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A Selection of Famous Rabbinic Portraits and Their Origins - Part I

By Mizrahi Book Store/JudaicUsed.com

This is a revised version of an article Yisroel Mizrahi originally published in the Jewish Press

The power of a portrait of great men is of utmost important in Judaism. The Medrash writes how Yosef Hatzadik was saved from sin, by his seeing an image of his father's likeness. Rebbi stated that the reason that he was sharper in learning than his peers, was due to his meriting to see Rabbi Meir (Talmud Eruvin 13:). Thus it is not surprising, that nearly every Jewish home today is adorned with portraits of great leaders, from contemporary, to Rabbis from centuries ago.

Historically though, in many circles there was much opposition to the creation of portraits and later of photographs. In early Hasidut, as well in Kabbalistic circles, the making of a portrait was often frowned upon and forbidden.

For the Jews of Arab lands, the surrounding Muslim cultures prohibited the creation of portraits and thus for the Jews that lived among Muslims, it is rare to find any portraits made until recent times.

In light of this, it is fascinating to see the origins of the portraits that did make it down to us through time and the circumstances that they were made in. Below is a look in to some of the more familiar portraits of Gedolim that are known today and their origins.

R. Akiva Eger 1761-1837

Der Marktplaz in Posen, with R. Akiva Eiger in lower left

Portraits of R. Akiva Eiger seem to have appeared already during his lifetime, though it is unknown how and when they were originally made. One example, a painting done by Julius Knorr, named Der Marktplaz in Posen (1838), shows a large market scene, with three elderly rabbis carrying canes walking together on the lower left-hand corner.

The figure in the center is R. Akiva Eiger, who most likely was unaware that an illustration was being made of his likeness. R. Eiger was 74 years old at the time and is depicted walking with difficulty, he passed away just a few months later. Years later, a publisher enlarged this portion of the painting, depicting the three Rabbis, and produced it as a print titled, " Our Rabbi Ekiva Eger z"l, when he was 74 years of age in a street in the city of Posen, accompanied by two rabbinic judges of the city, R. Jacob Kalvary and R. Moshe Landsberg z"l.

The portrait of R. Akiva Eiger standing alone that we are more familiar with today, was printed as lithographs already in his lifetime, published by Simon Fils in Strasbourg.

Lithograph of portrait of R. Akiva Eger published by Simon Fils in

Strasbourg.

R. Moshe Sofer, the Chatam Sofer (1762-1839)

Portrait of the Chatam Sofer, based on the drawing by his talmid Rabbi Yissachar Ber Frank

R. Rabbi Yissachar Ber Frank was a close talmid of the Chatam Sofer and a scribe and trustee of the Jewish Community of Pressburg. When. R. Yissachar Ber's daughter reached marriageable age, he was unable to come up with the funds to marry her off. Preferring to avoid charity, he drew a likeness of his Rebbe, the

Chatam Sofer and made prints based on his own drawing which he sold off to cover the marriage costs. It is said that when the Chatam Sofer discovered that his portrait was being sold, he summoned R. Ber and rebuked him for painting his likeness and distributing it without his permission, telling him "You did not want to show your face so you showed mine instead?".

Recently surfaced portrait of the Chatam Sofer

Recently, a second portrait of the Chatam Sofer surfaced, created by the artist Josef Edward August von Gillern (1794-1845). This portrait was in the hands of a family descendant from the Chatam Sofer and the family's tradition is that this bears a true likeness of the Chatam Sofer.

Rambam (1135-1204)

The Rambam's portrait in Thesaurus Antiquitatum Sacrarum

A more recent artist's rendition of the Rambam's portrait

Though we can all bring to mind the famous portrait of the Rambam, Moses Maimonides, where did the portrait originate? The source of this now classic portrait is surprisingly, a non-Jewish work, Thesaurus Antiquitatum Sacrarum (1744-69), a 34 volume Encyclopedia written in Latin. The author of this work

states that he obtained the portrait from an old tablet, but not giving any additional information. This portrait was later "discovered" by the Italian Rabbi Isacco Samuele Reggio, 1784-1855 who sent it to a German friend named Solomon Stern who went on to print it and disseminate it. By the early 1900s, this portrait was popularized with appearances in Haggadot, Sukkah Decorations and on the cover of a popular Mahberet, used by numerous school children in the early 1900s

Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760)

Though no authentic portrait of the Baal Shem Tov exists, a portrait of another 18th century Rabbi has long been confused as being of the Baal Shem Tov's. The familiar portrait of the founder of Hasidut, is actually a portrait of the Baal Shem of London, Hayyim Samuel Jacob Falk (1708-1782). The Baal Shem of London was an enigmatic figure, a Rabbi, Alchemist and Kabbalist, he was revered widely as a miracle worker.

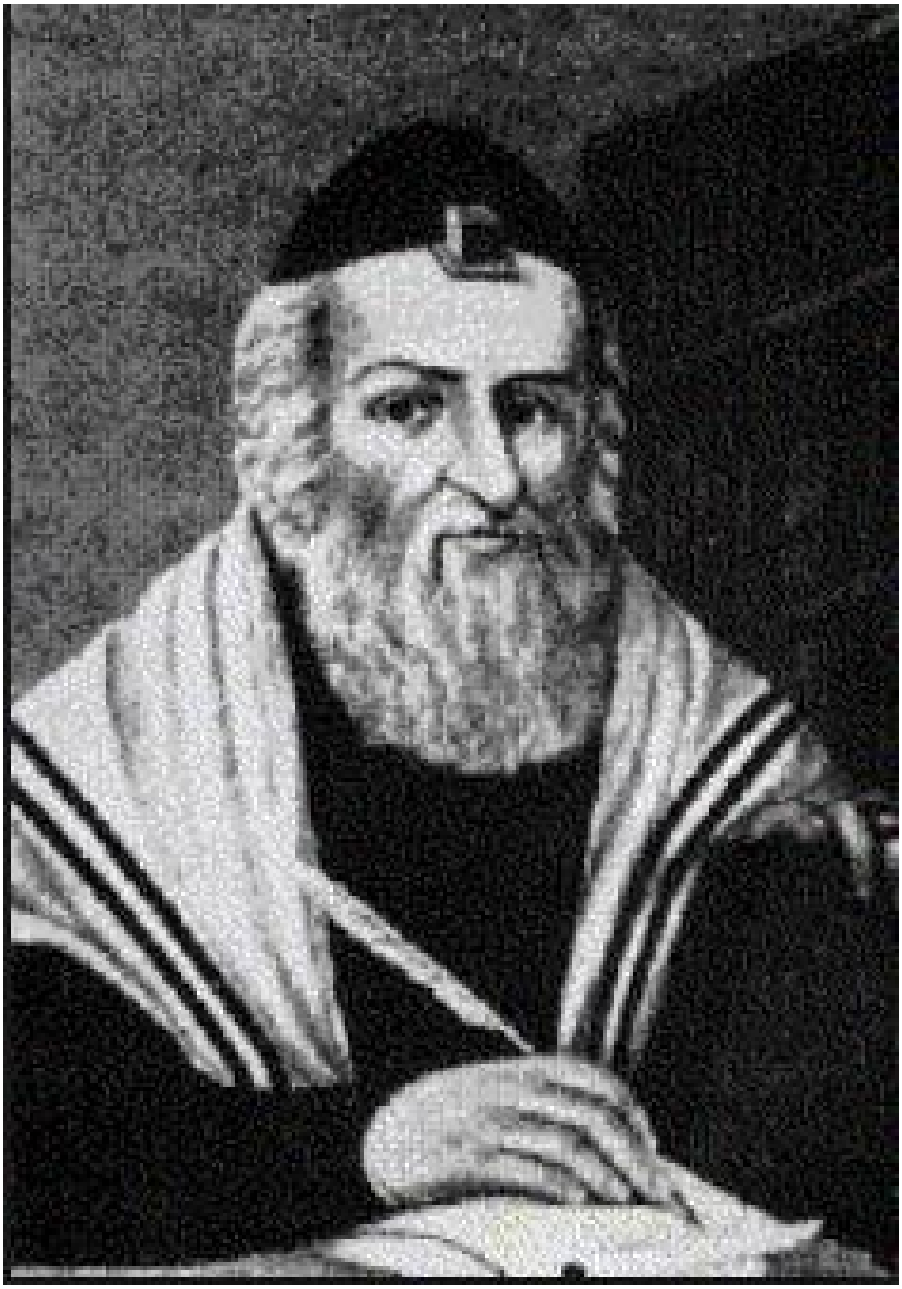
The portrait of his that we have has traditionally been ascribed to the artist John Singleton Copley. In the original portrait, formerly owned by the Anglo-Jewish scholar Cecil Roth, the Baal Shem is seen in Eastern style clothing and holding a compass, something that would have been very out of place in a portrait of the Baal Shem Tov, but more expected in one of the Baal Shem of London. The portrait got confused early on with the "other" Baal Shem, and the portrait can now be found on numerous biographies, illustrations, postage stamps, postcards and the like being passed off as R. Israel Baal Shem.

The Vilna Gaon (1729-1797)

Of the Vilna Gaon, only one portrait from his lifetime is known, estimated to have been made ca. 1750-1755.

The only contemporary portrait of the Vilna Gaon

This illustration slowly evolved, with different artists adding details to the portrait, adding tefillin to the Gaon's head, alternating between different attire and leading us to the more familiar portrait that is common today.



An "updated" version of the Vilna Gaon's portrait

Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz (1690/95-1764)

Engraving produced by Dr Elimelech Pulda (or Pulder) of R. Jonathan Eybeschuetz'

Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz's portrait that we are familiar with today, is based on an engraving produced by Dr Elimelech Pulda (or Pulder). R. Yaakov Emden, R. Eybeshutz's archenemy writes that the followers of R. Jonathan Eybeschuetz created their rabbi's portrait, in order to kiss and hug it, and went as

far as to accuse one of R. Jonathan Eybeschutz's followers of placing a portrait of R. Eybeschuetz in the Aron Kodesh. Setting aside these accusations, R. Jonathan Eybeschutz's portrait was often reproduced in etchings and engravings already during his lifetime and was revered by many of his followers as an amulet.

Rabbi Yehuda Aszod (1796–1866)

Rabbi Yehuda Aszod was of the most revered Rabbis in Hungary, a close friend of the Chatam Sofer and leader of Hungarian Orthodoxy. Despite R. Aszod's known opposition to his photograph being taken, his students or perhaps members of the community were keen on obtaining a photograph of their beloved rabbi, after his passing in 1866. During the funeral, R. Aszod was dressed in his Shabbat clothing and a large sefer was placed in his hands. He was then propped up in his

chair and a photograph was taken and was quickly reproduced and disseminated (Post-mortem portraits were an accepted practice in the 19th century). Contemporary accounts state that the money received from sale of this photograph was used to help marry off R. Aszod's daughters. There are accounts that say that all those involved in arranging and taking of this photograph were punished and all died within a year of R. Aszod's passing.

R. Hezekiah da Silva, the Peri Hadash (1659-1698)

The Peri Hadash, R. Hezekiah da Silva was born in Livorno, Italy in 1659. In 1691, he was in Amsterdam, for the purpose of printing his sefer, the Peri Hadash on Yoreh Deah. During his period in Amsterdam, the community offered

him the position of Rabbi of the city, and as a token of appreciation and admiration, commissioned his portrait. The portrait shows the Peri Hadash dressed in the manner of a Turkish Jew, with a Kaveze on his head and wearing a fur-trimmed coat. In the 19th century, a reproduction was made of this portrait with an inscription stating that one must bless Shehechiyanu for seeing an illustration of the Peri Hadash.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Baal HaTanya (1745-1813)

The portrait that we are today familiar with of the founder of the Chabad Hasidism, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, first surfaced in the late 19th century.

Within Chabad, there is a tradition that this illustration is authentic and bears a true likeness of the Ba'al Hatanya. Others maintain that this portrait was the work of the famed artist Boris Schatz, who drew the painting approximately in 1887. Boris Schatz is said to have used several descendants of the Ba'al Hatanya as models for his portrait, in his attempt to achieve as close as possible of a resemblance to what the Ba'al Hatanya actually looked like.

a very partial list of Sources:

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Baal Shem Tov: The Ba'al Shem of London and the Philosopher's Stone: his portrait still isn't the Ba'al Shem Tov's by Shimon Steinmentz

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R. Hezekiah da Silva, the Peri Hadash: Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe by Richard I. Cohen page 143

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi: Between hagiography and historiography: Chabad, scholars of Hasidism, and the case of the portrait of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady by Wojciech Tworek

With thanks to the following people who assisted me with the writing of this article: Shimon Steinmetz, Yitzchak Strohe, Menachem Silber, Zalman Alpert, Ovadia Hoffman and Philip Steiglitz

Reprinted from the February 1, 2019 email of MizrahiBookStore.com To learn more about the fascinating Marine Park Jewish book store (Mizzrahi Book Store) go to page 38 and read a feature titled "The Sephardic Bibliophile of Brooklyn."

For Years I felt Rejected by My Hasidic Neighbours. But COVID-19 Brought Us Together

By Joseph Rosen

Special to the Globe and Mail

Hasidic Jews in Montreal gather for morning prayers on their front porches, on May 4, 2020. (Photo by Lewis Cohen)

I live on a Montreal block in Mile End, once the neighbourhood of Mordecai Richler, which is now 50-per-cent Hasidic Jews – an ultra-Orthodox sect that prays three times a day, and wears black hats imitating 18th-century Polish aristocracy.

While I live among them as a secular Jew, and have friendly relations with some neighbours, the Hasidim separate themselves from me and my social world.

For many in the neighbourhood, including me, social distance with our counterparts is nothing new.

But COVID-19 quarantine protocols, while physically distancing me from secular society, have brought me socially closer to my Hasidic neighbours. Morning and night, their voices sing out in prayer: ancient Middle Eastern melodies float through the pandemic-emptied street, bringing archaic echoes of spiritual yearning to the urban streetscape.

Fathers, sons, grandfathers and grandsons – it's only ever men – cluster together on front stoops, lean out from balconies, and dot the sidewalk. Melancholic songs ring up and down the street in passionate call and response, and passersby stare in wonder. After weeks of this outdoor synagogue, I see that the Hasidim have something to teach us seculars about what it means for a community to reconnect in a COVID-19 world.

Joseph Rosen

My first response wasn't so romantic. Hearing noises coming from my balcony, I stepped outside and was surprised to see four Hasidic brothers praying on the adjacent balcony. I went downstairs to see that my neighbour's front stoop was the centre of the service, and immediately worried that this religious ritual might increase my family's risk of infection.

Years ago, my neighbour put up a green plastic fence to separate our front stoops. I felt rejected. Since COVID-19, the same neighbour brings out a Torah (a

ritual Bible scroll) on a portable table, and I find the front of my house at the heart of their religious services.

Because Orthodox Jews must pray communally in a “minyan" of at least 10 men, the Hasidim were in a bind when the government shuttered all religious buildings and forbade religious services. Rabbis, in accordance with government directives, forbade having minyans in person. Improvising, as Jews have often done living under regimes that forbid Jewish practice, my Orthodox neighbours took to the streets so that, while remaining two metres apart, they could continue to pray together. Instead of hiding in caves and basements – as Jews sometimes had to do in centuries past – the new coronavirus has driven them outdoors.

My Curiosity Overcame My Fear

One morning my curiosity overcame my fear and I walked out to the sidewalk when I heard them chanting. As much as I enjoy secular life, I found myself missing a sense of spiritual connection. It was cold, with a smattering of April snow on the ground. In addition to COVID-19, we have to survive what Montreal calls “spring” together.

My neighbour had started praying with his son, and he watched for others to emerge from their front doors. White tallit – prayer shawls embroidered with silver and blue – covered their heads. They wore tefillin: black leather boxes containing parchment inscribed with Hebrew verses, which are wrapped with leather straps onto the forehead and arm.

Identifying a Minyan of 10

My neighbour walked up and down the sidewalk looking to connect with other Hasidim as they came out across the street and down the block. Silent, so as not to interrupt the order of prayers, they made hand gestures to each other like third base coaches, holding up fingers to indicate how many were praying. My neighbour signalled to a man a few houses away who peeked into his neighbour’s window: two fingers. When they identified a minyan of 10 they said Kaddish. The prayer is recited by mourners for 11 months after a close relative dies. In Judaism, one doesn’t mourn alone – but surrounded by community.

The first Montrealer to die of COVID-19 was a 67-year-old Hasid who went to a synagogue two blocks away from me. Online news articles about the community became a hotspot of anti-Semitic ranting. The Hasidim felt immediately targeted. “The level of hatred, the level of focus, of scapegoating, has gone beyond anything we have seen before,” said one Hasid. When a janitor was seen cleaning a synagogue, a neighbour called the police and eight cop cars showed up. There are reports of verbal attacks on the street, and Hasidim being told to stick with “Jewish stores.”

A few unfortunately timed weddings, big families and travel back and forth may explain why my co-religionists were initially hit harder than other communities. And as friends and I joked, after Justin Trudeau warned against "speaking moistly," energetic schmoozing might have been a factor in the Jewish transmission rate (JR0).

Some argue that they have been socially irresponsible, but the Hasidim are not libertarian yahoos: It is their communal commitments that have made them – and potentially my front yard – more vulnerable to the coronavirus. We worshippers of the secular indulge in unnecessary COVID-19 risks, too.

Some go for runs in busy parks. Others order delivery from Pizza Pizza. My COVID-19 vices are social: ringing a friend's doorbell to sing happy birthday to their child, midnight scotch drinking with friends (at two metres) and visiting my girlfriend across town (at nowhere near two metres). The risks we take are based on what we value most.

The Hasidim Pray Together

The Hasidim pray together. And my neighbours, facing the green fence, sing loudly right onto my stoop, potentially increasing my viral exposure. The coronavirus highlights how permeable the borders are between our bodies, and how much our private choices affect everyone around us.

After stepping onto the sidewalk that morning, I strolled up and down the block, seeing a Hasid every three or four houses. The silver embroidery on their tallit flashed brightly in the sun, imparting a splendour one does not see indoors.

One man shouted his prayer from out of his open window on the second floor. I didn't understand the words, and the singing wasn't classically "beautiful" like the choirs in more mainstream synagogues and churches. But his voice rang out with a pained yearning that resonates in this time of uncertainty. At various points congregants yelled, so that all can hear, "Amen," pronounced "Oh-MAIN," meaning "so be it!"

They All Simultaneously Went Quiet

And then they all simultaneously went quiet. They prayed the Amidah, a prayer said silently on one's own. Closing their eyes they turned east – in the direction of Jerusalem – and began to bob up and down, swaying back and forth. Their fervour infected me, and I took a moment to stand, in the stillness of morning, feeling the weight and uncertainty of the pandemic that led to this outdoor synagogue. So many things seemed less important, and something – although I'm not sure what – felt more important.

They know what they're praying; I don't. They know what brings them together; we don't. To what will we seculars say "Amen"?

On Saturday morning, the Jewish Sabbath, I decided to join their minyan. I feared they wouldn't count me as a Jew, but I put on a tie, a black jacket and my yarmulke – the religious head covering that, along with hijabs, Quebec has banned from public office.

They Saw Me with Surprised but Welcoming Eyes

They saw me with surprised but welcoming eyes. My neighbour whisked a Torah out of his house, like it was a famous celebrity and he was a security detail.

They signalled back and forth silently to determine who would read and sing which parts. I let go of my insecurity and joined the chorus shouting "Amen!"

After the service everyone met one another's eyes to congratulate each other. They looked at me too, smiling, and said "Good Shabbos!" Infected by their communal warmth, I felt connected to these previously distant neighbours.

Later that afternoon, walking down the street I asked a Hasid about the "Parsha HaShavua" – the section of the Torah they read that week. It addressed impurity: how to purify women who have given birth and men who have wasted an "emission" – meaning an ejaculation that has not landed in the divinely sanctified receptacle. Then it addressed how to purify someone with leprosy after a seven-day quarantine. "Just like now!" the Hasid said enthusiastically: "It was a disease that no one knew how to heal." If a leper gets better, but their house remains unclean, concludes the Torah portion, it must be rebuilt using new materials.

The Hasidim have already figured out how to reorganize themselves, during COVID-19, based on their deepest values. And we – one of the most privileged societies in human history, who have known neither drought nor famine, war nor plague – need to do the same.

The Sabbath is the Day When We Pause All Forms of Labour

The Sabbath is the day when we pause all forms of labour; it provides an opportunity to reconnect to the deeper values guiding our work week. COVID-19 has provided us seculars with just such a pause. In this time of physical distance and suspended labour, we must reimagine how we will reorganize our society.

How we will restructure our economy – to come together, productively, without "wasting emissions"? Given the plague of global warming, we cannot just return to "business as usual": We need to discuss whether we must rebuild our house from scratch. We must rediscover the values that guide us. This is the conversation we need to have now: passionately, but not moistly.

Reprinted from the May 4, 2020 website of the Globe and Mail (Toronto) Joseph Rosen teaches at Dawson College in Montreal.

As L.A.-based Coffee Bean Drops Kosher Status, Orthodox Customers Fight Back

By Louis Keene

Sarah Blitzstein (far left). Above, they took photos with their favorite barista, Diana, after finishing their second Coffee Bean 5K in 2017. Photo courtesy of Sarah.

A few years ago, Sarah Blitzstein and a few close friends mapped out an unconventional 5K route. Instead of passing through local parks

or looping around prominent Los Angeles landmarks, they chose branches of an institution that had been central to their friendship dating back to their youth: The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

"It was our favorite place to hang out," Blitzstein said. "It was our gathering place."

Sarah Blitzstein (far left). Above, they took photos with their

They stopped at three or four Coffee Bean franchises around LA's west side along the route, drinking pre-run coffee drinks at one and stopping for water at another. When they reached the finish line, Coffee Bean baristas — friends they had made over years of breakfast pastries and afternoon Ice Blended drinks — were awaiting with a congratulatory sign for their longtime patrons.

Today, Blitzstein can quickly produce photos of yarmulke-wearing family friends drinking Ice Blendeds from Coffee Bean's trademark purple straws. "Half of my friends' kids learned how to walk there," she said.

What made the Coffee Bean an institution among Orthodox Jewish Americans like Blitzstein was the ***hechsher***, or kosher certification, which applied also to the entirety of the chain's wide selection of beverages, as well as baked goods, sandwiches, and salads, in the vast majority of its 1,000-plus stores in the United States. In many places, like a college campus with no kosher dining hall, or the Las Vegas Strip, Coffee Bean could be the only kosher establishment around.

A Statement Announcing their Move
To Non-Kosher Bakery Offierings

But in a statement posted to its website on May 12, the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf Corporation announced it would move to non-kosher bakery offerings, effectively forfeiting its certification storewide. The statement cited consumer research and the economic exigencies of the coronavirus pandemic, and noted that some packaged food offerings and all beverage ingredients would remain kosher.

The non-kosher food options will begin appearing in Coffee Bean display cases on June 8.

"It's very upsetting," Blitzstein said of the news. "This is going to be a huge deal in the community."

The announcement generated a swift uproar in among American Orthodox Jews. Multiple petitions to keep Coffee Bean kosher were launched on Change.org, one of which drew 5,000 signatures within 24 hours of its creation.

Zev Hurwitz, 28, the author of the more widely shared petition, wrote it shortly after learning the news, which he said came as a shock.

"I was raised on Ice Blendeds," he said, referring to the company's signature frozen drink, "and I had an iced coffee phase when I was in college." A few years

ago, he was obsessed with the Citrus Yuzu tea, a seasonal offering. "I spent like every dollar I earned that summer buying more of it," he said.

Coffee Bean's hechsher and ubiquity in the LA area gave it a value in professional settings that would be hard to replace. If a kosher blueberry muffin had shared a display case with a *traif*, or non-kosher sandwich, Hurwitz said he would not eat it.

"Coffee Bean is one of the only places I felt comfortable going to meet clients or donors," he said. "Otherwise it would be weird, like 'Why aren't you getting something to eat here?'"

The Kashrut Commitment of a Company Founded by Jews in 1963

The kashrut commitment of Coffee Bean, which was founded by Jews in 1963 and was majority-owned for decades by the Sassoons, a Jewish family, has diminished since private equity took a stake in the company in 2013.

In 2017, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf corporate began allowing privately owned franchisees to opt out of the kosher program, according to Kosher LA, which certified the stores in Southern California. Gradually, Coffee Beans at Paramount Studios in Century City and at Los Angeles International Airport gave up their certifications.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles-headquartered company was shifting its focus overseas, particularly in Asia, where it opened hundreds of stores, including a kosher franchise in Singapore, where the Sassoon family had roots. Spokespersons for The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf did not return The Forward's request for comment.

A Fixture of Orthodox Life in Southern California

In 2019, Jollibee, a food conglomerate based in the Philippines, acquired the company for $450 million and moved the headquarters to Manila. But in Southern California, Coffee Bean, whose bakery items included challah at some locations, remained a fixture of Orthodox life, a gathering place treasured by Jewish communities all along the coast, and an oasis in many kosher deserts.

"If you are on the Las Vegas Strip, you can hop into the Venetian and get something to eat," Hurwitz said. At University of California San Diego, where he received his undergraduate education, Coffee Bean was the only kosher option besides the Jewish Community Center café.

The affinity of Jewish customers for the cafes, recognizable for their mahogany-panelled interiors and faux shipping crate displays, was alluded to by the May 12 statement. "We have long been committed to providing food and

beverage offers that delight and inspire our Guests, including the Orthodox community," it begins.

But, the letter states, a "listening campaign" embarked on by Coffee Bean corporate demonstrated that the "ever-changing tastes and preferences" of its patrons made switching to non-kosher bakery the appear financially practical. The change was initially planned as a phased rollout, but the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the timeline.

Publicly, the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf has rejected the possibility of keeping stores in Orthodox neighborhoods kosher-certified. A representative told Jewish Journal reporter Kylie Ora Lobell that non-kosher status would apply to all stores "in looking at our overall business needs while at the same time trying to maintain a consistent brand experience across all of our locations."

The Situation is Still Evolving

However, Rabbi Jonathan Benzaquen, director of kashrut for Kosher LA, which had certified the Coffee Bean restaurants, told The Forward the situation was still evolving. He declined further comment in deference to a statement he said Kosher LA would issue on Monday.

Hurwitz said if the petition reaches 10,000 signatures, he would take next steps in reaching out to Coffee Bean's corporate leadership to see if some compromise could be reached.

"This is something people care about," he said. "This is something people are sharing. This is something people are spending money to support."

__Louis Keene is a journalist in Los Angeles.

Reprinted from the May 16, 2020 website of the FORWARD.

The Novominsker Rebbe, My Cousin

By Susannah Heschel

Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, who died of the coronavirus at 89, was a person of deeds who wanted to inspire us. How can we emulate him?

Rabbi Yaakov Perlow in 2019 courtesy of Agudath Israel of America.

With the tragic death of each great rabbi, the Mishnah Sotah teaches, all Israel is diminished and bereft: We lose the unique gifts of that individual person who has taught and guided us. Yet it is not the same view from heaven: "Precious in the sight of the L-rd is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:14).

The Novominsker rebbe, zz"l, died from the horrific COVID-19 plague, and we are diminished by the loss of an extraordinary person, a rebbe who guided us,

uplifted us; a bridge builder and a model of how to be a Jew. His grandfather and my grandmother were twins, back in Warsaw. Their pictures are on my living room wall, his picture hangs above my desk, and a small photo of his father is in my wallet. How odd, some might think, that the grandchildren of these twins would lead such divergent lives.

Since his death, many have written about private meetings with the rebbe and the ways he helped them—with a show of public kindness for a young boy who felt alienated from his peers, with generosity and sympathy for a husband or wife who had lost a close family member. Together with the rebbetzin, his home was open, and he was always available to listen, console and advise. From him I learned that human kindness brings people to deeper devotion to G-d.

The Novominsker came from an extraordinary lineage of Hasidic rebbes, including the Rizhiner, the Kotzker, the Chernobler, and Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. His grandfather, Alter Shimon Yisroel Perlow of Warsaw, had established the first Hasidic yeshiva in Poland. An illustrious lineage can leave some people overwhelmed and intimidated, while others rebel; what is extraordinary is how the Novominsker took his distinguished heritage and extended its significance.

Rare among Hasidic rebbes today, the Novominsker had a university education and studied under the very distinguished rabbinic authority, Rav Yitzchak Hutner, zz"l, director of the Chaim Berlin yeshiva, which embodies the Lithuanian school of Talmud study in New York City. Subsequently, the Novominsker taught at the modern Orthodox yeshiva in Skokie, Illinois, and then the Samson Raphael Hirsch yeshiva in New York, which represents German Orthodoxy's Breuer community.

What was his message? To build bridges. When he established the Novominsker yeshiva in Brooklyn, he declared "The ***Beis Halevi*** and ***Kedushas Levi*** will sit side by side on the shelf, equally cherished." That is, the works of both Brisk and Berdichev that had been worlds apart would now be studied in concert.

His yeshiva brought together the punctilious observance of mitzvot based on the intensive Talmud study cultivated by the methods of the Lithuanian yeshivas with the piety, ***kavana***, and gentleness of Hasidic practice and tradition.

Appointed head of Agudas Yisroel and the president of Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah in 1998, he brought profound Talmud learning—he authored the ***Eidas Yaakov***, a commentary on the Talmud—as well as a wide view of the world to that august position. I could talk with him about the latest scholarship in Israel in Jewish studies just as easily as family matters.

This unusual combination of learning was clear in his many speeches to gatherings of Agudas Yisroel and Torah Umesorah: He was deeply learned in rabbinics and sharply intelligent, but he also had a tenderness of heart and a capacious soul. To hear his speeches was to realize that he didn't simply speak for himself but embodied his family heritage. At the Agudos Yisroel gatherings, his speeches included calls to overcome division: Jews must pray for all Jews, "*acheinu klal Yisroel*." When the editors of the new Haredi magazine, *Mishpocha*, went to the Novominsker for a *brocha*, he told them its focus should be "*Ahavas Eretz Yisrael*," to "show the *chein* and *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael*."

At the same time, his speeches often included diatribes against innovations; he was opposed to "open Orthodoxy" and to many of the changes brought about by the Jewish feminist movement, and he also rejected state interference in Jewish religious life, including efforts to stop *metzitza b'peh* at the bris. I didn't always agree with him any more than I expected him to agree with me, but I respected him, and I looked for common ground. Most of all, I felt inspired by his courage and his kindness.

But he did not always reject the state, nor did he disparage science or medicine. On the contrary, in a video he recorded shortly before his death, he warned us that we are now confronted by a terrible disease, COVID-19, and we have to close our synagogues and yeshivas, though prayer and learning continue. He was firm: "We must know the facts from the infectious disease specialists … And it is Halacha, Jewish law, to obey the doctors and stay home to save lives."

As the leader of Agudos Yisroel, the Novominsker concerned himself with all aspects of Jewish life. He worried about those who had given up the observance of mitzvot but also worried about those Haredi Jews who might have lost their way, whether mired in personal unhappiness or losing the *ruach* and *kavana* in their observance. To him, we were all one, all Jews as a family, and for the Novominsker, family was all-important.

From his mother's Kotzker heritage, the Novominsker knew that the Kotzker rebbe had taught that our Judaism must be authentic to who we are; to be Jewish in imitation of others would be spiritual plagiarism. The Kotzker transmitted a teaching of Simcha Bunam: Though the Torah was given but once, it must be received every day. The giving of Torah was offered in equal measure to all of Israel, but the acceptance of Torah was not the same for everybody, since each individual acquires it according to his spiritual capacity.

While the Novominsker never endorsed changes in Jewish law or observance, the Kotzker's views are reflected in his understanding and love of his extended family. He accepted those of us who fall outside the Agudos Yisroel framework: Family must be close and caring, he said at the funeral of our cousin, Miriam Rabinowicz, the daughter of the Bialer rebbe who had become an artist.

There are many people in the world to admire: Brilliant scholars who dazzle us and write important books with all sorts of new insights. There are pious Jews whom we respect for their devotion to G-d and Torah. But the Novominsker was different. He was brilliant and he was pious, certainly, but he was not the sort of person to be placed on a pedestal and admired from afar; rather, he was a person of deeds who wanted to inspire us. How can we emulate him?

The Novominsker was the head of Agudas Yisroel, the international organization of ultra-Orthodox Jews, while I am professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, a place of limited Yiddishkeit. I am not a

rebbe but I have met rebbes and I think of them and try to incorporate something of their values in my life.

I think of the Novominsker, of his immense learning, his self-discipline, his intellectual acuity, his effort to know the world and not shy away from it. More important, I am inspired by his warmth and kindness; he was a true Hasidic rebbe who opened his heart to all who came to him seeking advice and comfort, and he listened, offered understanding and support, gestures of kindness that brought them closer to G-d, Torah and mitzvot.

How can I transmit some of the Novominsker's *rebbeshe* qualities to my students? I give them lectures on Jewish history, they read and memorize the facts, repeat them on the exams, and master the material. But what of the essence? What I want them to know is something of the Jewish spirit that, for me, has been revealed to me by the Hasidic rebbes I have known. My father used to say that schools do not need more textbooks, they need more text people—teachers whose qualities of spirit the students learn to emulate.

Shimon bar Yochai teaches, "Honor the mitzvot, for the mitzvot are my deputies, and a deputy is endowed with the authority of his principal. If you honor the mitzvot, it is as if you have honored me; if you dishonor them, it is as if you dishonored me."

At times, Jews can fall victim to a focus on the Shulchan Aruch that obscures our vision. We can think that as long as our observance of Halacha is strict, we are good Jews. The Novominsker came to remind us of Shimon bar Yochai's teaching, that the mitzvot are deputies of the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, prayers in the form of a deed, vehicles to bring us closer to G-d's presence and to expand G-d's presence in our world.

Blessed is the life of the zaddik; precious to G-d is his soul.

Susannah Heschel is a professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College.

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Photographing the Secret World of Chassidic Jews

By Dr. Yvette Alt Millerr

Agnieszka Traczewska

Agnieszka Traczewska, an accomplished documentary filmmaker and photographer from Krakow, Poland, remembers the first time she saw a group of Chassidim – Jews who adhere to a branch of Orthodox Judaism and revere a particular rabbi who leads their community.

The Jews were in Poland to visit the grave of a famous rabbi, and when Agnieszka caught a glimpse of the men in their long dark coats, black hats and long beards, she remembers being shocked.

Growing up in communist Poland, Agnieszka had learned about the Holocaust and how it decimated her country's Jews: "I didn't expect that anybody survived from the Jewish community," she recalls.

In an Aish.com exclusive interview, Agnieszka explains how that early glimpse of Chassidic pilgrims sparked a decades-long interest in photographing Chassidic Jewish communities. Agnieszka's exquisite, award-winning photographs give us a glimpse into the insular world of Chassidic Jewish life. Photographing

these communities has also profoundly shaped Agnieszka's ideas about Judaism and G-d.

"The Jewish identity of those places was totally forgotten, totally erased."

"I come from Krakow," explains Agnieszka. As a child, she learned about Polish history but without understanding the large Jewish community that called Poland home for over a thousand years. Before the Holocaust, Krakow was home to a vibrant Jewish community and the towns and villages around it sparked some of the Chassidic dynasties that still thrive today.

"As a child, I travelled with my parents around many small villages and towns in Poland," Agnieszka explains, and went on numerous school trips. "Nobody even mentioned that most of those villages or towns were 50%, 60% Jewish – sometimes even 80% before the war. The Jewish identity of those places was totally forgotten, totally erased."

Synagogue in Lancut, Agnieszka Traczewska

While the Jewish history of many Polish villages may have been forgotten within Poland, whole communities of Chassidic Jews outside of Poland

remembered their names and honored the history of the towns their families came from.

"That was the second surprise" of seeing groups of Jewish pilgrims visit Polish towns such as Bobowa (Bobov in Yiddish), Lublin, Lelow (Lelov in Yiddish), Radomsko, Krakow and Warsaw. "I realized how much these people inherited from these places, that I had no idea about."

Purim Tish at Lelov Shul in Bet Shemesh

Seeing groups of Chassidic men travel all the way to Poland simply for the opportunity to pray at the graves of great rabbis moved Agnieszka; she wanted to take photographs of these men and try to document their emotional visits to the towns and villages she'd so long taken for granted.

A friend told Agnieszka about an annual visit that Chassidic Jews made to the town of Lezajsk on the *yahrzeit* Rabbi Elimelech Weisblum (1717-1787), one of the founders of the Chassidic movement. Agnieszka went along and took photos of the men as they prayed and found herself very moved by their fervor and devotion. She decided to continue this work, taking photos of Jews who returned to

Poland to pour out their souls in prayer at the graves of the great rabbis buried throughout the country.

"When I started to speak with Chassidim, they said 'Oh, my *zeidie* was from Bobov, my *bubbie* (grandmother) was from Lublin," Agnieszka recalls. She was blown away by the fact that so many Jews who'd grown up all over the world retained such intense feelings of connection to Poland.

"I decided that if nobody else wants to remember this Jewish history in Poland, I will be the one. I didn't want to conquer the world – this photography was just my private archeology project to remember the Jewish past, and to learn about it myself."

Girl praying in the tunnel at underground part of the Kotel

Agnieszka's beautiful photographs bring to mind paintings by the Dutch masters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer who bathed their subjects in light and captured a sense of serenity. Largely self-taught, she has a palpable sense of communing with her subjects, and helping the viewer to feel as if they have got a glimpse into the very soul of the people in her photographs.

In an interview with the Yiddish newspaper *Der Forverts* Agnieszka recalled visiting the Jewish cemetery in the Polish town of Radomsko, where the great Chassidic Rabbi Shlomo Chanoch HaCohen Rabinowicz, known as the Radomsker Rebbe (1882-1942), is buried. “I am the only woman standing outside the *ohel*,” (an open-air memorial for the Radomsker Rebbe) Agnieszka described, "and somehow I have to get there from the cemetery gate. What should I expect? Open confrontation? Admonishment that I do not belong here?” Agnieszka prepared to be yelled at by the black-clad Jewish men for invading their space.

Rabbi Elimelech’s yahrzeit in Lizhensk

The Jewish visitors did begin to shout – but with joy. “I told you she would come!” they said to one another. Somehow, Agnieszka had become a legend: the non-Jewish woman who wanted to photograph moments of beautiful Jewish prayer. “What kind of coffee do you want?” the visitors asked her. “Would you like a cookie?”

It did take years to break into the insular community and meet Chassidic Jews who’d help her. About twelve years ago, Agnieszka was in Bobowa, taking photos of Jews praying at the grave of Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam (1847-1905), the founder of the vibrant “Bobover” Chassidim. While many Jews who are Bobover

Chassidim are intensely insular and unlikely to strike up a conversation with someone who's not Jewish, particularly a person of the opposite sex, some Bobover Chassidim are more used to interacting with the secular world. (New York Criminal Court Judge Ruchie Freier, for instance, is a well-known Bobover Chassid whose high profile has defied stereotypes of what Chassidic Jews can do.)

One of the men praying at the site was Duvid Singer, from Boro Park, a heavily Chassidic neighborhood in Brooklyn. Duvid and his wife Naomi have visited Poland numerous times, leading Jewish heritage tours with their company Heritage and Discovery and helping to restore Jewish cemeteries and other sites around Poland.

With his deep knowledge about Poland, Duvid was intrigued by Agnieszka's work. The Singers got to know Agnieszka and began to collaborate with her. Agnieszka describes befriending the Singers as a "turning point" in her life; she describes Duvid Singer as her teacher and almost her "rebbe", her spiritual mentor. The Singers, recognizing that Agnieszka was trying to be respectful in her work photographing Jewish subjects, gave her a helping hand.

Teaching a boy to read Meghille at Lelov Shul in Bnei Beraq

Through the Singers, Agnieszka got to know other Chassidim and began travelling all over the world photographing Chassidic Jewish families and settings. While her early photos in Poland were primarily of Jewish men, because the vast majority of pilgrims travelling to pray at the graves of rabbis were male, once she began visiting Chassidic Jews in their homes, Agnieszka began to get to know Chassidic women, developing a deep connection with the wives and mothers who hosted her.

In the smoke of the fire. Lag Ba Omer in Meron

Agnieszka's parents both died when she was young, and she has no siblings and few other relatives. "It's not so easy to be a lonely individual in the universe," she notes. "The people I've had the closest connection to in recent years were Chassidim."

Her photo won second place in National Geographic's Photograph of the Year Award in 2014, beating out 18,000 other pictures.

Agnieszka published a book of photos of Chassidim visiting the graves of rabbis in Poland in 2018 called ***Powroty / Returns***, and has exhibited her photographs in over forty shows worldwide. She's working on another book of photos of Chassidic Jews all over the world.

She finds it amazing that whenever she enters a synagogue or a Chassidic home, whether it's in San Paolo or Antwerp or Israel, the same timeless Jewish traditions are preserved and followed.

"First Time" Groom's mother's leaves newly married couple alone. As marriage was arranged by families, they never met without assistance yet.

One of Agnieszka's most celebrated photographs was taken in Jerusalem's Meah Shearim neighborhood at a large Chassidic wedding in 2014. Agnieszka had got to know an extremely religious Chassidic family in Meah Shearim, befriending the wife and getting to know her eighteen children. When the family's oldest son got married, Agnieszka was invited to the wedding.

The wedding was a grand affair, but Agnieszka's most treasured photo is from a quiet moment right after the ceremony. In Orthodox Jewish weddings, it's traditional for the bride and groom to spend a few minutes alone together right after the marriage ceremony. For many couples, these moments are the first time they have ever been completely alone together.

As the bride and groom entered a room where they'd be secluded together for the very first time as man and wife, Agnieszka followed them, along with the groom's mother, to the door. As the mother in law waved goodbye to the couple, Agnieszka snapped a photo of the beaming, happy young couple. Coming from a very Orthodox religious tradition, this couple had never been alone before and had never even held hands. This was a huge moment of transformation for them.

That photo, which she named "First Time", won second place in National Geographic's Photograph of the Year Award in 2014, beating out 18,000 other pictures. Agnieszka was shocked that her photo won, noting that most of the winning pictures in National Geographic's contests are of the great outdoors. Agnieszka recalls, "With this photo, they said they loved it because it showed not a physical volcano, but a volcano of emotion, an eruption of emotions."

When she heard that her photo had won such a prestigious prize, Agnieszka excitedly phoned the family and shared her good news. "They said they were so happy for me. I don't think they understood that this photo would be so widely published." The award-winning photo was reproduced all over, in newspapers and magazines, including in Israel. The family, so used to being modest and outside the public eye, was shocked to see the picture everywhere.

Since she's started photographing Chassidic communities, Agnieszka has found that her own life has profoundly changed as well. Brought up Catholic, she used to consider herself not religious. Now, Agnieszka explains that she feels much more spiritual and regularly prays. Being exposed to such intense spirituality has made her feel much closer to G-d, as well.

"Very often when I accompany groups of Chassidic Jews coming to Poland – especially when I have an opportunity to be with them for a long time (as they pray) I observe a growing temperature of *davening*" Agnieszka explains, using the Yiddish term for prayer. "I see their attempt to communicate with *Hashem*" – the Hebrew term for G-d. "I sometimes had the feeling that there were some divine transcendental moments that I'd never be able to see otherwise."

Agnieszka's exquisite photos can be viewed on her website http://www.agnieszkatraczewska.com/

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A BLAST FROM THE PAST (May 11, 2015)

The Sephardic Bibliophile Of Brooklyn

By Batya Ungar-Sargon

Yisrael Mizrahi, in one of the many aisles of bookshelves, and a very partial view of his bookstore's first floor

On a nondescript street of brick row houses, nestled between an insurance office and a computer store, in an out of the way corner of Brooklyn known as Marine Park that is not on any subway lines, lies a small storefront. From the street, it's impossible to see in — the glass windows are blocked by bookshelves, the glass door covered by a large red and white version of the Israeli flag. A small printed flyer is taped to the top of the door: "Mizrahi Bookstore: Over 60,000 Jewish Books in Stock." A phone number is provided, and then: "Please knock *and* ring bell."

Should you do so, the door will be answered by the proprietor of Mizrahi Bookstore, Yisrael Mizrachi, a delicate man who is a mere 28 years old. You will be escorted into the bookstore. Inside, it is cozy; you must maneuver delicately to avoid disturbing the chaotic order of the books.

Watching to See if You are An Afflicted Bibliophile

As you make your way through the maze of bookshelves, Mizrahi will watch you closely for signs of his own affliction—bibliophilia — until you arrive at the sanctum sanctorum, Mizrahi's office at the back of the store. Here, the buying and selling of books happens — a dizzying mix of the modern and the ancient, with books from the middle ages sharing space with three computers and a monitor displaying security footage of the front door.

Like Mizrahi Bookstore, the book business today is a curious mix of new and old, the Internet having changed the business significantly. Mizrahi himself seems to embody that very tension. An old-school piousness suffuses his words and the blog he maintains about his bookstore, and yet his gravity is belied by a quickness of wit and the spryness with which he moves. With his large black velvet yarmulke, fraying white shirt, black pants, and sneakers, he could easily pass for a yeshiva student.

He worried about telling me his age. "'Too young,'" he explained. "'Such a young guy, and such old books,' they say."

Born in Brooklyn to a Family of Moroccan Descent

Mizrahi was born in Brooklyn to a Sephardic family of Moroccan descent. After high school, he studied for a few years in yeshiva in Israel before returning to Brooklyn where he got married at 20. A lover of books for as long as he could remember, Mizrahi had been a buyer well before he began to sell, but shortly after he got married, he started to sell a few titles, and, shortly thereafter, Mizrahi Bookstore was born.

That was eight years ago, and he has in the meantime accumulated a stock of 100,000 books. To make a living, he explained, you have to sell between 100 and 150 books a day. The average $300 book will sit on a shelf for two years, so you need a stock of at least 50,000 to make ends meet. "One thing about this business is, there's no way to retire," he said with a chuckle. "What do you do with 100,000 books? It's a real problem!"

By the time I got to the bookstore at 11:30 in the morning, Mizrahi had already shipped his quota of 150 books. He gets to work at 6 a.m., and spends the morning packing and shipping books, tearing packing tape loudly and smoothing it over a final package.

"I do make a decent living," he said, "but you have to be a workaholic. There's no laidback way to do it." He tried to get an assistant — twice — but both times, his workers abandoned him to go study in yeshiva.

Speaks English and Hebrew and Can Read Ladino and Yiddish

But an assistant would only be of minimal help. Mizrahi —who speaks English and Hebrew fluently and can read Ladino and Yiddish — knows where every single book is. Disturbing a book's location has catastrophic effects on his ability to sell it. A sign beseeches customers: "We beg, we insist, we plead, we urge, whatever it takes: Please make sure every book gets back in the shelf it started from. We want to continue to serve you."

His evenings are spent searching out and chasing down books. "Occasionally you have the emergency phone calls," Mizrahi said, which is why he tells people to phone ahead if they want to drop by. He once got a call from Manhattan, telling him he had two hours to get to an apartment overlooking Central Park before they would send all the books to the dump. The collection Mizrahi recovered that day was worth $10,000.

But the reverse happens too. He once got a call from a guy in New Jersey asking if Mizrahi wanted an Encyclopedia Judaica. Mizrahi asked if he had anything else, and the man told him he had just disposed of thousands of books. "But you didn't want them," the man said "They were old." To add insult to injury, the man came from a prominent Zionist activist family, just the kind whose library might contain untold treasures.

Some People Just Don't Appreciate Books

"It's sad to say but for some people, books are cockroaches," Mizrahi said.

Books in New York are generally in good condition, unlike those that come from Israel or the Middle East, which can have worms in them, or worse. "Beard hairs is another thing you find in books," Mizrahi said. "Sometimes you find red ones, sometimes you find black ones." A kabbalistic concept that every hair is holy resulted in men slipping fallen hairs into their books.

Mizrahi sells to book lovers like himself — those who salivate at the words "first edition" and hunger to own rare manuscripts and old letters, the scent of the past clinging to these texts like the lost stories of their previous owners. His customers range from academics with specific interests to individuals trafficking in nostalgia.

"It's funny," he said. "No one goes into a shoe store and says, 'I'll have a size three because I had it when I was a kid,' but all the time people ask for

children's books they grew up with." Children's books from the '60s and '70s, especially illustrated ones, represent a big market.

Customers Looking for Anything Their Ancestors May Have Written

He also gets customers who have authors among their ancestors looking for anything their relatives wrote or published. He pulled out a book to illustrate his point — a 300-year-old book of poetry that Mizrahi was in the process of reuniting with its author's descendant. He found it in a collection of a few thousand books he had purchased, an operation that tends to yield one or two books he's been looking for. He has a 126-page-long list of such books, some of which he's been searching for as long as 10 years, in a treasure hunt that spans countries and continents.

The store is full of rare gems. But he also sells books for as little as $3 or $4. In the bookstore window, he has a small can of shaving cream from the 1930s, along with a copy of the rabbinic ruling permitting men to shave. He has pages of the Baba Sali's handwriting, which will go for $1,400. Hasidic books can go for much more — there are fewer of them, with a much larger number of people competing for the books.

Mizrahi pays attention not only to the books themselves but also to the stamps of former owners, inscriptions in books given as gifts, and stamps of publishers or presses from far flung places, the markings of a map tracing back in history and showing how far books, and ideas, traveled.

The Blessing for Returning Apostates

If you come on a good day, you might get Mizrahi to tell you some of his more fascinating finds, like the time he discovered Leonard Cohen's name written by Cohen's grandfather in a book, or the blessing for returning apostates he found in a 1929 prayer book, or the story of a Jew-on-Jew murder from 15th-century Germany.

In a travelogue written in the 1880s, an emissary from Tiberias traveled to Iraq and met a publisher who told him that the worst curse in Iraq is to tell someone they are married to a widow — it means you're in really bad shape, Mizrahi explained. But things got so bad in Iraq that no one would purchase books printed in Vilna by the Romm press, which was published by a widow, and was therefore considered bad luck. On another occasion, Mizrahi uncovered an unrecorded massacre of Jews in Poland in 1655 — someone had used the blank pages of their prayer book to write a lamentation recording the atrocities in excruciating detail.

He regularly finds books that aren't recorded anywhere else. "There's something fascinating about picking up a book no one has read for 50 years," he mused. Twice he found his own great grandfather's signature in a book.

Selling Yiddish Books to the Universities of Jordan and Tokyo

Mizrahi has sold Yiddish books to the University of Jordan and to the University of Tokyo. He has a customer who works in a mine in the Arctic Circle, a convert to Judaism who only spends six months out of every year above ground. He has a client who is a Holocaust denier — a *Jewish* Holocaust denier — with a radio show. He's sold to a customer in Qatar — first some English-Hebrew dictionaries, then some anti-Zionist works. To offset any nefarious purposes the client might have, Mizrahi included a few free books that had a more balanced perspective on Zionism and which he hoped might alter the customer's perspective.

Customers have flown in from London or driven in from Montreal. A lot of ultra-Orthodox men come in looking for unusual material. "You get to see the dark side of some rabbinic interests," Mizrahi said. "I have a lot of Orthodox rabbis come in here for the *kfira*" — heretical or banned books.

One day, a Bais Yaakov girl in her school uniform walked into the store and asked for the works of the Seer of Lublin. "The *Chozeh* of Lublin is not your standard Bais Yaakov reading," Mizrahi thought, so he asked her why she wanted it. She told him that lately, the *Chozeh* had been coming to her in a dream, so she wanted to understand him. "I gave it to her," Mizrahi said. "But what I really wanted was to get a portrait of him, because we don't have one. I don't know how she knew it was him. Maybe he introduced himself."

His Personal Collection of Almost 10.000 Titles, Many Ladino Literature

Mizrahi now has three children, and a personal collection of about 10,000 titles, including a large collection of Ladino literature. Additionally, he is trained to play piano, and dabbles in violin. In the office, he drinks orange juice from a glass and listens to music while he works. Classical music was playing in his office the day I visited, for my benefit, it turns out. He prefers Middle Eastern music.

"My interests are very Sephardic," he said. When I asked if he was ultra-Orthodox, he said, "Sephardic Jews had a bypass on that whole issue. We're just Jews."

When he finds something he wants for himself, Mizrahi tends to keep it. He likes to read responsa from 300 years ago, from North Africa, Salonica, Turkey. It gives him a window into the day-to-day life of real issues, he says. "The problems

are the same, but the solutions are different," he says, comparing the responsa of then to that of today.

The Fascinating Insights into Rabbinic Rulings

"They were much more willing to work within the framework of Halacha to solve issues back in the day." As an example, he told a story of a rabbinic ruling that allowed women to inherit wealth — forbidden by Jewish law — because women were going to Muslim courts to get their inheritances. "Something like that would never happen in Hungary," he said. "When you see rabbinic letters, when you see the very mundane things the greatest people are busy with, it's sort of comforting," he said.

He told me about a bunch of postcards he found amongst a pile of books he bought. They were written by Yaakov Fichman, a Hebrew author and poet who was stranded without his family for the duration of World War I. The postcards were love letters to his wife.

"The really cute thing about them is, he starts the letters with, 'I'm writing because I love you, even though you haven't responded,'" Mizrahi said. "He's very poetic and writes very well. They're all on Zionist postcards. They must have been very connected because they were buried in Israel under one tombstone."

Very Much an Online Business

Despite the charm of being in the actual Mizrahi Bookstore, it's very much an online business; the old brick and mortar places that didn't evolve no longer exist. But the Internet has also improved things for book lovers. For one thing, it's leveled the prices.

"It used to be, if you really wanted a book, a bookseller could ask you any price, and if you wanted it you had to pay for it," Mizrahi said. But now, buyers can look up prices online. And people who never had access to bookstores now have access to them, like Mizrahi's Middle Eastern customers. Still, Mizrahi is not hopeful about the future of the book business. "Young guys just don't read," he said.

During the course of my visit, he urged me not to write about him but about the books. "The focus should be, people should be reading these books," he said. "People should know there's a place they can read stuff which is interesting to read. Jews produced a lot of very good works. I take pride in being a little bit of a missionary in that sense."

Reprinted from the May 11, 2015 website of the FORWARD.

COVID-19: Cemetery Races To Keep Up as New York Virus Deaths Mount

The pandemic's death toll charges past 10,000 in New York City

Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, rear, finishes a prayer during the burial service for David Tokar as gravediggers prepare a plot for the next burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery in the Staten Island borough of New York, Wednesday April 8, 2020 Image Credit: AP

New York (AP): The streets are eerily quiet. Barely a soul walks by. But when Rabbi Shmuel Plafker arrives at the cemetery, it's buzzing: Vans pulling in with bodies aboard, mounds of dirt piling up as graves are dug open, a line of white signs pressed into the ground marking plots that are newly occupied.

Some of the few signs of life in this anguished city are coming from those tending to the dead.

As the world retreats and the pandemic's confirmed death toll in New York City alone charges past 10,000, funeral directors, cemetery workers and others who oversee a body's final chapter are sprinting to keep up.

Plafker, the chaplain at Mount Richmond Cemetery on Staten Island, grips in hands covered by rubber gloves the long list of burials he must preside over this day. In the notes section beside each person's name, the reason for their demise: "COVID.'" "COVID." "COVID."

Rabbi Shmuel Plafker conducting a service prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

"There's a tremendous sadness," he says. "Were it not for this, they would be living, some healthy, some not so healthy. But they would be alive."

Mount Richmond is run by the Hebrew Free Burial Association, which buries Jews who die with little or nothing. A century ago, it buried garment workers killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire and those who fell to the Spanish flu. More recently, it was Holocaust survivors who fled Europe.

And now, those dying of the coronavirus.

A stream of people trusted with preparing Mount Richmond's dead for burial continues to arrive at the cemetery, carefully washing the bodies as Jewish law

dictates, then placing them in a white shroud. The Torah calls for burial as soon as possible. These days, it's more of a challenge than ever.

Companies that transport the dead to their final resting places are backed up, part of a chain reaction of hold-ups that includes overbooked funeral homes and cemeteries that are turning families away.

"The casket companies have no caskets," says James Donofrio, a funeral director who handles Mount Richmond's arrangements.

Hebrew Free Burial stocked up on caskets before the coronavirus unleashed its worst, just as they did with protective gear for workers, garments for the dead and other supplies. They think they have enough. Then again, they thought the mortuary cooler they ordered a month ago to fit an extra four bodies would be enough extra space. Now they have a refrigerated trailer big enough to hold 20.

Amy Koplow, who runs Hebrew Free Burial, worries about staff maintaining such furious pace and raising enough money to cover the costs being run up. But they've vowed to plod on.

A “Crazy Day” Would Be Five

They were used to burying one person on an average day. A "crazy day," Koplow says, would be five.

The other day, they put 11 people in the ground.

Staffers find themselves exchanging texts about death certificates at 2am and fielding dozens of calls at a time. It takes its toll on everyone.

Plafker looks at the trees in bloom and the grass sprouting and finds spring's signs of rebirth so paradoxical given the death that surrounds him. He thinks of the centuries-old words he recites on the High Holy Days, that seem to carry so much more weight now.

"How many shall pass away and how many shall be born," it says. "Who shall perish by water and who by fire? Who by sword and who by wild beast? Who by famine and who by thirst? Who by earthquake and who by plague?"

Now, it seems, a plague is upon him.

Many Funerals Now Have No Mourners on Site

Between travel restrictions and potentially exposed family members kept in isolation, many funerals now have no mourners on site. When they do, they are prohibited from gathering at the graveside, instead listening to rushed services by phone from cars parked 50 feet away.

Michael Tokar comes along this day to bid his father farewell, waiting in his car for directions when Donofrio arrives with news.

"We have a problem," an apologetic Donofrio says. "The body ain't here. We're going to have to do the funeral tomorrow."

There was a snag in getting the hospital to release the remains. So the son dutifully returns a day later.

Tokar's father had a cough and fever and a home health aide got him to the hospital. Two days later, he was dead, with the coronavirus listed as the cause.

As Tokar sits in his car, his phone rings. Plafker is on the line. The service is beginning and the rabbi delivers a play-by-play of the ritual.

"I'm going to help the men lower the body," he tells him.

The Crew is Dressed in White Protective Suits

The crew is dressed in white protective suits, masks and gloves, looking more fit for a moon landing than a funeral. They use orange straps to place David Tokar in his grave.

"We're going to cover him now," Plafker says, before asking the son if he wanted to talk about his dad.

"He was born 92 years ago," he began, reciting a collection of facts that form a portrait.

He collected stamps. He loved the racetrack. He adored his grandchildren. The rabbi reads a Psalm and tells Tokar his father will live on in the hearts of those who loved him and that he hopes this "terrible plague" will finally pass. In 10 minutes, it is over.

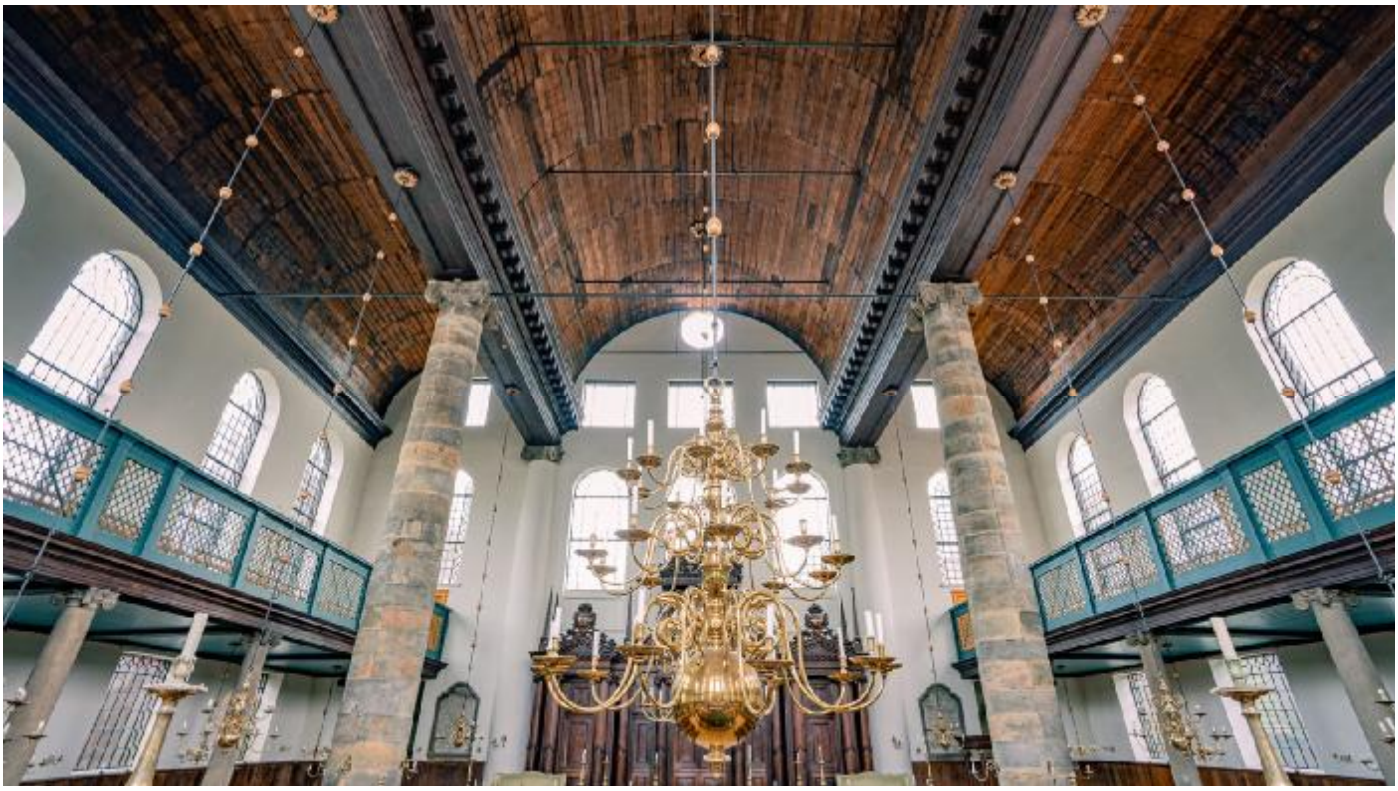
A few rows away, Thomas Cortez readies another grave. Two of his friends have fallen ill and he and his colleagues worry they will too. It is sad work, he admits, but it must continue.

Another funeral is about to begin.

Reprinted from the April 21, 2020 Associated Press (AP) dispatch written by David Goldman and Matt Sedensky.

Amsterdam's Jewish Quarter is Getting Ready to Reopen, But Some Wonder if it will Ever be the Same

By Cnaan Liphshiz



A view inside the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, which is part of the city's Jewish Cultural Quarter. (Bas de Brouwer)

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — Located in what used to be this Dutch city's Jewish neighborhood, its Jewish Cultural Quarter — a group of museums and other institutions situated within a few blocks of each other — packs centuries of European history into an area half the size of Times Square.

It includes the Jewish Historical Museum; a Jewish Children Museum, the first of its kind in Europe; the Portuguese Synagogue, a beautiful 17th-century building that still functions as a house of worship; the Ets Haim library, located underneath the Portuguese Synagogue; the Hollandse Schouwburg theater, which occupying Nazis used to round up Jews during the Holocaust; and other

monuments. There's also a $27 million national Holocaust museum that is being renovated and scheduled to reopen in 2022.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the cultural quarter drew over 350,000 visitors each year, acting as a vibrant portal into Jewish life and culture for tourists and locals alike. The Children's Jewish Museum had received thousands of visits by Dutch elementary school students for day trips. The main museum houses the world's two priciest Hanukkah menorahs and is made up of what used to be four Ashkenazi synagogues used before the Holocaust.

Now there's a fear that when the cultural quarter reopens, it won't have the same impact in multiple ways.

The Jewish Cultural Quarter is scheduled to reopen on June 1, and its staff is figuring out the format. Ticket sales — entry costs about $20 and is valid for all the institutions there — will be done online exclusively and in advance, essentially ending walk-ins.

Emile Schrijver, director of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, stands in the area located in the center of Amsterdam, May 4, 2020. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

Whereas the area in the center of Amsterdam had about 360,000 visits in 2019, "if we get 135,000 visits in 2020, then that's a good outcome," said Emile Schrijver, the director of the quarter's umbrella organization that formed in 2012. "That's just being realistic."

The cultural quarter's core interactive framework also stands to change. The Jewish Museum developed a philosophy called "I ASK," which encourages visitors to start conversations with guides rather than act as passive onlookers. In 2015, the Dutch museology magazine Museumpeil profiled the pioneering method and argued that it should be copied.

Yet the model may need to be adapted for post-lockdown reality, Schrijver conceded.

Concert-goers attend a performance at the Portuguese Synagogue, Aug. 17, 2017. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

Some areas within the cultural quarter, like the community treasures display at the Portuguese Synagogue, are too tight to allow for mandatory 5-foot social distancing. Beyond changes to tourist routes, visitors will be forced to wear face masks and avoid standing in gatherings.

"I miss walking around, hearing people talking about what they've seen in the cafeteria, praising it or complaining, whatever," Schrijver said. "I miss the vitality and interaction of this place."

His voice echoed in the now-empty museum in an interview earlier this month.

"We've done a lot online and will continue, but to me that's not the same," Schrijver said.

The cultural quarter was a way into Judaism for Anne-Maria van Hilst, a 32-year-old tourist guide from Amsterdam who converted over a decade ago to the religion. She said Judaism's tradition of asking questions appealed to her.

Van Hilst began attending the synagogue of the Liberal Jewish Community here out of interest when she was 13, before her conversion. But the accessibility and diversity of the various institutions that make up the cultural quarter allowed her to develop her Jewish identity gradually, and in a way that felt comfortable, she said. It later even helped determine her career choices.

Children learning about Judaism at the Children's Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, Sept. 25, 2008. (Ruud van Zwet)

"I started coming to the Children's Jewish Museum as a teenager," she recalled. "I liked how they always had staff there whose job it was to answer questions. It wasn't just a museum where you look at exhibits, it was a place of dialogue."

But, van Hilst added, she may have asked the staff too many questions. "I'm not sure they liked me as much as I liked them," she said.

As she matured and her knowledge of Judaism deepened, van Hilst "graduated" to the main Jewish museum. It helped her decide to study Jewish history at the University of Amsterdam. During her studies, she gained access to Ets Haim, which is not open to the general public except for guided tours of very small groups every few weeks, as well as to scholars for research.

"In many ways, it's there that I found what it means to be Jewish," she said of the library.

Last week, walking past the now-deserted cultural quarter, van Hilst lamented the need to keep it closed — precisely at a time when she believes it's particularly valuable.

A view outside the closed Anne Frank House Museum in Amsterdam, March 31, 2020. (Sjoerd van der Wal/Getty Images)

"Especially when anti-Semitism is rising, when conspiracy theories about the Jews and the virus are flourishing, the Jewish Cultural Quarter needs to open and tell Judaism's real story," she said.

The quarter has several dozen employees and an annual turnover of $10 million. Annual funding from the Dutch Education Ministry covers about half its budget. The rest comes from ticket sales, more than 200 events yearly, shops and the cafeteria, as well as donations and nongovernment subsidies, said Schrijver, whose father was Jewish.

The Anne Frank House, which is not part of the cultural quarter but received over a million visitors last year, is also dealing with a drastic reduction in visitors because of the virus.

The museum, which was built where the murdered teenage diarist's Jewish family hid for a time from the Nazis, is housed in a small annex with narrow doorways and cramped spaces. The architecture is part of the reason it has been so successful at conveying the feeling of confinement, but it also complicates keeping up the mandatory 5-foot social distancing rule, its director Ronald Leopold told AT5 last month.

A man walks by the offices of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, Sept. 25, 2008. (Marijke Volkers)

The Anne Frank House dispensed with walk-ins years ago because of high demand, and ticket sales occur weeks in advance online. Before the pandemic, it allowed in 78 visitors every 15 minutes. But after June 1, the number of visitors who will be let in daily will be reduced by 80 percent, Leopold said.

Both the cultural quarter and the Anne Frank House have adapted to the online quarantine era. The Anne Frank House rolled out a series of vlog posts by an actress who looks like the diarist. The quarter has been giving virtual tours on social networks and livestreamed its annual Open Jewish Homes project in which people who live in Holocaust victims' homes invite visitors to explore them and the former residents' stories.

Other online tours have involved Dutch Jewry's golden age in the 17th century, when the Portuguese Synagogue was built, and a showcase of the colorful art of the Dutch-Jewish painter Eli Content.

Van Hilst got to visit the Jewish Cultural Quarter earlier in the lockdown, when she was invited to give a virtual tour of the Portuguese Synagogue.

"I didn't expect it, but it was a very special feeling to be there almost all alone — it's usually so full of people. It's even more majestic when it's quiet," she recalled.

But it was also deeply melancholic, van Hilst said.

"It brought home how people can't hear the story the Jewish Cultural Quarter has to tell, among many other things we can't do," she said. "It breaks my heart."

Reprinted from the May 19, 2020 dispatch of the JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency)

Reb Mottel Chein, 81, Chassidic Mentor and Community Activist

By Motti Wilhelm

A printer by trade, and a lover of G-d And the Jewish people by inclination

Reb Mottel Chein would spread Chassidic joy and devotion to G-d, Torah and mitzvahs wherever he went.

Mordechai Chein, a printer by trade whose ceaseless Chassidic dedication turned him into a communal mentor and activist by example, passed away on March 31 from COVID-19-related complications. He was 81 years old.

Reb Mottel, as he was affectionately known, viewed every moment as an opportunity to help another person, physically or spiritually. Whether laying *tefillin* with a fellow Jew, putting up a *mezuzah* on someone's door or simply encouraging another with a smile and a kind word, he was a man always on the move. Although Reb Mottel never held an official rabbinic position, he saw himself as a foot soldier in the mission of the Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M Schneerson, of righteous memory—of spreading Judaism to every Jew.

And he did it all with a certain charm, a mischievous wink. Like the time, almost 20 years ago, when he was driving one of his sons for physical therapy at a Manhattan hospital. Sitting in the car or waiting room for the duration of his son's hour-long session wouldn't cut it for the irrepressible Chassid, who instead grabbed his *tefillin* and headed for a nearby JCC-like complex.

In his Russian-Yiddish tinged accent, Reb Mottel began asking men whether they were Jewish and would like to put on *tefillin*, but soon staff approached and delivered a fatal blow to his endeavor: the space was for members only. Without missing a beat, he pulled out his wallet and purchased himself a gym membership. With his card in hand, Reb Mottel would return to the center with his *tefillin* every week for the next two decades.

Mordechai Leib Chein was born on Nov. 4, 1938, in Leningrad, in the Soviet Union, a descendent of a long lineage of prominent Torah scholars and renowned Chassidim dating back to the days of the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. His parents, Reb Berke (Dovber) and Faiga Chein, were prominent Chassidic figures in their own right.

Even now, stories are told in Chabad circles of Berke Chein's self-sacrifice to teach Torah during the years of Soviet oppression. Reb Berke's fiery prayers, devotion to the Rebbe and steadfast humility acquired a name for him as one of the foremost Chassidic mentors of his time and were traits deeply ingrained in his son.

Mottel Chein's early years were spent on the run, the family heading from Leningrad to Samarkand, Soviet Uzbekistan, to escape the Nazi onslaught. In Samarkand his father taught in an underground *cheder*, and Reb Mottel would later recall being posted at the age of 6 as a lookout to warn his father and the class whether Soviet police or secret police were approaching. The code word, he would remember forever, was *knepl*, or "button" in Yiddish, to signify the uniform representing Soviet authority.

In 1946, the Cheins, like many other Lubavitcher Chassidim, headed to Lvov, Ukraine, on the Soviet border, hoping to obtain false Polish identity papers and escape to the West. While this dangerous plan worked for more than 1,000 Lubavitchers, young Mottel's father, Reb Berke, who was helping to lead the

effort, was arrested in the city. With their father in MGB (later KGB) hands, the Cheins moved in with their grandparents, Schneur Zalman and Menucha Kalmanson.

Young Mordechai Chein, bottom right, with his father and grandfather in Samarkand.

One day while their mother was out on errands, a taxi pulled up at the Kalmenson home and out came Sara Katzenelenbogen, another one of the individuals behind the massive and coordinated escape effort (who would later herself be arrested and perish in a Soviet prison). The window was narrowing, she said. There was a train to freedom leaving in a short amount of time. Telling the Kalmansons that there was not a minute to spare, Katzenelenbogen took Mottel and his brother and brought them to the train station. The two boys boarded the train with a few dozen

other Chassidim and left Russia forever. Their father would go on to serve a number of years in Soviet prisons and then spend years in hiding living under an assumed name, while their mother and sister awaited his return.

Hundreds of miles from both of his parents, the 7-year-old Mottel first lived in Paris with relatives. A few years later, with the blessing of the Sixth Rebbe—Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, of righteous memory—he and his brother left for Israel to live with their grandparents, who had also escaped Russia by that point.

Reb Mottel, right, with his father, Reb Berke (Dovber) Chein

In the late 1950s, after the passing of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak and the succession of his son-in-law, the Rebbe, Reb Mottel traveled to New York to study at 770 Eastern Parkway, Chabad World Headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y. After a year of rigorous study, he was granted permission to stay for a second year, unusual for those who traveled from Israel. For all practical purposes an orphan during his parents' lifetime, Reb Mottel was shown special attention by the Rebbe, who personally assisted him with his finances.

Whether laying tefillin with a fellow Jew, putting up a mezuzah on someone's door or simply encouraging another with a smile and a kind word, Reb Mottel Chein was a man always on the move.

In 1960, the young man was witness to an open miracle when the Rebbe promised him that the Soviets, despite blacklisting his father, would allow him to leave the Soviet Union. Indeed, the senior Cheins and their daughter were granted permission to leave and finally reunited with their sons after 14 years of being apart.

In 1962, Reb Mottel married his wife, Bracha. During the Shabbat both before and after the wedding, the Rebbe mentioned the celebration during the *farbrengen,* instructing those assembled to say *"l'chaim"* for those who remained locked inside Soviet Russia.

A Man Who Lived for His Ideals'

Studying in the synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway

After his marriage, Reb Mottel wished to join the Rebbe's growing network of emissaries. When he was offered a position in London, he wrote to the Rebbe asking whether this was something he should pursue. Shortly thereafter he received a call from the chief of the Rebbe's secretariat, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Hodakov, who told the young man that the Chabad movement needed its own printer.

The Rebbe had since even before his assumption of leadership placed a heavy emphasis on preparing and printing both classic Jewish texts and Chassidic texts, some for the first time ever. But the Jewish publication revolution the Rebbe was precipitating was still just at its beginning.

At the advice of the Rebbe, as a yeshivah student Reb Mottel had apprenticed at the printing press of Rabbi Mordechai Shusterman. Now, he was being enlisted to utilize these skills for world Jewry, and Reb Mottel saw that this work would be his particular "***shlichut***," his mission. He and his wife settled permanently in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., where he would eventually become an indelible fixture, and printing became his life-long trade—first as a worker, and later as founder and partner of Empire Press.

Reb Mottel was simultaneously a friend and a respected elder to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Reb Mottel utilized his capacity to produce innumerable works of Chassidus, including the weekly talks of the Rebbe and many rush projects that the Rebbe requested on urgent deadlines. Among his customers, it was known that if a request from the Rebbe came in, all other work was halted until it was completed.

As a devout follower of the Rebbe, Reb Mottel did not need an official position to spread Judaism to a fellow Jew. From when the Rebbe encouraged his followers to give others the chance to put on *tefillin*, Reb Mottel would utilize

every opportunity to do so. A plane ride, a business meeting or a busy doctor's office were all seen as opportunities to connect a Jew to his Father in Heaven.

His greatest delight was to help another Jew do a mitzvah.

"My father once visited a doctor for a checkup," said Rabbi Shloime Chein, co-director of Chabad at the University of California in S. Cruz, Calif. "In passing, the doctor told my father that he really needs to stop smoking. Without missing a beat, my father responded, with a twinkle in his eye, that the doctor 'really needs to start putting on *tefillin*.' "

"The doctor, not believing that a decades-long smoker could quit, promised that he would begin putting on *tefillin* daily if my father kept his half of the deal. From that day, my father didn't touch another cigarette. This was after numerous unsuccessful attempts to quit, but the chance to get someone to lay *tefillin* gave him the strength to kick the habit."

Encouraging a youngster to give charity.

A similar pattern played out with all of the Rebbe's mitzvah campaigns. Whether by offering a *mezuzah* to one who didn't have, *shmurah* matzah before Passover or blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah, Reb Mottel always saw every encounter as an opportunity. From when the Rebbe instituted the daily study of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, he made sure to join a class and study the daily portion. And when the Rebbe spoke strongly about the coming of Moshiach, Reb Mottel took it to heart, changing his perspective to always be preparing for the time of ultimate good.

"My father was a printer by trade, but his life was being a Chassid," added his son, Rabbi Shlomie Chein. "Picturing his constant learning, the way he prayed or the way he helped so many people and institutions without fanfare, the only conclusion one can reach is that this was a man who lived for his ideals."

He is survived by his wife, Bracha, and their children: Yossi Chein (Brooklyn, N.Y.); Raizel Shemtov (Toledo, Ohio); Pinny Chein (Argentina); Chana Eidelman (Vienna, Austria); Mendel Chein (Brooklyn, N.Y.); Peretz Chein (Cheadle, England); Moshe Chein (Toulouse, France); Shloime Chein (S. Cruz, Calif.); Zalman Chein (Binghamton, N.Y.); as well as many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Although Chein never held an official rabbinic position, he saw himself as a foot soldier in the mission of the Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M Schneerson, of righteous memory—of spreading Judaism to every Jew.

Reprinted from the Parshat Tazria-Metzorah 5780 email of Chabad.Org Magazine

Marvin Schick, 1934–2020

A Pioneer of Jewish Education, and the Larger Communal Health He Believed it Fostered

By Menachem Butler

Dr. Marvin Schick, a pioneering Jewish communal activist, died last night. The cause was a heart attack, suffered at his home in Borough Park. He was regarded by many as the Jewish communal curmudgeon par excellence, though at times this obscured the real truth, which is that Schick deeply loved the Jewish people, even (or especially) those with whom he fundamentally disagreed.

In addition to his public work, for more than 15 years Dr. Schick was also my mentor, then my friend—and soon a man I adoringly called "Uncle Marvin." He was always available to answer any question by phone or email, and not infrequently dished out criticisms—always with love, always brutally honest. He often told me that his mission in life was to help others, and to think of the unity of

the religious community, and not to focus on the internal boxes of the religious community that otherwise divide us—"even if these boxes have validity for sociological study, they don't have validity in the real life." He pushed me to break away from the categories arbitrarily established by others. "It's not easy to be iconoclastic," he would say.

A Lifelong Resident of Borough Park

He was a lifelong resident of Borough Park and loved its every street, *shtiebel*, and store. He was a collector of rare *seforim* and a dozen years ago proudly told me of his dream to own an entire set of the Bomberg Shas, which he would purchase volume by volume at auction. The last time we spoke about it, he noted that he had 31 out of 45 of the volumes.

Marvin was fond of saying that he was born 15 minutes before his twin brother, Allen, on July 3, 1934. Their Romanian immigrant father, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Schick, served as the rabbi of the West Side Jewish Center on West 34th Street (between 8th and 9th avenues in Manhattan), and died on Purim in 1938—which fell on St. Patrick's Day that year. Marvin and Allen were just 3 years old.

Their mother, Rebbetzin Renee Schick, was widowed and without any relatives to assist in raising the children. When his mother died in 1998, Marvin wrote, in a moving obituary for her, of the trauma of his early childhood spent living in an orphanage and attending public school:

His Father Died Penniless

My father had died penniless; three weeks later she was served with eviction papers. She had no close relatives in this country, no parents or siblings or nieces and nephews, only cousins and four young children, ages 3 to 7. Allen and I were placed in an orphans' home. In 1939, I was hospitalized critically ill with diphtheria.

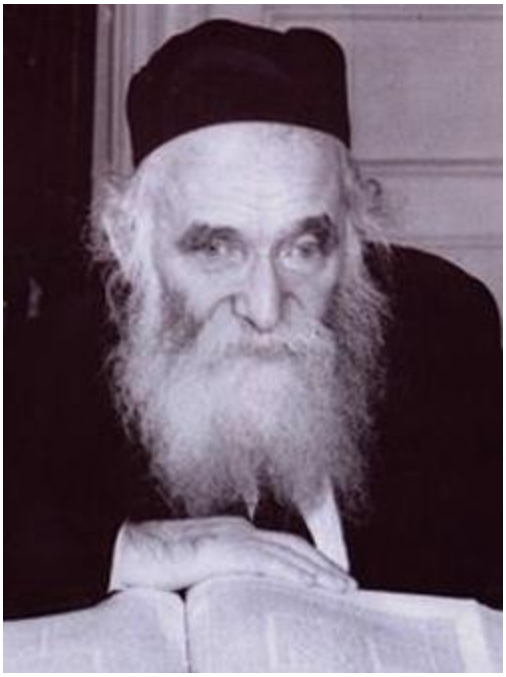
The next year was Allen's turn with pneumonia. She turned to people for help and some of the responses added to her pain. A handful of people who assisted in a modest way could not forget to remind her of what they had done. Already in 1938 she had written to a saintly relative in Europe, asking whether she could send Arthur and Ruth to be cared for back home and also for advice.

He responded that there were darkening clouds in Europe and told of a widow who, faced with a similar situation a century earlier, had provided for her children by baking challahs for Shabbos. Late in the year she moved to Borough Park where there were cousins who helped. Out of a small oven in her apartment, she began to bake, four challahs at a time. Skilled in all ways with her hands, her challahs and cake quickly gained acceptance. In 1943, the year of Arthur's bar

mitzvah, the family was reunited and my mother opened what would become perhaps the most famous kosher bakery in the world.

At the age of 17, Marvin met and become a devoted disciple of Rav Aharon Kotler. For the next dozen years, he traveled with Rav Aharon to meetings and conferences and learned how to think and act like a Jewish leader. Uncle Marvin would tell me that Rav Aharon would regularly go to the *beis medrash* where the teenage Marvin was learning and he would pluck him out of the *beis medrash*, and that there was no question in his mind that Rav Aharon Kotler felt that a Marvin Schick outside of the *beis medrash* would mean less "*bitul Torah*" inside of the *beis medrash*.

Marvin earned his doctorate in political science from NYU, and taught very briefly at Yeshiva University in the early 1960s. Then for many years he taught at Hunter College, Lehman College, and the New School for Social Research, where he taught political science and constitutional law. He also worked as a lawyer in private practice and founded the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA).



Rav Aharon Kotler

While still single in his early 20s, Marvin was given the task of fundraising thousands of dollars for the Chinuch Atzmai organization, an educational movement in Israel established by the Agudah, though independently run under the spiritual auspices of Rav Aharon in the United States. Chinuch Atzmai focused on

providing an Orthodox Jewish education for children from secular or irreligious homes in Israel.

It was at this point that he realized the need to focus on providing a deep Jewish education, so that every possible Jewish child could maintain a strong connection with his or her faith and traditions. He served as the voluntary president of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School system for nearly a half-century, responsible for the fundraising of a network of schools in Staten Island and New Jersey. (One of his proudest acts was that he wrote personal handwritten notes to each of the several thousand supporters of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School each year before Rosh Hashanah.)

A Lifelong Believer in the Importance Of a Strong Jewish Educational System

Indeed, Marvin became a lifelong believer of the importance of a strong Jewish educational system across every denomination—he was particularly pained when non-Orthodox schools shuttered—and served as an early and lone voice to philanthropists to place Jewish education high on the communal agenda. As senior adviser to the Avi Chai Foundation, he conducted many pathbreaking studies on Jewish education, and his innovative "Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States" remains the best source of information about Jewish education over the past generation—available online.

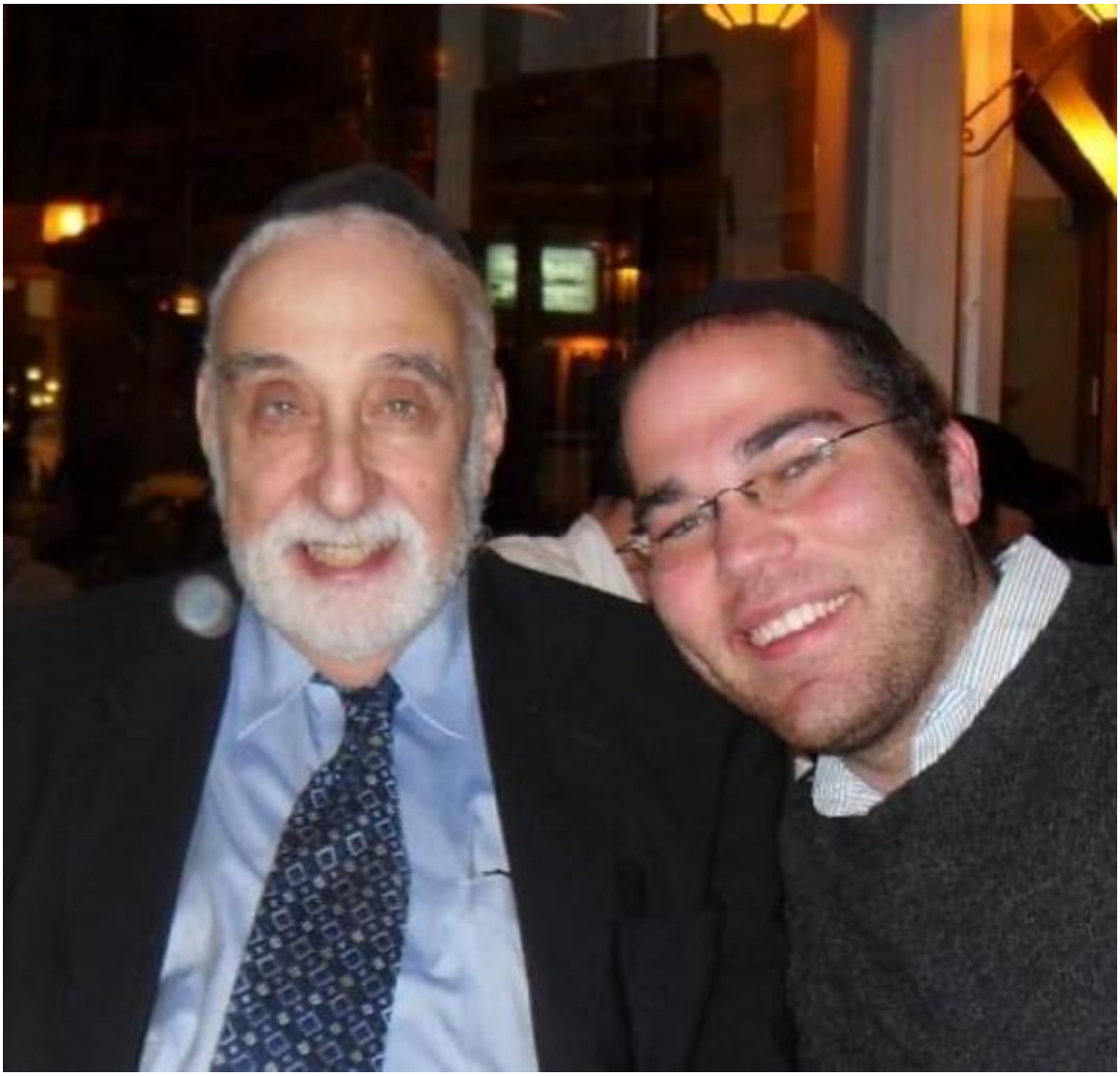
Several years ago, I presented Marvin and his family with thousands of pages of his weekly newspaper columns from the late 1960s until the early 1990s, which I had come across during the course of my own research into this era. In these articles—many of which were published under the "In the City" column—Marvin would weigh in on every single issue that impacted the Jewish community, and during his years of service (1969-1973) in Mayor John V. Lindsay's administration, these columns were seen as the official City Hall mouthpiece of outreach to the Jewish community.

Decades of Writing Formal Newspaper Columns

After decades of writing his formal newspaper columns in *The Jewish Press*, *The Jewish World*, and *The Jewish Week*, Marvin's final foray as a weekly columnist came in the form of his op-eds released as paid advertisements. For several years, he maintained a blog that served as an autobiography-in-process, of sorts, and where he would share his various ruminations on communal topics.

Several months ago Marvin published an article in Tablet magazine that shed light onto an otherwise overlooked chapter in the history of Jewish education in New York, when the Board of Regents adopted a resolution that "private or parochial schools that operate with a program providing a session carried on in a

foreign language during the forenoon, with only an afternoon session in English, be advised that such practice violates the compulsory education law." For the first time ever, Marvin shared how the plan was thwarted, and if not, it "would have meant the end of yeshiva education in New York."



Marvin Schick and the author in Jerusalem, 2009Courtesy the author

In 2009, I was studying at Yeshiva University's branch in Jerusalem, and I invited Marvin to deliver an evening lecture to my friends on his reflections on Jewish education in North America. It was an evening where he shared some of his most cherished stories of his own journey, and I regularly re-listen to the talk and gain renewed inspiration.

At the end of the late-night conversation, Marvin shared with us a story about the teacher, Rabbi Nachman Mandel, who taught him and his brother when

they switched into RJJ in fourth grade for secular studies, and placed in the first grade for Judaica studies with younger students.

"Mir Ken Dos M'saken Zein"

Marvin told us what it was like to run into his teacher more than a half-century later. After embracing each other, Marvin joked that he had a problem with a grade that he received in the first grade. Rabbi Mandel responded: "*Mir ken dos m'saken zein*"—it can be fixed.

It was this phrase that Marvin described to us as a philosophy of Jewish education: that children and their education must never be discarded and that everything must be done to create a more lasting and sustained Jewish community. In Marvin's earlier years of Jewish communal service, he was active in nearly every major and minor Orthodox Jewish organization—proudly being the only activist in both the (Haredi) Agudath Israel and the (modern Orthodox) Orthodox Union organizations during the 1960s and '70s. Others saw it as a conflict; he saw it as a fusion and part of his individualistic personality.

He established organizations that worked across communal boundaries and would fight for the individual Jew however they needed to be helped—regardless of ideological labels.

Later that trip, Marvin took me out of the *beis medrash* and we enjoyed a delicious dinner at Café Rimon—because, as he told me, "a Menachem Butler outside of the *beis medrash* would mean less '*bitul Torah*' inside of the *beis medrash*." I will cherish that moment for the rest of my life.

Reprinted from the April 24, 2020 email of Tablet Magazine. Menachem Butler, a contributing editor at Tablet Magazine, is the program coordinator for Jewish Law Projects at The Julis-Rabinowitz Program on Jewish and Israeli Law at the Harvard Law School, and a co-editor at the Seforim blog. Follow him on Twitter @MyShtender.

THOSE WE'VE LOST

Noach Dear, Combative Brooklyn Councilman And Judge, Dies at 66

By Sam Roberts

In pursuing his constituents' Orthodox Jewish agenda, he opposed abortion rights and legislation to ban discrimination against gay people.

Noach Dear in 2010. As a judge he handled cases involving debt owed to credit card companies and questioned laws regarding drinking alcohol in public. Photo Credit.- Ruby Washington/The New York Times.

Noach Dear, who served nearly two decades on the New York City Council as an outlier, advocating on behalf of the conservative agenda of his Orthodox

Jewish constituents in Brooklyn while defending himself against accusations of conflicts of interest, died on Sunday in Brooklyn. He was 66.

The cause was complications of the coronavirus. His death, at Maimonides Medical Center, was confirmed in a statement by Frank V. Carone, president of the Brooklyn Bar Association.

In 1986, Mr. Dear vigorously fought an anti-discrimination bill that gay rights supporters had been seeking for 15 years. Among members of the City Council's General Welfare Committee, his was the lone vote against the bill, which was approved by the full Council, 21 to 14. He was also an opponent of abortion rights.

Mr. Dear was an outspoken critic of David N. Dinkins, the city's first black mayor, accusing him of handcuffing the police and letting black people riot in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights in 1991 after a car that was part of the entourage of the Lubavitcher rebbe, or grand rabbi, swerved out of control and killed a 7-year-old black child, Gavin Cato.

The accident touched off a rampage in which a group of black youths fatally stabbed Yankel Rosenbaum, an Orthodox Jewish scholar from Australia.

Mr. Dinkins condemned what he called "the lynching of Yankel Rosenbaum" and admitted that the police had made tactical errors, but he denied that officers had been deliberately constrained. Mr. Dear demanded an investigation of police tactics and later sought a Council resolution denouncing the acquittal of the prime suspect.

Though enrolled as a Democrat, Mr. Dear was among those who bolted the party to support the mayoral candidacy of Rudolph W. Giuliani, a Republican, against Mayor Dinkins in 1993. Mr. Giuliani won narrowly.

Beginning in the 1990s, Mr. Dear raised millions of dollars for the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore, as well as soliciting contributions for himself.

Repeated overlapping interests between his role as a councilman and politician and his business investments and charitable activities prompted several investigations into potential conflicts. His liberal allocation of campaign funds for foreign trips and personal expenses also came under scrutiny. No charges were ever filed.

In the 1980s, Mr. Dear opened a kosher restaurant that went bankrupt, and in 1993 he agreed to repay more than $37,000 to a private foundation that had financed his home telephone and trips abroad for his children.

As chairman of the Council's transportation committee, Mr. Dear supported horse carriage drivers, many of whom were of Irish heritage, over the objections of animal-rights advocates, who sought to bar the carriages from city streets. He said he owed the Irish a great debt because they had supported the founding of Israel.

In 1998, Mr. Dear sought the congressional seat vacated by Chuck Schumer after Mr. Schumer's successful run for the United States Senate. But Mr. Dear wound up third in the Democratic primary in which fellow Councilman Anthony D. Weiner was nominated. (Mr. Weiner won the seat in the general election.)

Councilman Dear, right, in 1986 with Serphin R. Maltese, chairman of the Conservative Party in New York State. A Democrat, Mr. Dear often voted on behalf of the conservative agenda of his Orthodox Jewish constituents in Brooklyn. Photo Credit - Ángel Franco/The New York Times

Term limits kept Mr. Dear from seeking re-election to the Council in 2001. The next year, he lost a primary for the State Senate in a more racially diverse district. By then he had so irked the party organization by repeatedly challenging the seat's incumbent, Kevin S. Parker, that he had to wangle a nomination to a judgeship on the Civil Court.

On the bench he handled as many as 100 credit card collection cases a day, and estimated that in a vast majority of cases, credit card companies and banks couldn't provide proof that any debt was actually owed.

He also declared that a law against drinking alcohol in public discriminated against racial minorities, and said the police would have to prove through laboratory tests that a beverage contained alcohol before serving a valid summons.

Mr. Dear was born on Nov. 20, 1953, the son of Sidney and Joan (Lipins) Dear. After attending Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, he graduated from Brooklyn College with a bachelor's degree in 1975 and a master's in social work in 1977. He received his law degree from Brooklyn Law School in 1991.

Mr. Dear was district manager of the local community board, served on the Taxi and Limousine Commission and was elected to the Civil Court in 2007 despite initially being rated "not approved" by the screening committee of the Brooklyn Bar Association and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. He was appointed an acting Supreme Court justice in 2010 and elected to a 15-year term on the State Supreme Court in 2015.

His survivors include his wife, Rickly (Neiman) Dear, a speech pathologist, and four daughters, Rivka, Adina, Chaviva and Aliza.

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