersdorf. Information was also gleaned from *Auf verwehten spuren das Judische erbe im Burgenland*, by N. Magnus. Mrs. Magnus also graciously shared some photos from her collection of the *rabbanim* of the communities. Some facts and data on Hungarian communities were garnered from *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary* and from other similar works authored on the subject.

Additionally, a great deal of data on the life of the *rabbanim* of the Sheva Kehillos was provided by Rabbi Yechiel Goldhaber

of Jerusalem. He has compiled a spectacular anthology on the subject, which he hopes to publish. He graciously shared with this manuscript us, and much of the information in this book was derived from it.

The Chief Rabbi of Geneva, Rav Avraham Schlesinger *shlit"a*, whose father was the last *rav* of Eisenstadt, was extremely supportive of this project. He gave much of his precious time to share significant details concerning Jewish life in the Sheva Kehillos. He also shared his photos and documents.

A descendant of the *rabbanim* of Kobersdorf, Mr. Moshe Lipschutz of Jerusalem, also kindly shared his collection of information and photos of his ancestors, and provided details about life in the village in general. Details and photos of Lakenbach were supplied chiefly by the family of Rav Gestetner *zt"l* of Bnei Brak. Mr. Binyamin Luria of Jerusalem, born in Tzehlem and whose family came from Kobersdorf, shared his memories of the Sheva Kehillos, as well as documents which he found after the war in the community offices of Eisenstadt.

Some facts on the community of Nagy-Megyer were heard from Rav Eizik Haberfeld *shlit"a* of Jerusalem. He had studied in his youth in the yeshivah of Szerdahely, near Nagy-Megyer, and he shared his memories of the town as well as of yeshivah life in general during the period preceding the war. Details and photos from Rimaszombat were shared by the Steiner family from Israel, descendants of the *rav*, Rav Elazar Singer.

The Holocaust travails of Mrs. Frischman are from her own memoirs. Already while in Auschwitz, she felt that her experiences should be committed to writing, but understandably that wasn't possible — besides for the fact that there was no paper or pen to be had there. Later in Allendorf labor camp, she procured some paper and pencils but had no time to write.

Then a month after being liberated by the Americans, she sat down and committed her story to writing. The story here is based on these memoirs with additional details which she recounted later.

Glossary

The following glossary provides a partial explanation of some of the Hebrew, Yiddish (Y.) and Aramaic (A.) words and phrases used in this book. The spellings and explanations reflect the way the specific word is used herein. Often, there are alternate spellings and meanings for the words.

aron — burial casket.
aron kodesh — ark in which sifrei Torah are kept.
av beis din — head of a Jewish court of law.
avodas Hashem — service of G-d.
baal habayis (baalei batim – pl.) — layman; member of the community.
baal korei — the Torah reader; the man who reads the Torah for the congregation in the synagogue.
bachur (bachurim – pl.) — a young, unmarried man; yeshivah student.
beis midrash — a "house of Jewish learning" where men gather to study.
bimah — a pulpit; the reader's desk in the synagogue.
bitachon — faith and trust in G-d.
bris milah — the ritual of circumcision.
chassan — a bridegroom.
chazzan (chazzanim – pl.) — a cantor; one who leads the congregation in the prayer service.
cheder — lit., "room"; (Y., colloq.) a Jewish primary school for boys.
chessed — lovingkindness; acts of kindness.
chevrah kaddisha (A.) — lit., "the sacred society"; Jewish burial society.
chiddush (chiddushim – pl.) — a new, original explanation of a Torah topic.

chol hamoed — the intermediate days of Pesach and Sukkos.

daven (Y.) — pray.

davening (Y.) — praying.

dayan (dayanim – pl.) — a judge in a Jewish court of law.

derashah (derashos – pl.) — a lecture or sermon in which a Torah topic is elucidated.

ehrliche Yidden (Y.) — honest, upright Jews.

farher (Y.) — oral examination or review.

frum (Y.) — religious; observant.

gabbai — a secretary or treasurer of a synagogue; a Chassidic Rebbe's attendant.

gadol (gedolim – pl.) — great Torah sage and leader.

gaon (geonim – pl.) — a genius in Torah learning.

gemilus chasadim — acts of kindness.

halachah (halachos –pl.) — the entire body of Jewish law; a specific law.

hesped — eulogy.

kehillah (kehillos – pl.) — a Jewish community or congregation.

Kiddush Hashem — the sanctification of G-d's Name.

kittel (Y.) — a white robe worn by men at the Seder and on the High Holidays.

lamdan — Torah scholar possessing an in-depth knowledge of the Talmud.

matzeivah — a tombstone.

mechitzah — the partition which separates the men's and women's sections in a synagogue.

melamed — a teacher of Torah.

metzitzah b'peh — a custom in the bris milah ceremony in which the mohel places his mouth directly on the circumcision wound to draw blood away from the cut.

minhag (minhagim – pl.) — Jewish custom.

mitzvah (mitzvos – pl.) — (a) Torah commandment; good deed.

mohel — one who performs ritual circumcision.

nachas — pride; pleasure; satisfaction.

niftar — a deceased person.

psak — halachic decision.

rav (rabbanim – pl.) —rabbi.

rebbi muvhak — one's primary rabbi or teacher.

rosh hakahal (roshei kehillos – pl.) — community leader.

schmaltz (Y.) — animal fat.
sefer (sefarim – pl.) — holy book.
sefer Torah (sifrei Torah – pl.) — Torah scroll.
semichah — rabbinical ordination.
seudah shelishis — the third Sabbath meal.
shailah (shailos – pl.) — halachic question.
shamash — an assistant in a synagogue.
shechitah — Jewish ritual slaughter.
Sheva Kehillos — a term for the seven Jewish communities in Burgenland, Austria.
shidduch — a marital match.
shochet — a ritual slaughterer.
shul — a synagogue.
sugya (A.) — a specific topic of Talmudic discussion.
takanos — resolutions for improvement.
tallis (talleisim – pl.) — a fringed prayer shawl worn during prayer.
talmid (talmidim – pl.) — student; disciple.
talmid chacham (talmidei chachomim – pl.) — Torah scholar.
techiyas hameisim — the resurrection of the dead.
tefillah (tefillos – pl.) — prayer.
tisch (Y.) — lit., table; a gathering of Chassidim around their Rebbe at his table.
tzaddik (tzaddikim – pl.) — a righteous, holy person.
tzedakah — charity.
Yidden (Y.) — Jews.
Yiddishkeit (Y.) — Judaism.
yemach shemo (yemach shemam –pl.) — May his name be blotted out.
yiras Shamayim — fear of Heaven.

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...The holy communities of Burgenland, which were home to many of that generation's gedolim. Of those were Rabbeinu Akiva Eiger, Rabbeinu the Chasam Sofer, his son Rav Shimon Sofer. These towns were all holy communities, with gedolei Yisrael as rabbanim, and with yeshivos kedoshos. How wonderful it is that you compiled divrei Torah and stories about Yiddishkeit and yiras Hashem...

HaRav Yitzchok Tuvia Weiss
Av Beis Din, Edah HaChareidis, Yerushalayim

Rav Moshe Konig (1844 - 1914), an erudite and humble Torah scholar from the Hungarian town of Kobersdorf, was the prototype of a *talmid chacham* produced in the famed Sheva Kehillos, seven distinct Hungarian communities in the Burgenland district from the early 1700s until their decimation with the Anschluss in 1938.

Rav Konig's personal biography, intertwined with the general story of life in the Sheva Kehillos profiling many of the great luminaries who served these communities, opens a window into the illuminating world and pious deeds of a world that was, filled with uncompromising adherence to halachah and tradition. This comprehensive historical documentary, featuring over 200 photos, highlights the flourishing communities and their yeshivahs, and details the *rabbanim* who served there.

זכרון קהילות

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