

# **Battle For the Truth**

**A Documentary of the Struggle of the  
Minchas Elazar and Other  
Rabbanim Against Agudath Israel  
and the Zionist Movement**

## Index by Name

(All the rabbis listed below signed letters and proclamations against Agudah and against Zionism)

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Rabbi Abraham Joshua Freund of Interdam, Hungary  
Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur, Poland, author of Sfas Emes  
Rabbi Asher Lemel Spitzer of Kirchdorf, Slovakia  
Rabbi Asher Zelig Greenzweig of Dalha, Hungary  
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Rabbi Abraham M. S. Frankel, president of the Orthodox Office in Pest, Hungary  
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Rabbi Isaac Frish of Rokovitz, Slovakia  
Rabbi Joshua Sofer of Greater Brezna, Ukraine  
Rabbi Joseph Halevy of Kiralhoz, Hungary

Rabbi Isaac Gross of Tarin, Hungary  
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Kollel Chibas Jerusalem of Galicia in Jerusalem, Palestine  
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Rabbi Moses Greenzweig of Lipsha, Romania  
Rabbi Moses Brody of Uzhgorod, Ukraine  
Rabbi Meyer Arik of Tarna, Germany, author of Imrei Yosher  
Rabbi Mordechai Zev Halberstam of Gribov, Germany  
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Rabbi Menachem Mendel Deutsch of Jerusalem, Palestine  
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Rabbi Ezra Harari-Rafal of Jerusalem, Palestine  
Rabbi Pinchas Adler of Radvanka, Russia  
Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Shapiro of Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia, author of Darchei Teshuva  
Rabbi Zevi Elimelech Shapiro of Bluzhev, Poland  
Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Sofer of Greater Brezna, Ukraine  
Rabbi Reuben Chaim Klein of Sanina, Slovakia  
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Rabbi Samuel Benjamin Halevy Jungreis of Pilek, Hungary  
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Rabbi Samuel Rosenberg of Unsdorf, Slovakia  
Rabbi Simon Greenfeld of Semihaly, Hungary

Rabbi Samuel Cahana Frankel, president of the Orthodox office in Pest, Hungary  
Rabbi Solomon Zevi Strasser of Debrecen, Hungary  
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Rabbi Shalom Noah Landau of Veretzky, Romania  
Rabbi Solomon Friedman of Rachov, Romania  
Rabbi Solomon Isaac Scheinfeld of Aulik, Hungary  
Rabbi Samuel Jechiel Moscovitz of Palad, Hungary  
Rabbi Solomon Spitzer of Bogdan, Hungary  
Rabbi Solomon Eliezer Alefandri of Jerusalem, Palestine

### **Chapter 1: The Agudah is Rejected by Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Shapiro, Author of Darchei Teshuva**

The struggle against the Agudah and its ideology began under the leadership of the author of Darchei Teshuva, in his capacity as a leader of Hungarian Orthodoxy. In the year 5673 (1913) a wind of change began to blow from Germany; a certain German rabbi attempted to convince the Hungarian rabbis to join in founding the Agudah. At a meeting of the Hungarian leadership, the Darchei Teshuva arose and completely rejected the idea. He explained his reasons to those present using the analogy of two sticks, one long and one short: "If a man wants to make both sticks the same size, he cannot make the short one longer; the only way is to cut the long one shorter. Here too: do you not agree, dear rabbis of Germany, that Judaism in our country is in better condition than in yours? Hungary is the long stick and Germany is the short stick. How then will they fit together in the Agudah, which originates from Germany? We will have no choice but to cut down Judaism in our country, and this we will never agree to do. You may consider the Agudah a good thing for your country, but it would be a bad thing for our country." The Hungarian rabbis, all wise and respected leaders of their people, agreed not to join the Agudah, and so the land remained clean of this breach. The rabbis of Germany did not so much as consider bypassing the rabbis and turning directly to the people, for they had enough good sense and respect to know that the rabbis are the pillars of the land and without them one can do nothing. And certainly the Jews of Hungary would not think of disobeying the call of their Torah leaders.

### **Chapter 2: The Confusion Begins**

Then came the World War, when the countries were broken up, great misfortunes came to the world, and the Jewish people were bereaved, uprooted and impoverished, wandering without a safe place to settle. In this state of confusion, when the wisdom of the wise had gone crooked, the Satan found an opportune time to ensnare the masses. He found many an ear willing to listen to him, to found various groups and parties whose goal was the settle of Eretz Yisroel. Among these parties, to a greater and greater extent, was the Agudah. The masses, unable to distinguish between holy and profane, clean and defiled, began to slip, without knowing what they were slipping on. Even among many of the remaining great Torah leaders, disputes began to arise, and they did not gather together in unity to protest against the false ideologies – for the war and the peace that followed it greatly confounded the entire world, as anyone who lived in those bitter days knows.

And at that time, the Darchei Teshuva's son and successor, the great leader, zealot son of a zealot, the holy gaon, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro, author of Minchas Elazar, arose and donned the cloak of zeal for the sake of Hashem and His Torah, and printed the following warning:

### **Chapter 3: The Minchas Elazar Takes a Clear Stand Against Zionism and Settlement, Even With Permission from all the Nations**

For the sake of truth and Torah, I will call in the name of Hashem, to remove the stumbling block from the house of Israel, that we might not be suspect in anyone's eyes. I saw the newspaper Vochenshrift, mouthpiece of the Organization for Settling (i.e. destroying) Eretz Yisroel, printed in Pest, in which they make me the victim of their lies in order to attract more people to their movement. They put my name at the top of the list, together with two gedolei hador, as approving of the Yishuvist<sup>1</sup> movement. "When these three pillars of Torah come out in support of us," wrote the editor, "who will not come out?"

I was shocked to see this – how can they write such a obvious lie about me when I am here to deny it? And my opposition to the Yishuvists was well known, for when I was at the conference in Pest, in the presence of everyone, Dr. Zev Tzvi Klein, rabbi of Eisenstadt, came to debate with me over what I had already written against the Yishuvists in the introduction to a book published by our kollel. He was upset that I had called them heretics, deniers of the miraculous coming of moshiach – were the great rabbis who had founded the organization heretics? I replied that my accusation of heresy had not been meant to refer to the rabbis, only to the youth groups that have been formed recently, who laugh at all our faith in the miraculous redemption, showing disrespect for their elders. They are not only destroying (not settling) Eretz Yisroel, but destroying the whole Torah world by founding this groups and carrying on these activities.

The new groups advocating settlement in Eretz Yisroel are no better than the Mizrachists, who also claim to be following Shulchan Aruch. We look not at the name –

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Yishuvists" or "Yishuv Eretz Yisroel" referred to throughout this book was an early name used by the Agudah.

"Yishuv Eretz Yisroel" – but at the substance and platform of the organization. Regarding the Mizrachists, our rabbis and fathers, righteous men of our country, both past and present, have forbidden joining them. A lesser court cannot annul the ruling of a previous greater court. And the Yishuvists fall under this ruling.

They claim that now it is different, due to the great losses and destruction from which the Jewish people in Europe has recently suffered. For this reason, they want to become farmers in Eretz Yisroel. Even naturally speaking this idea is futile – there will be no room for all the Jews in the Holy Land until it expands (see Gittin 57a). This is not the place to delve into this issue. But more importantly, the question of emigration to Eretz Yisroel is not new; it was already raised forty years ago during the pogroms in Russia. In those years a million Jews, or perhaps more, were fleeing Russia. Still, the rabbis of the time ruled that they should not form groups and organizations to colonize Eretz Yisroel, for worse than all the persecution would be to take away from the remnant of Israel their spark of faith and observance of Torah. What has changed now? Who permitted this?

We cannot take lightly the ruling of Rabbi Meir of Rottenburg, brought by the Tashbatz (responsum 559), regarding the mitzvah to go and live in Eretz Yisroel: **"This is only if he accepts upon himself to be exceptionally strict and careful of any type of sin, and he will fulfill the mitzvos that apply in Eretz Yisroel. For if he sins there, he will be punished more than if he had sinned in the rest of the world.** The Torah says (Devarim 11:12) that Hashem your G-d looks after the land; His eyes are always on it. One who rebels against the King in His palace is much worse than one who rebels outside the palace. This is why it is called 'a land that eats its inhabitants' (Bamidbar 13:32). Regarding those who wish to go there and act with lightheaded and quarrelsome behavior, Yirmiyah (2:7) said, 'You came and defiled My land,' and Yishaya (1:12) said, 'Who asked this of you, to trample My courtyards?'" These are the words of the Tashbatz.

Now we understand the wisdom of our rabbis, who instituted the charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness for those Jews living in the Holy Land and occupying themselves with Torah and service of Hashem. Some of them do a little business, but the main goal of the charity is to support Torah study. This is what Jews in the King's palace should be doing. But if they go there and work the soil, plowing and sowing and reaping as farmers do, they will become sunken into the physical and forget the spiritual, and the words of the Tashbatz will apply to them.

It is also well known that the greatest of latter authorities, Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz of righteous memory, in his work Ahavas Yonasan, forbade any return to the Holy Land during exile, even with permission from the nations. In the Haftorah for Parshas Vaeschanan we read: "Go up on a high mountain, announcer of Zion; lift up your voice with strength, announcer of Jerusalem; lift it up, do not fear, say to the cities of Judah: here is your G-d" (Yishaya 40:9). Rashi notes that the word "announcer" is in the feminine, while later on (52:7) the word "announcer" is used in the same sense, but in the masculine. Rashi explains that if the Jewish people deserves it, the redemption will come quickly like a man, but if not, it will be weak like a woman and will be delayed

until the End. Based on this, Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz explains the verse in Shir Hashirim (2:7), "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to arouse or awaken the love before she desires." Here too, the word "techpatz" – she desires – is in the feminine. The meaning is that the Jewish people, who is the speaker in this verse, cries out to the nations (the "daughters of Jerusalem") with a curse and an oath: "Do not arouse and do not awaken the love towards the ingathering of Israel!" **Even if all the Jews are ready to go to Jerusalem, and all the nations agree, still she cries out that, G-d forbid, she will not go there.** For the end is hidden, and perhaps now is not the true time, only a temporary moment of favor. In a short time they will sin, and be forced into exile again, G-d forbid, and that exile will be worse than the previous one. Therefore she requested that they not go until "she desires," that is, until the time arrives when the earth is filled with knowledge. After that time, the Creator promises that the Jewish people will never lack anything, for that is the true time. Therefore, the prophet Yishaya calls the announcer feminine, for the end of the exile will be slow in coming, but once it comes, "Lift up your voice with strength" – for there will be nothing to fear. There will never be, G-d forbid, another exile, for "say to the cities of Judah, here is your G-d" – He Himself will come and redeem you.

Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz lived more than a hundred years before the Zionist movement began, but it seems that Divine inspiration moved him to write about this matter which so plagues us today. We cannot rely on the faltering support of the nations, even if right now they are in favor. They act with guile and all that they do is for their own benefit, as our Sages say (Avodah Zarah 2b).

The Yishuvists also write explicitly in their program that they are willing to join other organizations that have similar principles. So they admit that they are part of the Zionist movement and wish to join the Zionist establishment. If one joins forces with the wicked, "an organization of the wicked does not count" (Sanhedrin 26a). Chazal also say that in the days before Moshiach impudence will increase, and the truth will be absent (Sotah 49b). If they write that great and righteous rabbis of this country support them, do not believe it! If the publishers of the newspaper "Vochenshrift" in Pest were not ashamed to print my name among the supporters of the Yishuvists, after I had written so vehemently against them, then they have no credibility. Certainly we need not believe what they write about rabbis in places further away than I am.

I acted swiftly and published this denial of the position attributed to me by the "Vochenshrift" in order to prevent people from stumbling in this sin. I apologize to my dear rabbis and teachers for not waiting to gather signatures of many rabbis, as is normally done, for it was impossible due to the time constraints and the dangers of travel. "Wherever there is a desecration of Hashem's name going on, we need not defer to the honor of a greater person" (Berachos 19b). I hope that they will forgive me and be supportive of my words. "Assyria will not save us...and we will no longer call the works of our hands our gods" (Hoshea 14:4). This means that we will not think that with the acts of our own hands, or with the help of the nations, we should be able to accomplish our redemption. "All the predicted times for the redemption have passed, and the matter depends only on repentance" (Sanhedrin 97b).



I am ready to discuss this matter in further detail, but for now we must hold no gatherings in Pest or anywhere else for the purpose of settling Eretz Yisroel. Unless all the rabbis meet and reach a positive decision, we must not change our position on this matter. Whoever tries to change the position has the burden of proof, for he is lending a hand to the sinners and causing Jews to slip into the pit of iniquity, may Hashem spare us! This is the period of tests following tests, refinement after refinement, that Chazal foretold would come before Moshiach (Sotah 49b, Sanhedrin 97a, Kesubos 111a, Zohar end of Balak); these are the birthpangs.

Let me also mention that many of our activists have begun to draw up agreements to join the Agudists of Germany and Switzerland. But this is not the proper way to strengthen Orthodoxy in our country. Until they receive our permission at a general gathering of rabbis of this country, they are forbidden to join, for the Agudah was not founded in Hungary. This is what our leaders ruled before the War. Therefore, "anything new is forbidden by the Torah" unless we assemble, analyze the matter and vote to permit it. May Hashem help us to continue in the way of our fathers, and may their merit protect us, to go from darkness to great light, with the coming of the redeemer and the redemption of Israel.

Signed in Munkacz this Tuesday of Ki Sisa 5679 (1919), Chaim Elazar Shapiro

#### **Chapter 4: The Effect of the Above Statement**

After this warning was published and spread throughout the land, it was accepted by all the Jews. It was still a religious-minded generation who understood the importance of listening to the voice of sages, even if they personally had some doubts. Religious Jewry in Hungary withdrew its hands and kept a distance from all groups or parties advocating settlement on the land of Eretz Yisroel.

#### **Chapter 5: The Agudah Spreads to Poland**

One year later, the word got out that the Agudah had spread to Poland, that choicest land, home to millions of Chassidim and other religious Jews. The Minchas Elazar acted quickly and wrote a letter to the Gerrer Rebbe. It was not a letter of violence and attack, of sword and spear; but a respectful and peaceful letter, speaking for the sake of Hashem and the honor of His Torah. Here we present the exchange of letters; let the reader study them and draw his own conclusions.

#### **Chapter 6: The Minchas Elazar Writes Against Agudah**

To the honor of the great man, fiery candle, master of Torah, rabbi, scholar and well-known saint, fragrant garden, by whose light thousands and myriads of Jews walk, epitome of perfection, leader son of a leader, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai shlita, rav and admor of Gur, blessings of peace.

After paying proper respect to a Torah leader in Israel, I must speak to his honor about an important matter. During the years of the War, our Jewish brethren suffered greatly and each made do in his own way. But the Satan's counsel became powerful, as Chazal say in Tamid (32a) – "the Satan was victorious" – especially in these days of the birthpangs of Moshiach as it states at the end of Sotah (49b) and in Sanhedrin (97a) and at the end of Kesubos. All around us, the Zionists, who are known to be complete heretics, have begun to disguise themselves in order to deceive people. Jews who pretend to keep far from the ways of the Zionists, who say they are opposed to them, are actually carrying their poison. Thus they have harmed us more than the Zionists, who are more easily recognized as wicked. They have called themselves Mizrachists, Yishuvists (meaning settlers or builders of the Land, when they are actually destroyers of the Land), and Agudists. This last group is the subject of my letter. I am speaking as dust before the feet of his honor. When the founders of the Agudah began their work and wished to establish a branch in our country, my father, the Darchei Teshuva, did not allow it, explaining that it would weaken Hungarian Jewry by bringing in secular studies and languages. Perhaps in Germany this was the way to save Jewry from the flood of heresy, but our country must not join them.

When I read recently in the Agudah newspaper that his honor gave them a donation, I gave his honor the benefit of the doubt, that perhaps someone in his household gave the money without his knowledge, or perhaps he erred in thinking that sending money is not considered joining them. Maybe there was some temporary need to give them the money. But at this point we are dealing with an halachic question; one who errs regarding the Agudah is like who errs in an explicit law of the Mishnah, for the negative aspects of the Agudah have already been publicly revealed at their gathering in Zurich. I was sent copies of the minutes of that gathering, and I saw who their leaders were. Aside from a small number of G-d fearing men – Breuer, Frankel, the Brodshiner Rav and perhaps one other – they were all preachers from faraway gentile cities such as Florence, Copenhagen and the like, who have no scent of Orthodox Judaism at all. Our Sages say, "The clean-minded Jews of Jerusalem would not sit in judgment unless they knew who was sitting with them" (Sanhedrin 23a), and there is no matter that requires more serious judgment than the matters dealt with by the Agudah. How then can anyone join an organization with such leaders?

Together with the minutes of the Zurich gathering, they sent me a letter asking me and my fellow Hungarian rabbis to join them. I sent them a letter in German (see page ??) in which I dealt with their proposals to institute secular studies in the Holy Land, in the midst of Jerusalem, including a medical and technical university. All this is copied from the Zionist movement – what is the difference? Neither has the spirit of Torah and fear of G-d; this is not the way to return to Jerusalem. Only through loyalty to Hashem and His Torah will we merit to see the return of the Divine Presence there, may it be soon. Knowing all this, I thought that certainly his honor is not part of their organization and knows nothing about this.

But then I saw a terrible thing that prompted me to write this letter. The Agudist periodical "Haderech", in its issue for Adar-Nissan, contains an article about the religious

schools in Poland, and says: "The study of the spoken languages will be added to the curriculum, as well as all studies that prepare a person for the struggle for life and livelihood. The **Agudah** has taken the first step in this matter and founded the **Mesivta** in Warsaw...this mesivta is recognized by the government as a rabbinic school and therefore it follows some formal rules: only students 16 years and older are accepted, and in order to graduate they must show proof **that they have completed the proper course of secular studies.**" (This is nothing other than the "seminary" forbidden by our rabbis in the last generation.) On these enactments regarding the schools, three hundred rabbis have affixed their signatures, and **his honor's signature is at the top of the list!** Woe to the ears that hear this and the eyes that see this! The hair stands on end – woe to us that such has taken place in our days.

Even now, I think that perhaps this was done by members of his honor's family without his knowledge, perhaps due to their ulterior motives. Therefore I bring these facts to his knowledge in the hope that he will publish a denial, saying that this was done without his knowledge, and he is not a member of their organization. For how can one imagine that the Gerrer Rebbe could bring about such a stumbling block? To think that the holy Torah education for which we have put our lives on the line for thousands of years, should be extinguished in this final test, of all places in the country Poland, that choicest dwelling of Chassidim and religious Jews, by the founding of such an unclean seminary and cheder! When his honor publishes a denial, the other rabbis will also retract, for almost all of them surely relied on his honor and his righteousness. Please, my master! Your servants are suffering and the blame will be placed upon you. Let this not be a stumbling block for Israel, and let your throne remain clean. Act for the sake of Hashem and His Torah, and for the sake of the honor of his holy predecessors who sacrificed themselves for the holiness of Hashem and His Torah! For if the seminary is allowed to continue, Jews in all the other countries will learn from you, saying that the rabbis have permitted this. It will be like pig's meat prepared with the Temple's standard of purity.

What will I answer my opponents when they say that the Gerrer Rebbe and three hundred rabbis have permitted this? I have already heard that his honor told his chassidim that it is not important to belong to the Shlumunists (Agudists). But now that his name has been printed on the above enactments, I think that is not enough. He must take action to stop this breach. And surely there will be others who will return to Hashem and His Torah in truth, and the merit of the multitudes will be to their credit.

Waiting for a reply, Chaim Elazar Shapiro

### **Chapter 7: The Gerrer Rebbe Agrees that Agudah Might Be Harmful in Other Places**

To the great rabbi, splendor of the generation, leader of his people, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz:

Despite my limited time now with the approaching Yom Tov, I have written these lines due to the importance of the subject and because of his honor. It cannot be as you wrote,

that thousands and myriads of religious Jews, along with most of the rabbis of Poland, have been led onto the improper path. A letter will not suffice to explain this, nor will the sending of an oral message through the messenger boy. This is a time when I cannot write at length, and to write briefly would not do the subject justice. But this I will tell you: some statements in your letter are not true. For example, you write at the end of the letter that you heard that I tell my chassidim that it is not important to belong to the Agudah. The truth is that I tell them that it **is** important. I am not the head of the organization, neither was I a founder; nevertheless I see in it a strengthening of Judaism and the keeping of the Torah. But it seems that his honor looks only at the name, and since in Holland there also an Agudas Yisroel, every member of our Agudah in Poland becomes responsible for what a newspaper printer in Holland writes.

It is true that we received letters from the rabbis of Galicia against the founding of the Shlumei Emunei Yisroel (Agudah). **I replied to them that every place and time is different; perhaps there it is not necessary, and where it is not necessary it is, quite understandably, a damaging factor.** And if the rabbis there decide that it is necessary, it will surely be done in the best possible way, that every member will be required to keep the Torah down to the last detail, as is the case with the Agudah in Poland. If a man of understanding comes from me to you or from you to me, I am sure this entire matter will be better explained to you.

I remain his friend who seeks his peace, Avraham Mordechai Alter

### **Chapter 8: The Minchas Elazar Writes That Agudah is Forbidden in All Places**

To the famous rav, scholar and tzaddik, fragrant garden, master of Torah, epitome of perfection, by whose light thousands and myriads of Jews walk, to whom all chassidim and men of understanding turn for inspiration and direction, leader son of a leader, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai shlita, rav and admor of Gur, blessings of peace, and may our eyes see the return of the Divine Presence to Zion.

After paying proper respect to a Torah leader in Israel, whose deeds are great and numerous, let me say that today your letter reached me. And I did not merit to understand his honor's words, and therefore I find it necessary to speak more directly.

His honor wrote that it cannot be that most of the rabbis of Poland and thousands and myriads of religious Jews left the path of Torah. **You may be small in your own eyes, but you are a leader in Israel;** most of the rabbis of Poland rely on your judgment – and certainly the multitudes and the chassidim. This is what I wrote in my previous letter. Thus the responsibility rests on you alone – how then can you depend on them and say that their way must be the Torah way? I am greatly surprised. I have in my possession several signed letters from great rabbanim saying that they themselves did not sign, etc. and other words of denial. But I do not want to publish them until I receive word from you.

His honor drew a distinction between Poland and Galicia, and wrote that every place is different. But all of Poland and Galicia is one country now, Jews all have one Torah, and they will follow the decisions of the great leaders of the generation. Therefore the rabbis must be careful not to breach the fences set up by our previous generations of rabbis. There may be differences in religiosity between various parts of the country, but similar distinctions could be made within Poland proper itself, or within Galicia.

I am especially surprised at what his honor wrote that he is not responsible for what the Agudah of Holland prints. It seems that you have your countries confused, and you mean Switzerland, where the central offices of the Agudah are located. Is not the very meaning of the name "Agudah" a unification of people with the same views and goals? Certainly members of the group are responsible for the group's actions. And furthermore, they have shown their true colors even in Poland with the recent reforms bringing in secular education in the cheder, which our rabbis have forbidden not so long ago. Forgive me for saying the truth, that you are not greater than them, that you should be able to annul their words. And if it is the decree of the government that all must learn their language, let them at least learn it in gentile schools, with gentile teachers, rather than mix the sacred and the profane. This was always the ruling of the rabbis, in Poland as well as in Hungary.

And regarding the seminary founded by the Agudah in Warsaw, his honor wrote no reply! His orally transmitted reply, brought to me by the messenger boy, was that he did not make it, but Rabbi X. made it. I tremble to see such an answer from such a great man – what difference does it make who made this idol? If it is in Warsaw, the capital of Poland and the capital of his honor's chassidim, near his honor's home, and he also supports it, since it is under the Agudah's auspices – then his honor bears the responsibility, for it is known under his name. People will say that the rabbis permitted it, and G-d forbid all the forbidden has become permitted. I will not go into the reasons of those who permitted it, reasons which make no sense at all, for there is not enough paper or time now. But let it suffice that one court cannot annul the words of another unless it is greater. In Pest the rabbis forbade a seminary, although it might have been argued that Pest was then on a much lower religious level than Warsaw is now. When Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's neighbor took her cow out on Shabbos with a strap and he did not protest, our Sages considered it as if Rabbi Elazar's own cow had gone out with a strap (Shabbos 54b). Your responsibility for the seminary is not less than Rabbi Elazar's responsibility for his neighbor's cow.

But I conclude by agreeing with what his honor writes at the end of his letter, that it would be proper for a man of understanding to go between us and help us settle this matter. It is true that such a great and awesome issue cannot be decided merely through an exchange of letters. Therefore it is my intention to visit your area this winter, and I hope that we will make peace and that you will agree to the truth of my words. In the meantime, to prevent this great destruction of our holy Torah, I request that you send me a letter stating that the seminary was not made on your advice, and that the prohibition of our rabbis was never removed.

Bowing with proper honor for the Torah, Chaim Elazar Shapiro

### **Chapter 9: The Gerrer Rebbe Invites the Minchas Elazar to Come and See That No Wrong is Being Done in the Warsaw Seminary**

To the great rabbi and scholar, splendor of the generation, leader of his people, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz:

Several days ago I received your letter, and I see that you will not be able to understand this matter unless you come yourself, as you promised. It seems that the messenger boy either did not understand, or did not explain my words as I spoke them. I also do not understand why you write that we have permitted that which was forbidden. I am now more involved in the Agudah; today I was in Warsaw and I visited the Mesivta myself. There is no sin there, nor the shadow of a sin. I hope that when you come you will see that the entire problem never existed, and the accusations you heard were as false as the accusation that Binyamin stole the silver cup.

I remain his friend who seeks his peace, Avraham Mordechai Alter

### **Chapter 10: The Minchas Elazar Comes to Gur**

After these things, the Minchas Elazar spared himself no effort, and traveled in the month of Iyar 5682 (1922) from Munkacz to Warsaw and Gur, together with Rabbi Simcha Nosson Greenburg, rav of Kezmark, to look into the matter of the Agudah Mesivta in Warsaw and its curriculum, and to debate face to face with the rebbe of its staff. What follows is the substance of the conversation between the Minchas Elazar and the Gerrer Rebbe – let the reader draw his own conclusions.

### **Chapter 11: The Great Debate Over the Agudah**

Minchas Elazar: I have followed your advice and come to Warsaw to see the "Mesivta". And I am forced to say that there are all kinds of bad things going on there. Even more, I am amazed that they were able to hide all this from his honor, to do all these great and terrible things secretly, things which tamper with the very foundations of Torah and our faith.

Gerrer Rebbe: Please explain what you mean.

Minchas Elazar: I already wrote to you two years ago that it was the mixture of religious and secular studies that characterized the seminary founded by heretics in Hungary many years ago (i.e. the seminary founded by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Hildesheimer in Eisenstadt). This was forbidden by a conference of rabbis already in the year 5628 (1868). The prohibition was signed by about three hundred Hungarian rabbis, together with many rabbis from other countries, headed by the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz and Rabbi Yitzchok Eisik of Zidichov. How then can a beis din in our times annul their prohibition? This is especially true since their prohibition was not simply a legal ruling but a protective

measure to strengthen Torah and faith, as explained by the Maharam Schick in his responsa. This is Torah, and we are all bound by it, whether in Hungary, Poland or elsewhere. How then could such a thing have happened in Warsaw? Obviously, it makes no difference that the Agudah called this a "mesivta" and not a "seminary" – what matters is that under one roof they are learning the holy books together with the Polish language and other secular subjects.

If you would at least stand by your position stated in your first letter to me, that every country is different, and the Agudah may indeed be harmful in Hungary or Galicia, then I would be silent. Why should I intervene in your country? Surely you understand better than I what is good for your country, and who I am to question your wisdom and righteousness? Although personally I see this as a violation of the prohibition against mixing religious and secular studies, still I would not have traveled all the way here just to protest against it. I am not such a zealot as my father, the Darchei Teshuva. I would be happy if I could just save my own country from the net of the Satan and the pervasive heresy of our times.

However, you explained this position only to me, not to the public. The Agudists are now working hard to spread their organization to Galicia and Czechoslovakia. We are up to our necks in water in our country, despite the opposition of many of our rabbis to the Agudah. What can I reply to my people about the Agudah, when the great Gerrer Rebbe, scion of the great dynasty of the Chiddushei Harim and the Sfas Emes, has embraced it? How can we forbid the organization and its modern schools in our country, when this school in Warsaw is operating under your authority and prestige? Thus, the issue we are discussing affects not only Poland but the entire Jewish world.

The Gemora says, "If a man sees that his evil inclination is overpowering him, he should dress in black and wrap himself in black and go to a place where no one knows him, and do what his heart desires" (Kiddushin 40a). One of the many explanations of this statement is that if one sees that there is no choice but to commit a sin for some important reason, he should at least do it in a place where no one knows him, lest others learn from him and the sin become widespread even in cases where it is not necessary. But the Sages never say that someone has some good reason to sin he should put on white clothing and do it in public and attempt to convince others to sin with him.

This is why I say that Jews faithful to the Torah should not join the Agudah. If the Agudah were to be confined to Poland proper, although I see no justification to permit even that, still we would admit that the intention would be for the sake of Heaven, and this would be what your Daas Torah dictates to you for your time and place. But who permitted the great noise and publicity made by the Agudah to spread their movement to all countries? Who said it is necessary to teach gentile languages in yeshivos in other countries? One who wants to be a government-recognized rabbi can study the gentile language privately, in his home; he need not go to a school where the clean and the defiled are mixed. Furthermore, this kind of seminary for rabbis will lead to further tampering with our holy system of education: the cheder will be modernized to include

secular studies, so that the children grow up not knowing the difference between sacred and profane.

### **Chapter 12: Undesirable Elements in the Agudah**

Furthermore, how can one permit joining those unfaithful Jews from faraway gentile cities who are members (and in some cases leaders) in the Agudah? Is it not bad enough that there are many cities in which the Orthodox Jews have no power to expell the unfaithful Jews from the kehillah because of government regulations, and they are thus forced to be together with them? Why does the Agudah, founded by Orthodox Jews, have to spread itself so wide and create this problem on its own? Chazal say that one may not join the wicked, even for the purpose of building the Temple. The appointment of women to important positions, calling them "Bnos Agudas Yisroel", is no more than an imitation of the Zionist "Bnos Zion". These innovations are derived from the modern elements, and they bring destruction upon the Torah and its true path.

### **Chapter 13: Agudah's Work in Colonizing Eretz Yisroel**

Worst of all, the Agudah has brought ruin upon the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity fund, founded by our rabbis and teachers in every country to support the kollelim in the Holy Land. We have a tradition from the Ohev Yisroel of Opta that one can measure a Jew's feeling for Judaism by his contributions to the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes fund. But now, on this visit to Warsaw, I saw in the Jewish hotel two charity boxes, side by side, to satisfy all opinions: **the Zionist Keren Hayesod, and the Agudist Keren Hayishuv**. The Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes box was not even there. Who is to blame for this? Only the Agudists, for they established this fund to support their work in the colonies. Their goal there is not settlement of the Land but destruction of the Land, **as I have explained in a special pamphlet on this subject, based on the ruling of the Rambam that settlement in Eretz Yisroel is not a mitzvah in our time. When Moshiach comes, he himself will divide up Eretz Yisroel among the tribes with his inspiration from G-d, not as the Zionist heretics imagine that we will regain the Land by natural means. Only for this miraculous redemption do our eyes hope and wait.**

### **Chapter 14: The Gerrer Rebbe Says He Tried to Stop the Secular Studies**

Gerrer Rebbe: You are upset about the secular studies. But surely you know of the great scholar and tzaddik Reb Avremele of Sochatchov. I heard that he said it is necessary to permit secular studies in the yeshivos so that the students should not have to waste time travelling from the school to the yeshiva. He is great enough to rely on it making the Mesivta in Warsaw. Nevertheless, when your letter arrived two years ago, although I did not yet know you personally, still I said, "Since the son of the Darchei Teshuva writes this, I will listen to him," and I gave orders immediately to stop all secular studies in the Mesivta. My mechutan, Rabbi Menachem Ziamba, can testify to this. Didn't I tell them to stop the secular studies?



Rabbi Menachem Ziemba: Yes, the Rebbe did give this order. But it is something that is hard to control. There is so much pressure to compete with the Zionists, who also have a rabbinical seminary in Warsaw with even higher level secular studies.

### **Chapter 15: The Agudah Leaders Have the Real Power**

Minchas Elazar: I did not merit to know the Sochatchover Rov personally, but I have read his great works and continue to study them. When Rabbi Dr. [Meir] Jung planned to open a Jewish gymnasium in Cracow, the great rabbis of the generation signed a poster against it, and on the poster they printed the ruling of **the Sochatchover Rov, that the gymnasium was forbidden because Jewish and secular studies cannot be under one roof; such a mixture is more dangerous than pure secular studies.** The ruling was very lengthy and detailed, and this was printed and publicized. So if someone told you a conflicting ruling in the name of the Sochatchover, we can be sure that he was mistaken.

In any case, this has no bearing on the issue, since such schools were clearly forbidden by the rabbis of the past generation, and no one can reverse their decision. In our country we definitely forbid this, and one may not give a Jew a food that that Jew holds to be forbidden, even if for the giver it is permitted (Kesubos 71b). **Why then do the Agudists campaign to ensnare us in violating the prohibition of our own rabbis?**

You say that you ordered them to stop teaching secular subjects in the yeshiva. What good does this do if they did not listen to you? **From then until now nothing has changed, and thousands of Jews are relying on your authority.** I also thought previously that everything was being done at your command, and that without your permission no one in the leadership of the Agudah would lift a finger in these grave matters. **But now I see** that the Agudah leaders have the real power, and they are leading on the Rebbe so that he carries the responsibility for their actions!

As to Rabbi Menachem Ziemba's argument that they are pressured into it, I have my doubts. And even assuming that he is right, the need to succumb to pressure cannot turn a sin into an obligation, especially since this pressure does not exist in other countries. You should have at least issued a public statement that no one should see in the Mesivta any basis for a lenient ruling elsewhere.

### **Chapter 16: Testimony About the Mesivta**

Putting aside all theoretical arguments, let me relate what I personally observed in the Mesivta, together with my friend, the rav of Kezmark. The students and teachers did not know who we were, and we made sure to speak Hungarian to each other so that they would not understand. We took aside several boys who were about to graduate and be ordained as rabbis, and we tested them on a few simple questions about defects in the lung of an animal. They could not answer properly. We tested them on the Gemora and Tosafos that they were learning – the first chapter of Kiddushin – and they did not know the subject well at all. Their rebbe, a noted scholar, the brother-in-law of Rabbi Naftali

Dayan of Warsaw, told us apologetically that the boys' secular studies were occupying their minds and they were unable to grasp and remember things properly.

Then we spoke to the rector and head teacher of secular studies there, and he complained that the students were unable to progress in higher learning as far as the students of the Zionist school. "The Zionists have eight levels, and we have only four," he said.

So each one complained that the other's studies interfered with his own, and each was right. Indeed a mixture of the permitted and the forbidden is forbidden, and great are the words of our rabbis who have forbidden this.

### **Chapter 17: The Kook Affair**

Now that I am speaking to you, permit me to ask you about a letter that was printed in the Agudah periodical "Haderech", written by you aboard the ship as you traveled home from your visit to Eretz Yisroel last year (7 Iyar 5681/1921). Forgive me if I ask you: did you write that letter yourself?

Gerrer Rebbe: Yes, I wrote it and signed it.

Minchas Elazar: Because of your holiness and the holiness of your predecessors, it is forbidden for me to believe that you wrote the letter yourself. Surely a member of your family wrote it and you signed below, without reading what it said. When you say that you wrote it, your memory is flawed, due to your many responsibilities and distractions. For how can I bear to see what is written there:

"That we must carry on concrete activity in all areas in the settlement of Eretz Yisroel." This is the platform of the Zionists – to build the land with human effort, in contrast to what we have learned from our holy books and rabbis in all generations.

"That one need tear only one garment when seeing the destroyed Holy City, and that when the Shulchan Aruch says (Orach Chaim 561:4) that he must tear all the garments he is wearing until he uncovers his heart, it means only that he must tear with the feeling of his heart." How can one write such a thing? I am certain that your intentions were good, yet one must keep far from anything that resembles the way of the Zionists who say that practical mitzvos are not important and one need only have a Jewish (i.e. nationalist) heart.

Worst of all, the letter speaks highly of Rabbi Kook, who encourages sin with his unclean, heretical books.<sup>2</sup> How could you have written that he is "a great man, who

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<sup>2</sup> In the book Oros Meofel, Chapter 34, Rabbi Kook wrote: "This sport [i.e. soccer] that young Jews play in Eretz Yisroel in order to strengthen their bodies in order to be strong young men for the nation, completes the spiritual strength of the righteous above... playing sports to strengthen the body and the spirit for the mightiness of the entire nation is a holy service of G-d, and raises the Divine Presence higher and higher, like the 80 songs and praises sung by David, king of Israel, in the book of Tehillim."

despises personal profit and whose intentions are for the sake of Heaven," and compared him to the great rabbis of Jerusalem who are putting their lives on the line to fight against him? Is there anything as painful to the heart of a believing Jew?

Gerrer Rebbe: But I have a handwritten letter from Rabbi Kook saying that he retracts what he wrote in his books.

Minchas Elazar: The world does not know about this slip of paper in the Gerrer Rebbe's pocket, but it does know about the heresy in Rabbi Kook's books, which are printed and distributed everywhere. If you would at least publish Rabbi Kook's retraction, to show that you agree that he deserves rebuke for his heretical words, the desecration of G-d's name caused by your visiting him and approving of him would not be so great.

Gerrer Rebbe: Even if you are correct in criticizing me, I am just one man acting on my own. Why then do you blame the Agudah? In truth, I already dislike bearing the title of honorary president of the Agudah. I would willingly give up the honor and I wish I had never taken it on. For what do I need such a big responsibility? Who am I that people should blame these things on me? I would like you to suggest a different way for religious Jews to unite, so that there might be no complaints against us.

### **Chapter 18: An Agreement is Reached**

Minchas Elazar: Certainly. I have not come, G-d forbid, just to complain and bring about disunion. For a unifying organization is really a very good thing for Torah Judaism, only it has to be done right, without any trace of modernity or reform. In my humble opinion, three changes should be made:

- 1) The name "Agudah" must be changed, since its source was in a country physically and spiritually far from us, who have a different approach to Judaism. Although the word "Agudah" is harmless in and of itself, it is no different from the word "Zion" which means the place where the holy dynasty of David began, and yet since the Zionists used that word as the name for their heretical movement, it became a disgusting word among religious Jews. Here too, the name "Agudah" was chosen by German and Swiss Jews who have modern ways, unknown to our fathers. Rather, I suggest using the name "Knesses Yereim" (Assembly of G-d-fearing Jews) or any other name that his honor suggests.
- 2) All work on colonizing Eretz Yisroel must stop, for that is an imitation of the Zionist pioneers, and it serves no purpose for religious Jewry, physical or spiritual. Instead we must support the Old Yishuv through the charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, as established by our fathers and teachers.
- 3) We must remove from the Mesivta all secular studies, and work on supporting only the chadarim and the yeshivos, without any modernization. Furthermore, we

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In Chapter 43 he wrote: "The souls of the irreligious Jews in the period before the coming of Moshiach, those who connect themselves with love to matters of the Jewish people and the revival of the nation, are more perfect than the souls of faithful believing Jews who do not have this quality of devoting themselves to the good of the public, the building of the nation and the land."

must truly fight against the Zionists and the Mizrachists, not joining them in any way, even monetarily. Also, we must make detailed rules and regulations so that there be no members of the organization who violate the Torah.

Gerrer Rebbe: True, this is how it should be. But what will people say? You and I both have enemies, and they will say, "They met together and suddenly spoiled all the arrangements for the organization that, until now, would encompass the whole world." Besides, I have no power to do this, according to the Agudah by-laws. How will we do it?

Minchas Elazar: You will choose ten rabbis, and I will choose nine rabbis, making a total of 21. You will be the head, and we will meet together in Warsaw no later than the first of Tammuz of this year, to discuss this plan and put it into practice.

Gerrer Rebbe: Good, I agree to this plan.

### **Chapter 19: Let No One Ruin the Plan**

Minchas Elazar: Permit me to make one more request. Please do not let any of those close to you who are strong Agudists change this decision that we have reached together.

G-d said to Yechezkel (3:17-21), "If I command you to warn a wicked man to repent, and you do not warn him, and he dies as punishment for his sins, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn him, even if he does not repent, you have saved your own soul. If you fail to warn a righteous man and he becomes wicked and dies as punishment, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn the righteous man, and he does not sin, but lives, you have saved your own soul." The question is: in the second case in which the righteous man accepts the warning and does not sin, why does it say "you have saved your own soul"? The prophet has saved the righteous man as well! The answer is that sometimes the righteous man accepts the warning, but he has advisers and followers who do not understand his ways, and they will talk him out of hearkening to the rebuke of the prophet. Therefore it says in this case as well, "You have saved your own soul."

But I hope that I am not leaving saving only my soul. You have expressed your agreement to the gathering of rabbis I proposed, and I hope you will find a way to carry this out.

Gerrer Rebbe: Why do you suspect that any of my household or close followers would be against this? We have no personal interest. I am only the honorary president, and our sole objective is to work for the benefit of the public.

### **Chapter 20: Even the Greatest Man Can Have Personal Interest**

Minchas Elazar: The Gemora in Sanhedrin 18b says that the Kohein Gadol may not participate in the conference of rabbis who decide whether to add an extra month to the year, lest he be affected in his decision by personal interest. He knows that on Yom Kippur he will have to immerse himself five times in a mikveh, and if an extra month is

added to the year Yom Kippur will be later, and the water will be colder and more uncomfortable for him. The question is: what kind of personal interest is this? The adding of the month takes place in Adar, seven months before Yom Kippur. The water was not so cold in any case, since they would place pieces of heated iron into the mikveh to warm it up (Yuma 34b). This extra month might mean that the water was a tiny bit, perhaps 2 degrees, less warm. And there are times when the weather is warmer in Cheshvan than in Tishrei, especially in Eretz Yisroel, where, as Chazal say, the end of summer is hotter than the summer. If you took a simple Jew today in the month of Adar and asked him if he would pay even one penny so that the mikveh on Erev Yom Kippur that coming year would be 2 degrees warmer, he would laugh at you. All the more so that the great Kohein Gadol, who entered the Holy of Holies, should be above such concerns. So why is he unfit to participate in the conference?

The answer is that Chazal kept to the rules of disqualifying a judge because of personal interest even in the most extreme cases, so that in case some great man in future times is affected by personal interests – through his family members or disciples – no one will think badly of him. A man cannot be a witness for his own relative, no matter how righteous he is - even Moshe and Aharon (Bava Basra 159a).

Nevertheless, we are relying on the Rebbe and his followers to make sure this gathering of 21 rabbis takes place by the appointed time

### **Chapter 21: Preparations for the Gathering**

The Minchas Elazar came home, his heart full of hope that progress would be made. He told his people that all matters would be decided at the upcoming rabbinic gathering in Warsaw, and he set to work recruiting Hungarian rabbis to join in the gathering.

In Poland, however, the Agudah leaders looked for a way to prevent the gathering. Still the Minchas Elazar did not flatly denounce the Agudah, but continued his attempts to find a peaceful solution. He penned another letter to the Gerrer Rebbe:

### **Chapter 22: Is the Plan Still On?**

To the cedar of Lebanon, holy and scholarly rabbi, to whom thousands and myriads of men of wisdom and understanding turn for inspiration and direction, leader son of a leader, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai shlita, rav and admor of Gur, blessings of peace.

Upon my return home, I set to work preparing for the gathering at Warsaw that his honor agreed to, to change the name of the organization, to take the focus off of Eretz Yisroel, and to make new rules in all areas to repair what has been done wrong. But now I have heard rumors that your son-in-law Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levine will not hear of this, and he is making a great clamor against it. He wants only the holy name "Agudah," chosen in Switzerland and Germany, and all that the name implies: their ways of life, ways of study and other sins.

It is hard to believe that a matter that such a righteous man worked hard on should be spoiled by his children. The halacha is that if a forbidden food that will later become permitted gets mixed into a permitted food, one may not eat it, although it is nullified, for why should one eat it while forbidden if he could wait and eat it when it becomes permitted? All the more so in this case, where Polish Jewry is not small enough to be nullified by German Jewry, and is perhaps greater, and certainly has not become mixed. Why then should they follow the ways of the German Jews and transgress the enactments of their fathers, when they could organize themselves in a kosher way, under the banner of Orthodoxy and Knesses Yereim rather than Agudah?

However, Chazal did describe to us the upside-down world that will exist before the coming of Moshiach, and I am afraid that these Agudah activists might influence his honor's pure heart. I am preparing to come to Warsaw as planned together with ten rabbis from Slovakia and Hungary, to meet with you and Rabbi Menachem Ziemba; you will call a similar number of Polish rabbis to join in the meeting. Please reply to me and let me know if the plan is still on.

His friend, Chaim Elazar Shapiro

### **Chapter 23: Rabbi Menachem Ziemba Accuses the Minchas Elazar of Spreading False Rumors**

Peace unto my good friend, the scholarly rabbi, famous for his writings, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro, rav of Munkacz.

I received your letter when I was on my way to Gur to visit the Rebbe, and thus I was delayed in replying. Regarding the gathering you proposed, let me tell you that an urgent meeting of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah has been called for Monday of the week of Behaloscha. This is obviously too short notice to call you and your fellow Hungarian rabbis to attend. At the meeting I plan to set forth your proposals, and if they set a time to gather together with you, I will let you know.<sup>3</sup>

Also, we have received letters from Galicia saying that you quoted the Gerrer Rebbe as speaking against the Agudah. If this is true, then you surprise me: the Rebbe promised only to meet with the gedolim, and said that he accepted all your suggestions only on condition that the other gedolim would agree to them. If so, how could you go around spreading the word that we have reached a conclusion when the discussion has not even begun?

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<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, Rabbi Menachem Ziemba informed the Minchas Elazar that the Moetzes was prepared to meet with the Hungarian gedolim, but only on condition that they be elected democratically by a congress of Hungarian rabbis, just as the Moetzes of Poland was an elected body. This requirement was an almost insurmountable obstacle, in view of the difficulties of convening a rabbinic congress from the many different countries and regions that were formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: the Carpathians, Russian, Czech, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Galicia. This was an abrupt change from the original agreement between the Minchas Elazar and the Gerrer Rebbe, that each would select a number of rabbis on his own.

How peaceful are the holy ways of the Gerrer Rebbe! For after all, the whole business of changing the name of the organization is not a central issue, and would only be done to satisfy those who have distanced themselves from the Agudah until now. Is it really correct to tamper with a holy thing just to satisfy certain people?<sup>4</sup> And who knows if this change might not cause us a loss from those opposed to religious Jewry? But despite all this, to make you happy he agreed to submit the matter to a meeting of rabbis, all for the sake of promoting peace in the world. But if you come to us with an offer of peace and at the same time go around arousing opposition to the Agudah, this will not encourage the Polish rabbis to come to the meeting. The meeting will come to nothing. But please clarify what you are telling the world. The holy and humble Gerrer Rebbe will surely agree to whatever the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah decides.

His friend who seeks his peace, Menachem Ziembra of Praga.

I also send greetings. You must know that you caused me pain when I saw in the letters that you said in my name that I am also opposed to the Agudah, when in truth I see in the Agudah the strengthening of the Jewish religion on all levels.

His friend who seeks his peace, Avraham Mordechai Alter

#### **Chapter 24: The Minchas Elazar Defends Himself**

To the scholarly and holy rabbi, to whom all men of wisdom and understanding turn for inspiration and direction, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter shlita, rebbe of Gur.

I thank you for your greetings sent at the end of the letter from Rabbi Menachem Ziembra; I was greatly honored. But I am surprised that you were upset at me for telling my fellow rabbis what my own eyes saw in the Agudah Mesivta of Warsaw, and the other problems with the Agudah. Did his honor not agree with me, and agree to my plan of changing the name, the focus on Eretz Yisroel, the style of education and other things? I had to tell this to my friends before the meeting, so that they would know why they were coming.<sup>5</sup> Did his honor not recognize that even the best of the Agudah leaders misled him to think that there was nothing wrong in the Mesivta in Warsaw, only a yeshiva of pure Torah? This is what you wrote to me before I saw the Mesivta, and so you told the Kirchdorfer Rav in Vienna: that there were no secular studies there at all. The Kirchdorfer Rav told me this orally and in writing. Such leaders are worse than a butcher who was caught selling treife

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<sup>4</sup> These "certain people" who had distanced themselves from the Agudah included such famous luminaries as the Bobover Rebbe, the Belzer Rebbe, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Alexander Rebbe, the rabbis of Sighet, Satmar, Kalashitz and Komarna. In fact, most of the religious Jewish world stood outside the Agudah at that time (1922).

<sup>5</sup> In fact, most of the rabbis called by the Minchas Elazar asked him for these details. For example, Rabbi Avraham Yosef Greenwald of Ungvar wrote: "Today Rabbi Boruch Friedman, rabbi of Chop, came to me on your behalf asking me to participate in the Warsaw gathering on the subject of the Agudah. If I knew that my coming would benefit the Jewish people and strengthen the Torah, I would be ready to run and jump to take part, without any concern about the difficulty and cost of travel. But since I do not know the agenda of the meeting, I ask you to brief me on the issues of discussion and who will be attending, who from our side and who from the other side, so that I may know what I am dealing with."

meat. And this went on for two years without your knowledge. Let his honor know from now on that the Jewish people is relying on him.

I am being brief because of my preparations to travel to Marienbad – may Hashem strengthen me and heal me quickly. I conclude with blessings of much peace.

Bowing and hoping for the redemption, Chaim Elazar Shapiro

### **Chapter 25: The Gathering is Cancelled**

And so the Satan was victorious – the proposed meeting between Polish and Hungarian rabbis never took place. In retrospect, perhaps this was the best thing, and so it was arranged by Divine Providence, so that later when the serious problems with the Agudah became well known, and their leaders had already been entrusted with the fate of the Jewish people, there would be at least one portion of the Jewish people that escaped untainted by this breach, still holding onto their faith in Hashem without any modernization.

The Minchas Elazar did not tire, and immediately called a meeting of Hungarian gedolim in Chop.

### **Chapter 26: Protocols of the Gathering of Rabbis in Chop, Tammuz 5682 (1922)**

The Minchas Elazar said, "We are here to discuss matters relating to the fundamentals of our faith. I am going to speak as a witness to what I have seen; therefore it would not be proper for me to be the chairman at this meeting. Instead I ask the congress to appoint the Brezna Rav as chairman."

The Brezna Rav accepted this role, and asked the Minchas Elazar to tell us about his visit to Warsaw and his conversation with the Gerrer Rebbe.

The Minchas Elazar told his story, and then said, "I ask the congress to reach a decision to found an organization to strengthen the Torah in the true way. If such an organization is founded, I ask the congress not to appoint me as its leader, or even its vice president, for even at this young age I am too weak for this. But I agree to be our representative to exchange letters with the Gerrer Rebbe."

He then related the history of the Agudah, displaying copies of documents drawn up at its founding in Zurich, Switzerland and showing who the founders were – modern rabbis from Florence, Italy and other cities far from the spirit of true Orthodoxy; and that even the religious rabbi-doctors from German have a different way of life. He explained that what is a breach of Judaism for us is not a breach for them. He also told about the Warsaw seminary founded with the German style of Jewish education. Such study was forbidden by the Maharam Schick (Yoreh Deah 335) and other rabbis of his time. All of their reasons applied to the seminary in Warsaw and others like it in Germany. This is why, when Dr. Breuer came from Frankfurt to Pest and asked Hungarian Orthodoxy to



join the Agudah, the committee of rabbis under the influence of the Darchei Teshuva rejected the request. After the passing of the Darchei Teshuva, the Agudists again began to pressure the Hungarian rabbis, and the Unsdorfer Rav with the Madder Rav wrote to the Orthodox counsel in Pest not to join. At that time, in the summer of 1914, the War broke out and the Agudah's work was stopped.

He also showed those gathered a booklet of notes from the founding conference of the Agudah in Switzerland. The speakers then advised that a German-style rabbinic academy be founded in Jerusalem for students from around the world, as well as a technical school. "Is this destruction of Torah the way to fight Zionism?" he said. "Woe to us that such a thing has taken place in our time – that such false idea have been voiced!" He also showed what was written in the booklet, that as far as settling and colonizing Eretz Yisroel they would join the Zionists. He also showed a booklet entitled "Digleinu" published by Agudah leaders in Warsaw the previous year (fall 1921), containing teaching material for Jewish school children, full of defilement and false teachings – songs to sing about fields and vineyards in Eretz Yisroel, in imitation of Zionist poetry and song.

### **Chapter 27: The Agudah's Unscrupulous Leaders and Their Accomplishments**

Then he read aloud his exchange of letters with the Gerrer Rebbe: how he had pleaded respectfully with him regarding the mesivta, and how the Gerrer Rebbe had replied that there were no secular studies in the mesivta; how he had seen the secular studies with his own eyes and told the Gerrer Rebbe about them, and how the Gerrer Rebbe had admitted that the secular studies should be stopped. He related that the Gerrer Rebbe had agreed with his complaints against the Agudah, expressed regret over the improper things done by the Agudah, explaining that he was not really their leader, only the "honorary president". He was willing to forgo this honor and accepted the Minchas Elazar's suggestion to change the name of the organization, to stop funding colonization and instead continue to support the kollelim, and to stop the secular studied in the mesivta. It became clear to all present that the leadership of the Agudah in Poland was made up of two elements: unscrupulous individuals who were willing to give in on religious issues for the sake of money and power, and great scholars who, due to their diligence in Torah and lack of knowledge of worldly matters, were unaware of the wrongs being done. The Agudah would become a terrible stumbling block for the Jewish people, especially for truly religious Jews in other lands who would copy what was done in Poland, thinking that the gedolim had permitted it.

The Minchas Elazar spoke further about the consequences of studying Torah and secular studies at the same time, based on what he had heard in Warsaw from the rector and the rebbe. He argued that the Agudah should at least be considered like a butcher who had been caught selling treife meat – for two years they had taught secular subjects in the mesivta and kept the Gerrer Rebbe in the dark about it. Thus they had lost their credibility and it was wrong to join them. He related how he had tested the boys of the mesivta, who were soon to be ordained as rabbis, on questions of halacha, and they had not been able to answer, and how their rebbe had blamed it on the secular studies.

The Minchas Elazar also told of the destruction brought by the Agudah upon the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes kollelim, the time-honored practice of supporting Torah learning in the Holy Land, begun by the Beis Yosef, the Alshich and continued by rabbis after them in every generation. Now, in all of Congress Poland (as opposed to Galicia) and in its capital Warsaw it was almost impossible to find a Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity box. The Zionists and the Agudists have the same goal: the agricultural settlement of Eretz Yisroel. He showed those gathered his statement on the subject, written several years earlier, in which he quoted Rabbi Meir of Rottenburg's statement that settling Eretz Yisroel was only for someone who studies Torah and will not sin (see above, Chapter 3).

He also displayed the periodical "Haderech," the official Agudist Hebrew-language organ, which gave information about decisions made by them in Warsaw and other places to found new chadarim at which both Torah and secular subjects would be taught, as well as Bais Yaakov girls schools, which violated Chazal's prohibition on teaching Torah to girls.

### **Chapter 28: Fighting Zionism With Zionism**

He read a line from the "Haderech," a statement made at a major Agudah gathering in Adar of that year: "We believe with full faith that Eretz Yisroel will return to us through the nations, and we especially hope to the great government of England." They do not mention the name of Heaven, that we hope to Hashem Yisborach that He will redeem us and bring us back to our land through Moshiach ben Dovid, when we return and improve our ways with complete repentance, as the Rambam says at the end of the Laws of Kings. They hope only to the nations, who in truth will not help us at all, only harm us, as Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz predicted long ago.

The Agudist newspaper also said that they had appointed a commission to establish relations with Mizrachi, and that the agreements would be concluded in the summer. Since the Mizrachi organization had already been forbidden by our gedolim as complete Zionists, this step by Agudah revealed that they are also the same, and their differences were nothing but a disguise, a pretense of fighting against Zionism. They were like one who says he will extinguish a fire by pouring gasoline on it. The acts of the Agudah were nothing but acts of the Satan, leading astray several great rabbinic leaders in order to ensnare Jews in all countries. We look not at names but at substance, and at the core of all these groups is the same Zionism; the disputes between them are only political, to make it seem as if they are fighting with each other. This way they will capture all the Jews, and then the Zionists and the Agudah will join hands and become brothers.

He displayed the Agudah weekly "Kol Yisroel" published in Jerusalem, where they wrote that they would like to make peace with the Zionists and work together for the settlement of the land. He also displayed articles in earlier issues of the same newspaper about Rabbi Horowitz of Jerusalem and the general Agudah desire to collaborate with the Zionists. This entire process was clearly the work of the Satan to entrap young religious Jews who read the newspapers.

He also showed the assembly Rabbi Menachem Ziembra's letter to him in which he admitted that a public Shabbos violator has the status of a gentile, but said that the Agudah cannot expel these people lest they be mocked and despised in Warsaw, resulting in a decline in Agudah membership.

### **Chapter 29: Other Criticisms of the Agudah**

He also showed the assembly a letter written by an Agudist to the rav of Kashau, in which he gave a heretical rephrasing of the Gemora in Sotah 49b: "On whom should we rely? On our Father in heaven?" The writer also offered scientific explanations of the Revival of the Dead – woe to the ears that hear this and the eyes that see this! (We have omitted the name of the author of the letter, since he has since repented and retracted his words.)

The Minchas Elazar also displayed original copies of letters from rabbis in Galicia whose signatures appeared in "Haderech" as supporters of Agudah. The rabbis said that they had never actually signed; their signatures had been submitted by Zionist elements in their cities, and they were afraid to issue a public denial because of the strength and power of the Zionists. These facts, said the Minchas Elazar, should serve as an example to teach us that in general one cannot rely on rabbinic signatures in support of the Agudah.

He related that one German rabbi had said proudly during a visit to Warsaw, "When Rabbi Dr. Azriel Hildesheimer tried to establish a seminary in Eisenstadt, Hungary, he was despised and ridiculed by the local religious Jewry, but now we will build a similar institution in Warsaw, capital of Chassidism, with the help of Agudah and its leaders."

Lastly, he displayed the letter from the Gerrer Rebbe and Rabbi Menachem Ziembra in which they backed out of the plan for a joint meeting in Tammuz, and criticized him for publicizing the problems in the mesivta in Warsaw, as well as their secret plans to improve the Agudah. He explained to the assembly that he had been obligated to reveal these things to his fellow Hungarian rabbis in order to gain their assistance in fighting the breach.

He concluded by asking the assembled to suggest a solution and plan of action.

### **Chapter 30: The Rav of Kezmark Speaks**

The Brezna Rav, chairman of the assembly, thanked the Minchas Elazar for his research and said that every G-d-fearing Jew must take to heart the great and fearful situation facing him. Let no one withhold his opinion on this matter, he said, especially considering the damage being done to the holy charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. Something must be done to strengthen the true Torah institutions.

He then asked the rav of Kezmark to speak, since he had accompanied the Minchas Elazar to Warsaw. The rav of Kezmark concurred with the Minchas Elazar's testimony,

adding stories and examples of his own. He pointed out that the "Haderech" had devoted several pages to eulogizing the late Dr. [Meir] Jung, who had been the first to combine Torah and secular studies in the Orthodox world. He was among the founders of the Agudah and exhorted others to follow in his ways. He had been the one who tried to found a Hebrew gymnasium in Cracow, which was denounced by all rabbis in all countries. The fact that the Agudah so respected Dr. Jung demonstrated further that this was the Agudah's position – to combine Torah and secular studies.

### **Chapter 31: The Kirchdorfer Rav Suggests Improving the Agudah From Within**

The Kirchdorfer Rav spoke, urging that the assembled rabbis re-issue the prohibition against seminaries that teach secular subjects, including explicitly the seminary in Warsaw.

But he advised that the assembly not issue a categorical ban on the Agudah. Although he was also against the wrongs being done by the Agudah, he held that it was impossible to ban Agudists completely because there are many tzaddikim and great scholars among them. Rather, he suggested joining the Agudah and trying to rectify the problems from within.

As far as the issue of settling Eretz Yisroel, he advised that the matter be presented to the Ashkenazic Beis Din of Jerusalem under the leadership of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, and if they determine that supporting settlement presents no threat to the Torah, they will take care of the matter.

### **Chapter 32: Rabbi Yonasan Shteif and the Orshiva Rav Reject the Idea**

Rabbi Yonasan Shteif, dayan of Ungvar, objected to the Kirchdorfer Rav's position. He said that we cannot expect any good to come out of our joining the Agudah, an organization stemming from America, Germany and Switzerland. On the contrary, it would be dangerous for us to join. In his opinion, we are responsible only for ourselves, and we must issue a ban on the Agudah in our country. According to our tradition, the Agudah is forbidden to us just like Zionism and Mizrachi.

The Rav of Orshiva (later to be known as the Satmar Rav) concurred with Rabbi Yonasan Shteif, and told the Kirchdorfer Rav that it would be a danger to the Torah to strengthen the colonization of Eretz Yisroel, for we have already seen the evil wrought by them in our Holy Land. Rather let us follow in the footsteps of our forefathers and strengthen the charities of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. As far as the Agudah's actions in Europe, we see with our eyes what has happened to all the chadarim in Hungary that were under their leadership. We have seen how the Agudah has joined up with heretics of all sorts and how they reflect their influence. We see how the Torah has been carried on in Hungary only by a small number of local G-d-fearing Jews, and that joining up with powerful, faraway organizations could only harm us.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Satmar Rav later related that the proposal had been voiced at Chop to found an independent organization of Hungarian Jewry called "Knesses Yereim." He had told the rabbis sitting next to him,

### Chapter 33: The Resolutions and the Signatures

The following resolutions were adopted by the assembly:

1. According to Torah law, it is forbidden for us in our countries to join with the Agudah, for many reasons.
2. New actions will be taken to strengthen the kollelim. The most important thing is that money should be donated only to the charities of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, a practice which was established by the Beis Yosef, the Alshich and the Chasam Sofer. The money will be distributed by the appointees of the kollelim in Jerusalem.
3. A committee will be established, consisting of the rabbis of Orshiva, Ungvar, Brezna, Kezmark and Munkacz, to carry out the resolutions.

Signed by: Chaim Elazar Shapiro

Yoel Teitelbaum, rav of Orshiva  
Mordechai Leib Winkler, rav of Madd  
Avraham Yosef Greenwald, rav of Ungvar  
Yitzchok Tzvi Lebovitch, rav of Chop  
Mordechai Lichtenstein, rav of Tchirtch  
Chaim Zucker, rav of Beregsas  
Yitzchok Eisik Adler, rav of Seredna  
Sholom Sofer, rav of Brezna  
Menachem Mendel, rav of Torna  
Asher Zelig Greenzweig, rav of Dalha  
Dovid Schlissel, dayan of Munkacz  
Yonasan Shteif, dayan of Ungvar  
Shea Heshel Razner, rav of Tartzal  
Yoel Wolf Glatstein, rav of Helmetz  
Mordechai Eliezer Ehrengruber, rav of Waranov  
Menachem Gershon Lebovitch, rav of Tchernovitz  
Yosef ben Moshe, rav of Zbarow

The following rabbis sent in their signatures later, after the resolutions were published (this list follows the order in which they signed):

Yaakov Moshe Saffrin of Komarna

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"When they drafted men into the army, they asked them to come in for a medical examination. After the examination they were told to travel home, and two weeks later they received a notice that they must show up for another examination. This process would go on for several times before they were actually chosen for the army. Once a Jew was being examined, and after the examination refused to put his clothes back on. 'I know I will just have to come back again. So why go through all the trouble – I'll stay right here until the next examination.' Similarly, if we found another organization we will eventually have to make another assembly to ban the new organization. So why waste our time travelling back and forth – let's ban it right now while we're here!" (Moshian Shel Yisroel, v. 7 p. 71.)

Shmuel Binyamin Halevi Yungreis, rav of Pilek  
Yitzchok Teitelbaum, rav of Husakov  
Yekusiel Yehuda Rosenberg, rav of Diresch  
Shimon Sofer, rav of Erlau  
Yisroel Chaim Shapiro of Pshevorsk  
Yechiel Michel Hakohein Fried of Ovarosh  
Reuvein Chaim Klein, rav of Snina  
Dovid Dov Meisels, rav of Ujhel  
Moshe Dovid Estreicher, rav of Tchimpa  
Shabsi Lifshitz, dayan of Orshiva  
Chaim Elazar Teitelbaum, dayan of Tashnad  
Pinchas Adler, rav of Radvanka  
Chaim Leib Teitelbaum, rav of Kaba  
Moshe, dayan of Orshiva  
Dovid Elimelech Weiss, rav of Skernitza  
Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich, rav of Samlau  
Menachem Mendel Halberstam, rav of Pristik  
Menashe Simcha Friedman, rav of Sabrantz  
Chuna Halberstam, rav of Kalashitz  
Dovid Frankel, rav of Neflekowitz  
Moshe Greenzweig, rav of Lifsha  
Chaim Yehuda Leib Greenbaum, rav of Svaliva  
Moshe Brody, dayan of Ungvar

### **Chapter 34: Reactions and the Continuing Battle**

When the above declaration against the Agudah was published, the Agudists of course made a great noise and tried to deny the criticisms of them presented at the Chop gathering. They also waged a battle of persecution against several of rabbis who signed the declaration. To go into all the details of this battle would take many pages and would be beyond the scope of this documentary. This is especially true since at the time of this writing (1936) many of the pro-Agudist Hungarian rabbis have already passed away, and it would be improper to speak against them after their passing. But the Minchas Elazar continued his fearless battle for the truth, which Chazal tell us will eventually stand, and no wind in the world will be able to blow it down.

Since the assembly in Chop, the ban on the Agudah has been upheld by all of our rabbis, including many rebbes, tzaddikim and great Torah scholars, each of whom alone is a weighty halachic authority, and certainly together their decision is compelling. This ruling is Torah and cannot be altered.

Our posterity must know that anyone whose heart turns aside after the Agudah in any way, shape or form is immediately transgressing the decision of all these rabbis, rebbes and righteous men from many countries. In this matter one cannot rely on other rabbis with more lenient opinions, however great they may be, for a danger (in this case, a danger to the Jewish faith) is more strict than a regular prohibition, and we must be strict

even if there is the slightest doubt. This is all the more true for us today, knowing what we know about the Agudah's actions, as we shall soon see.

The above-mentioned rabbis from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Galicia who signed on the ban were not the only ones who opposed the Agudah. In Russian and Lithuania, the great Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, arose like a lion and expressed his opposition to the Agudah in a letter to the Gerrer Rebbe and other Agudah gedolim. Here we present the letter, copied from a pamphlet that first appeared in Galicia.

### **Chapter 35: The Lubavitcher Rebbe Speaks Out**

#### **An Open Letter**

To the Moatzei Hatorah in Poland, and especially to the president, the Gerrer Rebbe shlita, and the vice-president, the Radziner Rebbe shlita.

After the proper greetings for the honor of the Torah, may their honor forgive me and hear my words. I do the bidding of my holy father, who put his life on the line for the Jewish people and our Torah, our beauty, may his merit protect us. The words I speak are at his command.

My concern for the life of my people, the nation of the G-d of Avraham, and His Torah, compelled me to write this letter. I will reiterate what I wrote in previous letters to you, for in the replies I received I did not find an answer to any of my questions.

I do not know what motivated the leaders of religious Jewry to toy with an idea whose results are at the least unclear, and on the contrary they scare those who tremble from the word of Hashem.

We in our country are suffering [under the Communists' anti-religious persecution], but at the same time happy to see young Jewish men using their youthful strength and giving their lives to the study of Torah with love and holy desire in the tradition of their fathers. Israel is a mighty nation, may Hashem raise its pride. Still, everyone here must make great sacrifice to support Torah. But we hoped that in the lands further west – Poland, Lithuania and Latvia – the Divine Presence rests. No one there disturbs them from the holy service of G-d. We thus hoped for the time when we would be united with them to strengthen Torah even more.

Just as we were suffering and dreaming our dreams of hope, unwelcome tidings reached us – the Chovevim, the Zionists and the Mizrachists raised an alarm in the Jewish world, saying: "Rabbis! Rebbes of Poland! We are building the Holy Land! It is a time to work for our nation, our land, the land of our ancestors! Violate your Torah! Arise and listen to the voice of enlightened teachers, who guide the nation in the spirit of the times! Go up to the Land, conquer it, fortify it – it is full of room for all to work! Make haste, our brothers, go up to the land of your ancestors; there you will be safe from pogroms and anti-Semitism. The gentile lawmakers have opened the doors of our land for us. Do not worry about your possessions – you will eat the fat of the land!"

I was confounded by what I heard – why does G-d put us to such a merciless test? Will even the light [free world] be turned to darkness? Then the fear of G-d clothed me and I allowed myself no rest. I wrote to you to ask if there was any truth to the Zionists' boast that you had traveled to the Holy Land and purchased a piece of land to build a factory. I pointed out that this step would be viewed as approval of the Chovevim and Zionists. I sent emissaries to determine the truth, and asked that if it was not true you should publish a denial in the Jewish newspapers.

Today I have before me three letters, as well as the write-up of a speech given in response to my letter. One letter is from you, one is from your brother, and one is from my chassidim who at my request visited you, the Radziner Rebbe and the Radziminer Rebbe. The speech was given by one of our chassidim who explained the history of the Agudah. What follows is the information I have gathered from these four sources.

At the beginning of the War, seeing the rising threat to the keeping of the Torah, an Orthodox organization was founded with the name "Shlumei Emunei Yisroel," with a department to support the settlement of Eretz Yisroel in the pure Torah way, not changing a single detail. This was what you wrote in your letter.

When Eretz Yisroel was taken over by a government that promised to grant freedom and power to the Jewish immigrants, the Shlumei Emunei Yisroel rabbis decided that religious Jews should take steps to increase religious participation in the settlement, so that the irreligious should not do it first. Still, they warned against joining the Zionists, G-d forbid. This is from your brother's letter.

After the Balfour Declaration, which promised to give Eretz Yisroel to the Jewish people, the Gerrer Rebbe called a gathering of "Moatzei Hatorah" and they founded the Eretz Yisroel Fund and the Fund for Settlement According to Torah and Tradition. The rabbanim who were chassidim of the Gerrer Rebbe followed him in this matter. At this point they joined forces with the "Agudas Yisroel" organization. Together they are promoting the idea of building up the land. The Gerrer Rebbe said that he saw nothing wrong with settling the land. He brought proof that it was a good thing from Bava Basra 14a: "Rabbi Yannai planted four hundred vineyards." He understood that this was because of the mitzvah of settling the Land. When people come to him for advice, saying that they must leave the country and asking where they should move, he tells them to go to Eretz Yisroel rather than America. When he was visiting Eretz Yisroel, the religious Jews there asked him to make the community bigger. He saw that Jews there could wear Jewish clothing, even white clothing and peyos; the Arabs make no trouble about this at all.

The Radziner Rebbe said that the name "Fund to Build the Land" is wrong, and the name should be "Eretz Yisroel Fund." The Agudists used this fund to promote new settlement in Eretz Yisroel, but this was the mistake – they should have continued to support the existing settlement – the Old Yishuv. The Radziner Rebbe said he had only given his approval to this fund out of fear that new immigrants might be forced to send their



children to the Zionist-run compulsory education system. The fund was used to build religious schools for the new settlers so that they would not need to turn to the Zionists. All this information was gathered from the letter from my emissaries.

When the German Jews first began to promote their organization in Poland, the Gerrer Chassidim liked the idea, and proposed to found an Orthodox organization. The German activists encouraged this, warning the Polish Jews about the danger that the government might pass laws about compulsory education. Thus they founded the "Yesodei Hatorah" system of schools, to teach Jewish children Torah, the language of the country and secular subjects. Many rebbes did not agree to this step, and they came out against it in a gathering of 15 rebbes. As to the threat of compulsory education, they said that they would worry about that problem when it comes. In any case, Chazal tell us that a evil government decree is never permanent, and we should make no changes in halacha to avoid a decree (Kesubos 3b). The Gerrer Chassidim, nevertheless, prevailed and they founded Yesodei Hatorah with the encouragement of German Jews. They also began publishing an Orthodox newspaper.

The other rebbes of Poland stood apart from all this. But when the Polish government passed the law of compulsory education, although it has yet to be enforced, thank G-d (and we hope it will never be enforced), the other rebbes decided to join Agudah in order to strengthen the Torah institutions. This information is all from the speech. The speaker explained the matter of Eretz Yisroel as above, that the Gerrer Rebbe encourages it and puts work into supporting the religious education system there for boys and girls. The "Chavatzeles" school was founded with his encouragement. We have enough material in these letters and this speech to understand what has transpired and where things stand.

My eyes grow dark and cannot see! Woe to the heavens at this terrible mistake, this fearful naivete, this bitter lack of attention, this coldness and thick darkness! I am almost unable to speak, I have no words to say. One thing is clear: that you have breached the fence built by previous generations, and this causes us great bitterness. I will say as much as is not too difficult for me, in order to take action on this painful matter. The precious Torah of the Jewish people must take precedence over all else, and our guarding of the Torah will be to our credit when our day of judgment comes and we stand before the throne of Hashem, Giver of the Torah. When the angels gather to weigh and measure our deeds, how we guided the people of the G-d of Avraham, no empty excuses will be acceptable.

We must always remember that G-d is in Heaven and we are on earth, full of energy to do His will, and in all areas we must act to do what Hashem our G-d commanded us, without taking into consideration the wisdom of politicians, the ways of governments and their outlook, and lawmakers of the gentiles and their goals. The Torah given to us is light before us, the command of Hashem illuminates our path. This is how our fathers lived, and this is how we will live. We will deliver the same seal of knowledge and strength to our children and posterity. When our redemption comes, when the foundations of the world are shaken, when new heavens and earth are created – G-d will never take His Torah from His holy people.

## Chapter 36: Eight Questions For the Agudah

The fear of compulsory secular studies, desire to guard the Torah, the desire that Eretz Yisroel be in the hands of the religious, the mitzvah to settle in Eretz Yisroel, giving advice to people where to move, the good practices of religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel, the fact that the Arabs do not persecute Judaism, the request of religious Jews to expand the community, the founding of schools for boys and girls --- all these threads have meshed together and become a veil over the face of the organizations "Yesodei Hatorah" and "Eretz Yisroel Fund" and "Shlumei Emunei Yisroel," which you have taken a leading role in building. The Moatzei Hatorah sees these as the vehicle through which G-d will save His people from all its enemies, and the sanctuary in which pure Torah Judaism will be kept, without the slightest iota of change.

Before I go into detail about these plans, I want to ask on what is this based? What is your source for taking these steps on which the entire Jewish people and its Torah depend? Did the Moatzei Hatorah think in accordance with Torah about the end results of its actions? Did they ascertain that the nails they put it would not fall out of place and break, G-d forbid?

I will ask my questions again and I demand careful and responsible answers:

1. Does the Moatzei Hatorah know Jewish history? The Torah in Germany was once great and glorious, and then came the terrible upheaval. Does the Moatzei Hatorah know the history of this war – who the warriors were on both sides, their effects and the ends they met?
2. Does the Moatzei Hatorah know what transpired in the Jewish communities of Russia and Poland during the years 1800-1828, 1840-1857, the upheaval that accompanied the Crimean War (1857-1872), the anti-Semitism of the Russian government, its promotion of a sea of misfortunes and pogroms, and the emigration of the Jews from Russia in the years 1879-1899?
3. Does the Moatzei Hatorah know how the Chovevim were born and what motivated them? Does it know the ruling of the great rabbis of Russia regarding this movement, their thoughts on it, their predictions, their warning to all Jews to separate from the movement because in the end they will throw away all that is holy, **and because their forced settlement of Eretz Yisroel is against the Torah and against the command of Hashem to wait until He gathers our exiles through Moshiach?**
4. Do you recognize the true intent in the hearts of the German rabbis and activists – their spirit, their way of life, their methods of working for the good of the Jewish people, the history of how they have helped and what its results have been?
5. Did you participate in the rabbinic gatherings in Vilna, Warsaw, Petersburg, and Moscow? In the gatherings of activists and some rabbis, mostly German rabbis, in Katowitz, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and in the gathering of some activists in Paris?
6. Did you look at the plans of the rabbis, who carried the banner of Torah (among whom you stood) and the plans of the political activists, and do you remember

who prevailed? Did you see the end predicted by the gedolei hatorah? Did you hear their warnings to the Jewish people not to follow the promoters of modern ways, who in the name of well-dressed Torah and wisdom tried to turn aside the hearts of the Jews and fool them?

7. Do you remember the strength of the Torah leaders to stop those who wanted to roll the wagon of Jewry on the wheels of physical life alone? Do you remember their mightiness to stand by their holy guard. They knew their position as leaders and representatives of the nation to stand before G-d, and they stood up to fight fearlessly whenever necessary. They trusted in G-d, not in any earthly power, and protected their people from all evil.
8. Do you take into consideration the scepter of truth and the sealed flag bequeathed to you by your forbears who have passed on? The Jew is in the world for one purpose. He may be oppressed all his days, the waves of the ocean may pass over him without reprieve, he may wander from one end of the earth to the other, he may risk his life to earn his bread, he may labor endlessly scraping his livelihood together. But what keeps him going is his straightness, the Jewish warmth within him, the knowledge that he is a son and a brother of the people of G-d, that the Torah is mixed into his blood, the holy zeal runs in his arteries. He uses his strength to build a synagogue, to support a beis medrash. There he pours the earnings of his sweat, sharing his bread with a Torah scholar. There is his hope; the Torah is his beauty and ornament.

This strength of faith which surrounds every Jew, whether scholarly or ignorant, was guarded by the leaders of Jewry like the apple of their eye. They saw this as G-d's portion in the world, that the Jewish heart contained the life of the nation. This was their comfort. In every difficult situation they built themselves houses of learning, houses of charity, houses of prayer in which they stood strong against any destructive influence.

Can you take responsibility for the outcome of your actions? What guarantee can you give G-d and His holy people that your path is straight and leads only in the right direction?

Let us only follow the light of the past, which is a more reliable base than any innovator who makes predictions and worries about his people. In all times, Jewish leaders stuck to their positions without fear. Germany is broken, thanks to their putting political wisdom before Torah. And our country – Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine – has give forth its produce of Torah and fear of G-d, thanks to the stubbornness of the Torah leaders, who did not let the Jewish people bow its head and walk in the path of the political activists. Our leaders always knew how to protect the Tree of Life and Knowledge, to conquer the physical problems, to use political action when necessary to hold their ground. They never stepped out of bounds; with all their strength they made sure that no unsafe thing could come inside their courtyards.

### Chapter 37: The Threat of Compulsory Education

Where were you for the past twenty years when the German activists – sated of secular wisdom but empty of Torah, experts in dry organizational skills and speech - tried to

scare us, warning us of compulsory education? Then the man of G-d, leader of leaders and upright men [Rabbi Shalom Ber Schneersohn, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe], may his merit protect us, laughed at them and their scare. He said to them, "If we are to fear compulsory education, should we then fight it by committing the sin ourselves as you advise, founding children's schools that include secular studies? How dare you give us such vain advice, that we should kill Jewish children with our own hands, out of fear and weakness of heart? We will not exchange a possibility for a certainty! It is a known fact that secular studies cut down a Torah scholar, cut off his holy beauty – should we do all this ourselves out of fear that they will force us to do it? We must raise our children in the tents of Torah, sustaining them with G-d's spiritual meat and bread, and if, G-d forbid, a time comes when the gentile lawmakers pass a law of compulsory education, we trust that G-d will also create a cure for this sickness. We do not know how it will happen. But we cannot serve G-d with something that is an abomination to Him. How is it possible that this is what G-d wants of us?" I take these words from [my father's] letters and discussions with the activists from Germany and France. They show his care in approaching this issue, his resoluteness and his righteousness.

Now that the law of compulsory education has been drawn up in your country's parliament, what have you done about it? Have you tried to prevent its passing? Have you tried to show that it is unnecessary? Have you used political tactics to let the government know what such a law would mean to the Jewish people according to Torah? Our Torah is independent of any law or government. No official or king has the power to impose on us laws different from the laws given to us by G-d. Did you inform them that the Jewish people will not leave its Torah or violate its mitzvos, nor violate its covenant with G-d? Instead, you have, pardon me, lowered the honored of the Torah and desecrated it, despised the word of G-d, and poured dirt in the eyes of all G-d-fearing Jews in all countries. You have desecrated the flag by signing your approval on this Agudah that unites Torah and gentile wisdom, Jewish learning with the language of the country and secular studies. Even before you are compelled by law to introduce these studies, you are fortifying yourselves and building graves for Judaism and the pride of Israel. Naively you carry on your shoulders towering buildings with impressive names like "Yesodei Hatorah", whose walls are annointed with oil, spreading its fragrance all around the land: secular studies, the language of the country in a Jewish cheder, based supposedly on keeping the entire Torah down to the last iota.

It is true that there is no man in the world today who can demand a clear answer from you. But the souls of past leaders of Israel, may their merit protect us, can demand: Where did you get the power to determine the fate of an entire generation of Jews and its Torah, by your own judgment, at a new juncture unknown to our fathers, leading to a terrifying end? Remember the past, think over what your hands have wrought. I remember like yesterday your outcry at the rabbinic gathering in Vilna over the general weaking of Jewry and their desire for secular studies. There were some young rabbis who had the nerve to suggest a law that rabbis must know the language of the country and that in the cheder Hebrew writing skills be taught.

One of the rebbes (who is now one of the pillars of the Moatzei Hatorah, the Shlumei Emunei Yisroel and the Eretz Yisroel Fund) demanded that the Vilna gathering proclaim a ban on the study of modern Hebrew, and on the printing of novels in Hebrew or Yiddish.

I remember your worry at the Warsaw gathering over the fact that religious leaders were getting too much involved in worldly matters, which might lead them to ignore their constant guard of the Torah, a job which rests on the Torah leaders more than on other activists. You wanted to resign from one of the committees because of this.

I remember your speech at Marienbad in which you explained the necessity for the zealous leaders to stand at the helm of the movement, not allowing any bad influence to challenge the gedolim and prevent them from being strong.

And now what has happened? The past has been forgotten, all worries are gone, and you are the first to wave the sword over the necks of Jewish children by founding Yesodei Hatorah, adorned with secular studies and the language of the country. You were so convinced of the correctness of your plan that you stood up to the other rebbes, paying no attention to their position that we should do nothing, and their logic that the decree will not be permanent. You founded "Foundations of the Torah" on principles opposed to Torah, on the foundations of fear, weakness and melting of heart.

### **Chapter 38: What Agudah Could Have Done**

Tell us now, how are you guarding and how are you mending the breaches of the Jewish people? Did you send emissaries in all the countries and all the cities to see what is going on? Whether Jews are keeping Shabbos and Yom Tov? How are the cheder, the talmud torah and the yeshiva faring? Are their mishnayos groups, groups that arise early to say Tehillim, maggidei shiur, Ein Yaakov groups, Gemora groups? Did you found a general organization with the purpose of supplying each city with the funds it is missing for all these projects? This is something that could be accomplished in your country and would have results. And who has as much prestige as you in all of Poland? Your prestige is a gift of G-d to enable you to work for the good of our people.

All this you did not do, but instead you established Shlumei Emunei Yisroel to introduce to religious Jewry what is despised and hated by them. You rationalized it with reasons relating to the time and conditions. This is how you want to preserve the pure Torah, down to the last detail.

And now that you have put your spirit and action behind all these institutions that put out the eyes of Israel and stab the heart of Jacob, I ask: how are you guarding the Torah and from whom are you guarding it?

### **Chapter 39: A Religious Conquest of Eretz Yisroel**

Did the question of conquering Eretz Yisroel suddenly arise today? It is already fifty years since the Chovevim began to build themselves up in Eretz Yisroel, and it is almost 25 years since the Zionism organized themselves to begin buying land in Eretz Yisroel. Why are you so late in taking this step for the good of the Jewish people? Why didn't you ask the great Torah leaders of the previous generation about this question, while they were still with us, and follow what they said without question?

Even today, is it only the Moatzei Hatorah that can resolve this question, taking it upon their shoulders to answer it "according to Torah and tradition" and in the name of all religious Jews? **This is a matter about which we have been forewarned in the covenant of Hashem Tzva-os that not by might and not by power we will prevail, but through wisdom and knowledge of the word of G-d and His redemption.** And you have come to uproot that which is holy to the nation of the G-d of Avraham, having the nerve to decide it without asking the great Torah leaders. We do not even know which of our Torah leaders has the first chair at the table of Hashem.

**Why is it different now? Just because politicians split up the lands and the [British] government opened the gates of their provinces [Palestine]? Will you sell the inheritance of our ancestors, the property of our people for thousands of generations, the rivers of martyrs' blood, the myriads of pure hearts, in exchange for the soup of a political state? Do you, the Moatzei Hatorah according to Torah and tradition, also see the Balfour Declaration to give the land to the Jewish people as the rising star of Jacob? Do you see his promise as the spirit of G-d, that you make a great noise among the Jewish people, saying that the religious Jews will conquer the land, in violation of the command of Hashem and the Torah?**

Oh, leaders of Israel! G-d forbid, G-d forbid, you are destroying and smashing the head of Jacob, and you are leaving his glory, G-d forbid, to the destroyer. Think: has this ever happened? Has a Jewish leader ever abandoned his flag in exchange for an idol? And what would be his punishment if he did. Think about the end of days.

Have mercy on the sheep you are shepherding while there is still time!

This is not just naivete or lack of attention. And even if it were, a leader cannot claim innocence before the Judge; he will be blamed for the end result of his actions.

#### **Chapter 40: Settlement of the Land**

Is the question of settling the land a new one? Why did the great Torah leaders of the previous generation reject this idea? Instead they said: Whoever has a shadow of fear of Hashem in his heart and calls himself a Jew must lend a hand to support Torah and service of Hashem in the Holy Land. Let every man give a donation to Hashem from his income to support our brothers who sit in the Holy Land, occupying themselves with Torah and prayer.

They wrote long letters on this subject, and they took action to set an example. Each one founded a kollel for people from his area, including yeshivos and the like. They spoke constantly to the Jews in Europe, exhorting them to support those living in Eretz Yisroel. They exhorted the Jews of Eretz Yisroel to continue their Torah study and prayer constantly. They continually tried to improve the lot of those in Eretz Yisroel however much they could. Nothing was too hard for them to do for their brothers in Eretz Yisroel. Only through the adornment of Torah and fear of G-d did they sanctify the land. They did not allow the land to be sullied with physical efforts, with businesses, labor and factories. The land must be kept only holy for the Jewish people until the promised time comes, regarding which Hashem swore to our ancestors, through the breath of His mouth, through Moshiach, may he gather our exiles soon.

Why then did you encourage your followers in Poland to found an organization for settling the land by building factories and labor? If you did it because of the need of Polish Jews to emigrate somewhere, is their need to flee greater than that of Jews during the terrible pogroms of 1879, 1882 and 1905-7 [when the gedolim nevertheless opposed the Chovevim and Zionist movements]? Is their love for their people greater than the love that the Torah leaders of that time had for the Jewish people? Or did G-d bless us with greater understanding today, to realize that the time has come to, G-d forbid, trade away the form in exchange for the physical? Tell me, please: is it possible, is it right, that the rebbes of Poland and the activists of Germany should have the same goal, should walk arm in arm towards the golden calf they have erected, G-d forbid, to cause Israel to sin?

Is this not what is happening? Those from Poland are building factories and new schools for boys and girls; those from Germany are buying land and supporting the Chavatzeles schools, and both have the goal of broadening the settlement according to the pure Torah. Rabbi Dr. Ehrmann is traveling from town to town and settlement to settlement in the Holy Land, under the auspices of Agudath Israel, to search for a suitable place for a factory, in accordance with Torah. And the rebbes of Poland, although they do not possess the Germans' organizational skills, are also working toward broadening the settlement and conquering the land, through building factories, buying land, all for the sake of Heaven, to establish the settlement according to the pure Torah.

L-rd of Avraham! Where is the wellspring from which the Moatzei Hatorah draw their purity and running water to purify all these things: the language of the country; secular studies; conquering the land through human effort, based on the words of some official in the British or American government; settling the land by building factories and workshops – everything done in complete purity, according to our holy Torah.

Pardon me, but your proof from the Gemora about Rabbi Yannai planting 400 vineyards is questionable. To say that Rabbi Yannai's reason was the settlement of Eretz Yisroel is no more than a prophecy.

In any case, tell me this, Moatzei Hatorah: Was a new Torah given by G-d recently? I admit without shame that neither I nor any other Jew who follows the previous generation's Torah leaders faithfully never asked them such a question, from what

wellspring they drew their opinions and views. Their words were always holy to us, no matter from where they drew them, and whoever opposed them, even if they could open the windows of the heavens and show us the holy throne, or make miracles in the earth, we would not listen to them. We had no need to investigate, for the "holy spirit" of these opposers was the same spirit that rested on Achav's prophets.

We must know only one thing. Although we have sinned greatly, G-d has afflicted us and that generation of leaders is gone, yet their soul and spirit remains alive with us. We hope that they pray for their disciples and disciples' disciples, that they not be ensnared in the trap of naivete, as we walk between the true lovers of our people and the net of the wicked that is stretched out to bring about our downfall.

### **Chapter 41: Where Should One Move**

The spirit of G-d rests on you to answer those who ask where to move, that they should move to the Holy Land and build their businesses there. G-d has helped you and you have a large Jewish community who submit their questions to you, and some of them will do nothing without your direction. Tell them to go to America or England, but not to take it upon themselves to go to the holy place, bringing their business with them.

I do not mean to stick my head among great mountains, to criticize the way a holy man answers questions. A holy man does not base his answers only on his limited human understanding, but on inspiration given to him by G-d. And after all, do Jews ask him questions because of his wisdom, his understanding or his broad knowledge? They have chosen him as their holy man, to hear through him the counsel of G-d in every matter, great or small, be it the service of G-d, health, business matters, raising children or lifestyle. They hope for his answer and blessing as the farmer hopes for rain. Therefore it is senseless to criticize such a man's answer, to evaluate it, or to compare it with the answers given by others.

However, it is easy to see why a personal answer given to an individual cannot be a basis to decide the question of settling the land. Everyone knows that it is more comfortable for a Jew to live in Eretz Yisroel, breathing the holy air, living together with religious Jews – than to be breathing the smoke from the chimneys of the British factories or entering the race for profit of the American business world. So when you tell a person to move to Eretz Yisroel and then add logical reasons, you are talking not only from Divine inspiration but from your own opinion; you are guiding people in the proper Torah way, being wise and seeing the outcome of your advice.

If one travels around the world and looks at Jewish communities, he will see that, thank G-d, the Jewish people is alive and well. Although our enemies (who intend to be enemies but are actually benefactors) persecute us, yet every city has a cheder, a yeshiva and charity organizations. When a religious Jew comes to a new place and gets settled, he will, with the encouragement of gedolim, help build one of these institutions. As the Midrash says (on Shir Hashirim 2:8), when one Jew lives in Barbary and another lives in Britania, it is considered as if the whole Jewish people went to these places and this



fulfills the decree of exile to the seventy nations. **We must believe with complete faith that when Moshiach comes, he and Hashem will be more pleased with the cheder, the shul and the charity institution founded by the Jews in exile, in Barbary and Britain, than with the factory and workshop founded, G-d forbid, in Jerusalem the holy city.** What will you have to say for yourself then?

You say that the religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel are very good in their dress and behavior. It is very hard to say this, but the appeal of settling the land seems to have blinded your eye. For the sake of this good thing – that Jews should be able to wear Jewish clothing and peyos – have you decided to overlook everything else? If only you could use your strength to take other actions, to make sure that all religious Jews in whatever places they live are perfect, you would bring about improvement without causing ruin to the beauty of the Jewish people.

You say that the Arabs do not interfere with the practice of Judaism. But I think that in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Austria they also do not interfere. As far as anti-Semites, I think the gentiles in Eretz Yisroel deserve that title just as well as those of Europe. The violence against the Jews in Eretz Yisroel and the failed British system of justice are the bitter testimony to this.

The religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel ask you to expand the community. Did you give them a choice of expanding it through the founding of yeshivos or through the building of factories, and they chose the factories? I would not be surprised if the religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel would choose the yeshiva. Of course, they might like to expand the settlement with factories as well. But for that do not look to the Polish rebbes but to the wealthy philanthropists in the lands empty of Judaism. Something founded by the Polish rebbes would be far more beloved to them.

### **Chapter 42: Building Modern Schools**

Now to the subject of modern schools for boy and girls. It is true that when a man enters the forest and gets lost, cannot find his way out, and faces a terrible fate, we must save him. But, pardon me, why have you become involved in this saving? This is the domain of others who are more experienced in guiding these animals back onto the path. They need special kinds of schools, not yeshivos under our care with the tradition of our fathers. We should not be the ones to make girls' schools in the style of Germany and France. I think the Jewish people will forgive the rebbes of Poland if they do not take part in founding these schools.

### **Chapter 43: Conclusion**

Now, let the Moatzei Hatorah tell us: isn't this Agudah of "Shlumei Emunei Yisroel" a new offering, a gift to the Jewish people mingled with the oil of the proponents of Haskalah, the Chovevim, the Zionists, the Mizrachists – all together. We hear you swearing: "G-d forbid, we are not Zionists or Chovevim!" But then, what is the Agudah of "Shlumei Emunei Yisroel"?

Who were the proponents of Haskalah? Do you know what they advocated? Was it not schools that teach the language of the country and secular studies? Who were the Chovevei Zion? Surely you have heard that their goal was to build settlements in Eretz Yisroel and to expand the community. Who were the Zionists? Wasn't their goal to focus Jewish efforts on building the land with human effort, by gaining permission from governments, building factories and founding new boys' schools – "Hechalutz" – and girls' schools – "Chavatzeles" or "Sharon"? Who were the Mizrachists? Wasn't their goal to bring the beauty of Judaism into the tents of Zionism?

And now this Agudah of "Shlumei Emunei Yisroel", founded by the Moatzei Hatorah, is woven from threads of all these Jewish movements together: Haskalah, Chovevim, Zionists and Mizrachists. But it is holier, based on the purity of our holy Torah and the keeping of the mitzvos down to the last detail.

Torah, work, the language of the country, secular studies, conquering the land, expanding the community with factories, with Western-style schools... But the Agudists and the Moatzei Hatorah continue to swear that this is not, G-d forbid, Zionism or anything like it. To conquer Eretz Yisroel with human effort is definitely forbidden, they say, but now that it is no longer in Arab hands, or now that we have the freedom to go there, we will go too! To conquer it, to build factories and labor, to expand its community, to build schools where secular language and studies are taught – yes. But G-d forbid to say that we are following in the footsteps of the Zionists. No, we are following the purity of the holy Torah, to keep the mitzvos down to the last detail, as Hashem commanded us.

Jewish people will say painfully and mockingly, "The bitter day has come when those who wear the cloak of faith have been captured, and beautiful cedars of Lebanon have been led away. **Until now the chair had three legs – Chovevim, Zionists and Mizrachi – but now the Moatzei Hatorah has added a fourth leg called Shlumei Emunei Yisroel.**" **And now the Zionists will reign supreme.**

The Torah says that when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, "His brothers could not answer him, for they were confounded by him" (Bereishis 45:3). Whenever Rabbi Elazar would read this verse, he would cry, saying, "If this is the reaction to the rebuke of a human being, what will be our reaction to the rebuke of the Holy One, blessed is He?" (Chagigah 4b) May Hashem inspire us to serve Him with full hearts.

I am dust and ashes under the feet of the leaders of the holy nation, who until their last breath did not desert the venerated and holy banner, may their merit protect us. It is their influence on me that brought me to write these words, and it is in their name that I appeal to you, asking for an explanation for all of the above. And I appeal to you to erase from the agenda of the Agudah of Shlumei Emunei Yisroel the program of secular studies and language, and instead focus their attention of supporting the pure Torah as it was given; to erase the agenda of settling the land through vain means, factories, labor and Western schools, and instead to broaden the settlement by supporting Torah scholars, chassidim, pious men, yeshivos and the like. And let there be peace upon Israel.

Servant to the servants of G-d and lover of everyone who spreads the pure Torah, son of my great father the Lubavitcher Rebbe,

Yosef Yitzchok Scheersohn.

#### **Chapter 44: The Alexander Rebbe Against Agudah**

Even in the very place where this breach took place, in Warsaw, capital of Poland, the great Alexander Rebbe arose and wrote the following letter before his passing, in which he revealed the sins of the Agudah and cried over the destruction wrought by them. His sons after him, including his successor, Rabbi Yitzchok Menachem of Alexander, together with all his chassidim who are the best of Poland, continue to oppose the Agudah. Here is the letter:

To the rav, scholar and tzaddik son of a tzaddik, fiery candle, beautiful vine, Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita, may he be written and sealed in the book of the righteous for a good life, warmest regards.

I received your letter; please do not be upset with me for not answering you until now, for there were many reasons for this. Although now I am very weak, may Hashem heal quickly, and also busy preparing for the holy days, still since I heard that you are upset with me I feel obligated to answer you. I remember when we spoke together in Krenitz with my holy father of blessed and righteous memory. I do not remember his exact words, but I do remember that he spoke highly of you, and now I see that he was on the mark.

Regarding the Agudah, what can I say and what can I speak? My heart is pained for the slain of the house of Israel! My soul cries in secret over the great destruction and terrible desolation, burning and flickering like fire! The misfortunes grow worse from day to day, and who knows will grow out of this? May Hashem have mercy on the remainder of us. I am almost weakened from suffering so much over this.

May Hashem strengthen me and heal me quickly, in the merit of my holy fathers, and may I regain strength and get off my bed, and may we merit a good writing and sealing, a year of redemption and salvation, and may Hashem hear our cry in these holy days.

Your friend who moans over the misfortunes of the time and hopes that Hashem will have mercy on His people and send us Moshiach, hoping for salvation,

Shmuel Tzvi.

P.S. I heard that you obtained a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Perhaps you could send me a copy.

#### **Chapter 45: The Belzer Rebbe Against Modern Agudah Schools**

When the Agudah spread its wings to Galicia and founded a mesivta there, the Belzer Rebbe came out against them and printed the following warning:

Peace and blessings unto the respected G-d-fearing Jews and chassidim of Galicia. I hear that they want to found in Lvov a seminary, which they call a "mesivta" in order to mislead Jews. I tremble with fear lest they entrap young Jewish boys in their net. Therefore, although every Jew who has fear of G-d and love of the Torah in his heart knows and understands on his own that this is destruction of the Torah, still I feel obligated to warn Jews in all places not to take any part in this, and on the contrary, every Jew is obligated to search for ways to prevent their plans from coming to fruition. It is a mitzvah to tell all gedolim and tzaddikim in our country, as well as those who are still exiled in other countries, to cry out bitterly and publicize their opinion that no Jew should give ear to these people who seduce to sin, enemies of the Torah, and thus all of the Jewish people who step back from this. May Hashem Yisborach help that we might all be able to raise our children with the Torah and fear of G-d, in the ways of Chazal, in the traditions of learning that we received from our holy fathers, and may we quickly see the raising of the pride of the Torah and Jews everywhere.

May we see the comforting of Zion and Jerusalem, Yissachar Dov of Belz.

The following letter from the Kalashitzer Rebbe mentions the opinion of the Belzer Rebbe:

Peace and blessing to my friend, the rav and tzaddik by whose light the multitude walks, Munkacz Rav shlita.

After the proper greetings, I am writing in reply to your letter. Let me tell you that I was in Haleshitz and the Belzer Rebbe told me about the Agudah, that the girls organization "Chavatzeles" or "Sharon" or "School of Engineering" were very repulsive, and other bitter and bad details. And I said to him, "But the Agudists quote you as saying the opposite!" He said to me, "You should testify that you heard this from me!" Since I saw from your letter that some weakness had entered your heart (unusual for you), let me tell you that even those who are sitting there [in Haleshitz] say that the Munkaczer Rav is gaining merit and bringing merit to the public. I will conclude here because of preparations for Shabbos.

Chuna Halberstam, rav of Kaleshitz

#### **Chapter 46: The Radimislaver Rav**

For a long time I have heard that, unfortunately, many groups, including great Torah scholars, want to join the new organization whose goal is to mix good and bad, i.e. that students should learn secular subjects for several hours each day. They must know that that way is bad and bitter – who knows how much destruction of the Torah will come of it? It is known that all the true tzaddikim put their lives on the line to prevent the mixing

of religious and secular subjects. If I had the power, I would raise a great outcry over this, but unfortunately I am weak and not in my home country. Still, I find it necessary to inform the public that in my opinion this path is very wrong. Anyone who has fear of G-d in his heart should not let his children attend such a school, only train them in Torah and fear of G-d as in all previous generations.

Also, a Jew should not join the new Agudah. We do not care how nice the name sounds. And although I heard that some of the gedolim in Poland agreed to the Agudah, it is surely because they lacked knowledge about the organization. But I know well that their path is a dangerous one; therefore one who guards his soul should keep far away from it. I hope that all those who fear G-d agree to me. May Hashem Yisborach lift up the pride of Torah and may we merit to see the salvation of the Jewish people soon.

Kasho 1921, Shmuel Engel, rav of Radimishlau.

### **Chapter 47: The Madder Rav Against Agudah's Settlement Program**

Blessings to the righteous, holy, honored rav and distinguished scholar, the pious Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz, author of Minchas Elazar.

After paying proper respect, I notify you that yesterday I received your letter with your holy and fiery words. Already before this I was hoping that you would publicize your opinion in order to teach the Jewish people the proper way. Although some gedolim have supported the Yishuvists, this is no reason to sit quietly and not protest against the group, for it has happened many times that gedolei hador were deceived by the Maskilim with their smooth tongues. See the responsa of the Chasam Sofer, v. 6 siman 85-91 regarding the gedolim of his time. And in the Talmud, many sages said things and later admitted publicly that they had erred – see Berachos 37, Shabbos 63, Eiruvim 104 etc. You were right to show them the Tashbatz in the name of Rabbi Meir of Rottenburg. I also saw awesome words on this subject in Midrash Talpiyos, in the section on Eretz Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu said to G-d, "If You do not accompany us into the Land, do not bring us there." And certainly this applies to these Yishuvists. In my congregation, no one joins these groups. I have already worked very hard to stop the youth from taking part in such activities.

With blessings and hope for the salvation of Israel soon and bowing with respect,  
Mordechai Leib Winkler of Madd

### **Chapter 48: The Ban is Binding on All**

Peace unto the great man, light of Israel, my friend, the rav and distinguished scholar, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz.

After paying proper respect, I notify you that I received your letter. Recently I exchanged letters with the head of the Orthodox counsel in Pest regarding the testimony given at our conference and the ban on joining the Agudah that you and I and the other rabbis issued. I

told him that the Bach in Choshen Mishpat 1 says that the decree of a gadol hador is binding even outside his own city, and whoever is not on the same level as him is obligated to follow the decree. The Maharam Schick in Orach Chaim 307 says that the rabbis of his time had the power to issue a ban on joining the Status Quo Congregations. And even the Rivash, who says in siman 271 that a rabbi has no power to make a decree outside his own country, implies that if the decree is a fence against great deterioration he does have the power. And so seems to be the opinion of the Parshas Mordechai, Choshen Mishpat 2, and the Chasam Sofer, Choshen Mishpat 41 and 79. In our case the decree is obviously a fence against great deterioration. It is also apparent from the words of the Chasam Sofer that if such a decree has already been made in a previous generation, the rabbis who renew the decree are considered to be acting as mere agents of the first generation, and thus their decree is equally binding. Here too, one who reads the testimony given at our conference will see that the reasons against joining the Agudah are all old matters – groups like this have been banned long ago.

Next Tuesday a national conference is scheduled, and I was asked to come. The question of the Agudah will also be discussed, so it is Divine Providence that I will be there and have this opportunity to present our position, that we must all keep the ban issued at the conference.

With blessings and hope for the salvation of Israel soon, bowing with respect to his honor, his friend, Mordechai Leib Winkler.

#### **Chapter 49: The Rabbis of Unsdorf and Veitzen Oppose the Agudah**

Peace unto the great man, light of Israel, the rav, distinguished and famous scholar, perfect tzaddik, holy candle, pious Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz, author of Minchas Elazar and other seforim.

After paying proper respect, I notify you that I received your letter. Regarding what you wrote about the opinion of the rav of Unsdorf, based on my knowledge of him I am sure this is true. Several times I merited the opportunity to meet him personally, and given his character and righteousness, it is impossible that he would support the Agudah, for anything new is unacceptable to him. I do not know if testimony is even necessary; several years ago all the great rabbis agreed that we may not join the Agudah. The rav of Veitzen wrote me the same thing; I was sick at the time, but I sent him a reply that I also held one should not join them. A few days ago I received a letter from the rav of Chisad saying that he had also spoken out against it. At that time he had had a sharp debate with an community leader, and had told him, "Would you agree to accept a rabbi ordained by their mesivta? We do not give appointments to those who agree to the content of works of heresy. If we join the Agudah, it is more than likely that their rabbis will be accepted."

I assume that you have received replies to some of the letters I sent out. My hope is that G-d will be with us until we merit to see Moshiach. Bowing in his honor, Mordechai Leib Winkler of Madd

## **Chapter 50: The Actual Letter of the Unsdorfer Rav**

Peace and all good to the rav and famous scholar Rabbi Yitzchok Tzvi Halevi, rav of Kasho.

I received your letter. Although I originally supported the Agudah, but since I heard that there was a possibility that the Zionists would be strengthened by this, I retracted my opinion. And I also wrote to the Neitra Rav that I am retracting my opinion, so that I not be blamed for causing people to stumble. I am being brief because of my weak health.

Peace unto you, your friend, Shmuel Rosenberg, rav of Unsdorf

## **Chapter 51: Rabbi Shimon Sofer of Erlau, Son of the Ksav Sofer, Against the Yishuvists**

To my friend, the rav and scholar, sharp and knowledgable, eminent Rabbi Dovid Dov Led [Meisels], rav of Ujhel.

After proper greetings, let me inform you of my opinion on this matter. It is well-known that the Zionists are complete heretics as they themselves testify. Whoever has a spark of Judasim left in him hates them and cannot join with them. The Mizrachists who come with the mask of religiosity are really one with the Zionists. Our Sages have already taught us that if we are uncertain as to what kind of person someone is, we should look who he associates with. This is the Gemora in Chullin 65a: "Not for nothing does the swallow go with the raven – the two species are closely related." The Mizrachists are like the Status Quo Congregations, who put on the mask of religiosity, saying that they are changing nothing from the way it was, and thus preventing many members of the community from joining the Orthodox kehillah. Here too, the Mizrachists attract the hearts of our brethren who want to stay far from the Zionists, and through them they are actually joining the Zionists.

And now they have disguised themselves under a new name, the "Yishuvists", and they continue to wreak destruction. Whoever has the power to uproot them would be doing a great mitzvah. And whoever helps them or supports them is a peer of Yeravam ben Nevat...

I received a letter from Machzikei Hadas, headed by the Tcharna Rav, who is known as a scholar and G-d-fearing man, saying that they want to found a group called Yishuv Eretz Yisroel so that Jewish refugees will have a place to go. They should be able to go to Eretz Yisroel and find a way to earn a livelihood while staying on the path of Torah and fear of G-d. I replied to them that I agreed to this, since they are enemies of the Mizrachists and Zionists and kept separate from them. But now I received a document written in German expressing the Yishuvist program, and here is what it says: "We are willing to bring this organization together with other organizations that have similar principles." Therefore I am keeping far from them until the matter is discussed by the rabbinic board of our country, and if they agree to it I will also agree. But for now, I will say that joining them

leads only to being like the Zionists. The scholarly and righteous rabbi of Munkacz wrote well about this. Based on what I heard about the Yishuvists in Ujhel, it is clear that their plans are evil, and even a child who has some sense can see this. You would do well to abolish the entire organization there. I am going to write to the Tcharna Rav that if this is how the organization will be, I do not agree to it at all. And I say that you, together with the rav of the Orthodox kehillah there, must abolish the group and make sure nothing is left of it in your place, for it is a source of destruction, to turn away the youth from Torah and fear of Heaven. And perhaps we are seeing the fulfillment of the verse in Daniel, "And some of the irreligious members of your people will try to establish a vision but will stumble." This is until G-d has mercy on us and redeems us with a complete redemption, may it be soon.

Your friend who respects you, Shimon Sofer, rav of Erlau

### **Chapter 52: Rabbi Yehuda Greenwald of Satmar Protests Against Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld's Decision to Join Agudah**

The following is copied from his Responsa Zichron Yehuda, Orach Chaim, published in Budapest in 1923, page 156, siman 200.

Peace, long life and all good to my friend, leader of the multitudes, teacher of my youth, the famous scholar and tzaddik Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, one of the choicest Jews, guardians of the holy city of Jerusalem, may it be built.

After proper greetings to his honor, I would like to ask his honor: is there is any truth to what I read in the newspaper that you joined the organization Agudas Yisroel, and are considered one of the leaders of that organization in Jerusalem? And in order to fulfill the commandment "Do not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds," I must add some words and speak to you as a friend. All those in this country who read this news are torn to their hearts – how could such a big mistake be made by such a great person? There are two points here: first of all, even if it were clear to your mind that one is allowed to join the Agudah, even if it is a mitzvah or a great obligation, who gives you the right to sacrifice thousands of Jewish lives for this, taking food from their mouths and the mouths of their children? For the members of the Hungarian Kollel in Jerusalem are supported by the contributions of their brethren in Hungary, and the Hungarian rabbis are against Agudas Yisroel and speak against it and tell their congregants not to give charity to any segment of Agudah. If you join Agudah, the Jews of Jerusalem will also join, they will not receive support from Hungary, and then you will be to blame for the death of innocent souls from starvation.

Secondly, Scripture says, "If you do not know, oh most beautiful of women, go in the footsteps of the flock." Our Sages explain, "Follow in the footsteps of your fathers." How great was the self-sacrifice of our fathers and teachers of blessed memory to stay far from sinful men! King David began the book of Tehillim with the words, "Fortunate is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked..." Certainly he did not mean to warn against joining the wicked and doing as they do – that is obvious. Rather his intent was to



warn against following the counsel of the wicked even when they propose some plan for the sake of Heaven, to uphold the Torah. The Chasam Sofer explains this into the verse, "For the ways of Hashem are straight, the righteous walk in them, and the sinners stumble in them" (Hoshea 14:10). He punctuated it as follows: "For the ways of Hashem are straight, however if the righteous walk in them together with sinners, they will stumble in them."

The people of Hungary have obeyed the counsel of their elders and rabbis, and have suffered much embarrassment and derision because of it. They have sacrificed their soul, body and money in order to save themselves and their families and to stay far from sinful organizations. The merit of their fathers and teachers has stood by them and they have grown and been successful with the help of Heaven. And now, all the Hungarian rabbis who are faithful to Hashem and His Torah are calling out loudly not to give in and join the organization Agudas Yisroel **as long as they do not distinguish between Orthodox and non-Orthodox** – how then can I believe what the newspaper says that you have joined them? Are you not from this country? You saw with your own eyes what happened here. You are one of the Ksav Sofer's foremost disciples. I have known ever since that time when we sat together at the Ksav Sofer's table, and I saw how great was your fiery devotion to our master, how much you tremble from his holy words. How can it be that your feet have weakened from following his holy path of staying far from those who embrace the wicked?

How will we now be able to face our opponents, when they say: look at the great and eminent Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, whom all agree is holy and righteous in all his ways and all his deeds are for the sake of Heaven, and is one of the foremost disciples of the Ksav Sofer, and now stands in the gates of Heaven as one of the leaders of the Jerusalem community – and he says that it is right to become a member of Agudas Yisroel! This will, G-d forbid, destroy our people; damage will be done to this generation and future generations. Our ancestors stood on Mt. Gerizim, and those pronouncing the blessings said, "Blessed is he who upholds all the words of this Torah," and the Ramban explains that it means raising up and standing up the honor of the Torah.

And if you say that this membership in Agudah itself is upholding the Torah – are not the rabbis of Hungary worthy to be considered at this a minority opinion to be strict for, where there is a possibility of danger to the soul? They say that joining would be a great stumbling block and would lead to sin for the entire Jewish people, now and in the future.

Therefore it is truly difficult to believe that the news report is true. If you would only listen to me, as soon as you read this words you should immediately made a public announcement that the report about you joining Agudah was false. And on the contrary, you should don the zeal of the G-d-fearing man you are and cry out in a great voice, keep away from the tents of the organization Agudas Yisroel, as long as they do not follow the directives of our rabbis who are experienced in fighting the wars of Hashem.

May Hashem Yisborach be with you, and may you be among those who bring merit to the public, and may you and your comrades and all who are loyal to Hashem and His Torah get credit for the good of the public.

Hoping for Hashem Yisborach's mercy and salvation, praying always before Him that I may be one of those who brings merit to the public, who seeks his peace, Yehuda Greenwald.

**Chapter 53: Rabbi Aryeh Leibush Halberstam, Rav of Tzanz, Grandson of the Divrei Chaim, Against Agudah**

Peace be unto my friend, the well-known righteous scholar, who mends breaches, Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita, rav of Munkacz.

My son Moishele told me that when he visited you, you expressed puzzlement at my failure to reply to your letter. In truth, I never received any letter from you, only the printed sheet with the halachic ruling issued by you [at the conference] against the Agudah. You went out to fight the war of Hashem, proving that the goals of the Agudah not only will not be good for the state of Torah and Judaism but will actually make things worse. I am certain that G-d will assist you, especially when I see that many gedolim from your country are standing guard with you. You do not need me, since your ruling was only for your country [Hungary and Czechoslovakia] and you do not need help from rabbis of another country [Polish-ruled Galicia].

Still, my heart is very depressed to see the low state of our holy Torah in our country, which has declined dramatically through the work of the wicked Zionists, who have come to swallow up whatever is holy and to convince Jews to throw away their faith in the Creator. The Satan has been so successful that a few weeks ago, the Agudah of Shlumei Emunei Yisroel joined together with the wicked Zionists to form one voting block. This has become a stumbling stone for the Jewish people, for now they will begin to follow the Zionists, seeing that religious Jews, among them great rabbis of the generation, have extended their hands to them to become one block. The Zionist organization will grow from day to day, for they will seduce the Jewish youth with their smooth tongues. I have already publicized my opinion that it is forbidden to join any such Agudah or organization. Although some rabbis and gedolei yisroel think that they are improving things by joining it, time will tell that even if in the beginning they strengthen religion, in the end they will ruin it. It is very crucial that the rabbis of our country gather together and fix this breach that has unfortunately come about. However, I am very weak and therefore I look to Heavenly mercy, that He should bestow on us a spirit of purity and inspire the true gedolim and tzaddikim of our country to form a plan to save the Jewish people from the teeth of these lions. When that happens, I will also join with them.

Your friend who seeks your peace, waiting for the salvation of Israel and the uplifting of the pride of the Torah, Aryeh Leibush Halberstam

## **Chapter 54: Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich, Samloyer Rav, Concurs With the Ban**

Peace be unto the great and famous scholar and tzaddik, the holy candle of Israel, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz.

Greetings to his honor. The testimony given at the conference together with the concluding ruling of the gedolim forbidding membership in Agudas Yisroel reached me. I am a friend to all who fear Hashem and are concerned for His name, and I agree to all the things written in that ruling, to separate from them and their multitudes. Agudah is forbidden to us just like Zionism and Mizrachi. And it is not a coincidence that all three names (Agudisten, Tzionisten and Mizrachisten) end with the consonants s,t and n which spell "Satan", for the Satan is part of all three, and all of them will eventually break away from the Jewish faith, G-d forbid.

Seeking his peace, ending with blessings of peace and plenty – may He Who gives life to the living add to you years of good and sweet life, may your prayers be accepted with mercy, and please mention me as well.

Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich

## **Chapter 55: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Halberstam of Pristik, Son-in-law of the Shinover Rav, Speaks Against Agudah**

Peace and all good to my friend, the rav and famous tzaddik, the scholar Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita, rav of Munkacz.

I received your letter, and now I express my opinion, that we also cry out against the organization "Shlumei" and "Agudah" and ask all who hear our voice not to join them. You may sign my name on the protest, for I see clearly that this organization is as unhealthy for the Jewish people as a blister, because it is founded on an unsteady base, by two German rabbis, Dr. Carlebach of Kelin and Dr. Kohn. When the German king conquered Warsaw, these two rabbis came from Germany to Warsaw and worked to benefit the Jews there. They founded the Shomer Yisroel group, also known as the Jewish Gymnasium [high school]. For girls it is called Chavatzeles – Bais Yaakov – and for boys it is called a seminary. They did this out of love for their fellow Jews, because they saw that the Jews in Poland are empty of all secular knowledge. The tzaddikim of Greater Poland were caught in their net. Since these German rabbis keep Shabbos and are observant Jews, they were able to fool them. They changed the name of the organization to Shlumei Emunei Yisroel, but the agenda remained the same as Shomer Yisroel. When the Germans were expelled from Warsaw, they handed over the leadership to certain rabbis, to continue the gymnasium exactly as before. Many of the religious Jews of Poland were swept along with them, as known, for the body follows the head. One cannot put into writing the destruction of Torah wrought by this organization. Most of the heads and leaders are light-minded men, enwrapped in talleisim as if their intent were for the sake of Heaven, but sated with abominations in their hearts, for example, teaching Latin

to their children at home. Therefore it is a great obligation to tell all who fear Hashem to separate from them.

His friend, Menachem Mendel Halberstam

### **Chapter 56: His Son Rabbi Chuna Halberstam of Kalishitz Enumerates Three Sins of the Agudah**

Peace and salvation to my beloved rav, the great tzaddik, stronghold and tower, leader of his people, splendor of the generation, who stands in the breach, Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita, rav of Munkacz.

After proper greetings, let me say that my opinion of the new leadership is already well-known. I hereby permit you to publicize my reasons, and adjoin it to the words of the remainder of those who speak the plain truth. There is no difference between the organizations of the Zionists, the Mizrachists, the Agudists or the Shlumei Emunei Yisroel. The details of their ways are abominable to religious Jews. The girls schools are forbidden and considered "as if they were teaching her immorality" (Sotah 20a). Worse yet is their use of the language of the land in their chadarim, G-d forbid. **And the third evil is that they agreed to settle Eretz Yisroel with physical means, which is like a conquest before the End.** One sin leads to another, and they have permitted the seminar, a poisonous thorn, G-d forbid. The general rule is that anything that arises from cooperation between the doctors of Germany and some gedolim from Poland has no connection to holiness. On the contrary, it is a stumbling block for the public. I have heard clear reports that the tzaddikim among the Agudah's rabbis are crying out, saying, "We are trapped!"

May Hashem Yisborach have mercy and send us the righteous redeemer soon, in our days, to redeem us with kindness. Then he will take these people out of their trap.

Signing for the honor of Hashem's name, his friend who seeks his peace with full heart and soul, Chuna Halberstam

### **Chapter 57: A Letter From Rabbi Shmuel Engel to the Kalischitzer Rav**

Peace and all good to my friend, the rav, gaon and well-known tzaddik, Rabbi Chuna Halberstam shlita.

After proper greetings, let me say that I have already made you aware of my opinion that it is very crucial to stand in the breach and strengthen the fence of the holy Torah, and to publicize that we continue to hold onto the Torah of Israel, that we reject all new things, and we are obligated to train our children according to the ways of the Talmud and the poskim, as our rabbis have taught us. G-d forbid to mix the wisdom of the holy Torah with secular wisdom. A teacher for the people of Hashem must be one who truly fears Hashem, and only then can they seek Torah from his mouth.

Unfortunately, we have heard that even in our country, Galicia, various new organizations have been founded and they attract many religious Jews, who join them out of ignorance. As we see it, no good will come of this, only bad, G-d forbid. Why should we look for new methods that are against the will of Hashem Yisborach? We are obligated to learn and teach according to the way of our fathers and teachers without any new plans, and Hashem Yisborach will surely guard His people from all evil.

They justify themselves by saying that great rabbis from other countries did this, but one cannot compare one country to another. We know the country of Galicia well, and any new thing will be very harmful, especially to the youth. Therefore I am compelled to express my opinion that this entire new movement is going in the direction away from the path of Torah and fear of G-d.

We are also obligated to make efforts to support the charity funds for Eretz Yisroel in every way possible, so that in the future as well thousands of our fellow Jews can live there, studying Torah and serving Hashem without any distractions. They will pray for us as well, that we might merit to see the ingathering of the exiles soon. This is the mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisroel: to support those who are learning Torah there. But one may not support, G-d forbid, the group who is destroying the Eretz Yisroel charities, saying that the real mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisroel is to work the land there. That is a lie! But everyone should strengthen himself to increase his donation to the holy funds, to support the poor Torah scholars who fear Hashem, who live on the holy soil and pray for their brethren in the diaspora.

Also in our country, we must be strong and keep the old Jewish ways. Our rabbis with their holy inspiration have taught us the path on which we must continue until the coming of moshiach. My heart is very distressed to see that, unfortunately, there is much modernity in our country, and a few people from the religious community have been caught up in it. May Hashem Yisborach help that they should reconsider and see that this is not the proper way to go, and let them return to the ways of our rabbis. In this merit may Hashem Yisborach bring nearer our redemption, and have mercy on the remainder of His people.

I know for certain that the Belzer Rebbe is also opposed to this new movement. But since he is far from our country he cannot express his opinion publicly. Still, every man who seeks truth knows his opinion well.

His friend who seeks his peace with love and heart and soul, blessing him with blessings of gmar chasimah tova and simchas hachag, signing on this 13<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei in Kashau,

Shmuel Engel, rav of Radomishlau, now in exile here.

**Chapter 58: Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Freund of Interdam Against Secular Studies in Cheder**

I have also come to join the lions in forbidding the mixing of Torah learning with secular studies. Whoever wishes to make changes in this matter has the lower hand. Although I am not important enough to join in this, and I am unworthy to lend support to their words, still I wrote this at the request of the rav, the holy gaon and tzaddik, son of holy men and angels, scion of a great dynasty, tzaddik son of a tzaddik, Rabbi Chuna Halberstam shlita, rav of Kalischitz. I desired to do the will of a tzaddik, and the rav of Rogna told me that Rabbi Chuna had asked me to sign. It may not help, but it certainly will not hurt.

On this I have signed this Sunday night of Parshas Shemos 5680 (1920), in Rogna.

Avraham Yehoshua Freund

### **Chapter 59: Rabbi Meir Arik Writes to a Galician Rabbi Against Secular Studies in Cheder**

I received your letter just now and I am quickly writing a reply. You wrote that there is a rumor that I agreed to the teaching of secular subjects in the chadarim. This is a lie and I never agreed to this! In fact, I received a letter from the rabbi of Sokolov stating that there they already have secular studies in the cheder. Now they want it to be officially recognized by the government, so as to avoid the need to go to gentile schools. They explained to me the great necessity of this step, and nevertheless I did not give my approval. All the more so in places where they have not yet begun teaching the secular subjects in cheder.

Kesivah vachasimah tovah, Meir

### **Chapter 60: The Sfas Emes Against the Immigration of Sinners**

"Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you." (Devarim 32:7). We must study the words of the holy sages of Israel, true tzaddikim, lions and leopards of the previous generation, may their merit protect us, who stayed far from Zionism in every way, and were unwilling to find any permission for immigration to Eretz Yisroel to work the fields and vineyards and the like. The only valid way of settling Eretz Yisroel was in accordance with the enactment of the earlier rabbis, fiery angels, under the system of kollelim of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, to learn and teach, keep and fulfill the Torah and mitzvos there in separation from worldly things.

This is what we see from the following letter from the Sfas Emes, the Gerrer Rebbe, teacher of myriads of thousands of Israel. The letter is printed in the book Chiddushei Harim and Gur Aryeh, Bilgoraya 5673, letter number 8 at the end of the book.

Thursday of Parshas Kedoshim 5661 (1901), Gur.

Life and peace to the honor of my friend, the great and famous and holy rabbi, Rabbi Yisroel shlita.

I received your letter, accompanied by the pilpul on halacha. I was happy to see you walking with broad knowledge through the Talmud and poskim. Now I will do your bidding to tell you my humble opinion on this subject (moving to Eretz Yisroel) as far as halacha, and practically speaking.

Briefly, certainly one who has a little fear of Heaven, accepts upon himself to keep the mitzvos of terumos and maaseros, and knows that his wife will not be against it, should not be afraid to go to Eretz Yisroel, and it will be considered a mitzvah. Even though this aliyah would not be for the sake of the mitzvah, we say that "by doing mitzvos for the wrong reasons one will eventually come to do them for the right reasons." But one who is not certain of himself that he will fulfill the many mitzvos of the land – gifts to the poor and tithes come out to about a fifth of the produce or more, and keeping the Shmittah is even harder, a great test, especially if all their livelihood will be from the produce of the land – then **he should not bring himself to such a test.**

And especially regarding what you proposed to permit people who act improperly in our countries to go to Eretz Yisroel, on the assumption that once they live there they will humble themselves, **G-d forbid that a descendent of my father should say such a thing!** These people only go to benefit from the land, for their livelihood is difficult here. **Surely you have heard about the groups of irreligious and wicked people who have spread in Eretz Yisroel and Jerusalem. Woe to the ears that hear this!** Therefore in this case there is definitely a possibility of a prohibition.

All this pertains to the halacha. Now, turning to the practical sphere, you wish to make efforts in this area, to convince Jews to move to Eretz Yisroel. But you should not rely on stories; rather you should first send a few men with good sense and they should stay there for at least a few months, to see if it is really possible to live off the produce of the land. Hearing is not the same as seeing. And it is well known that there are many poor people in Eretz Yisroel – why do they not live off the produce of the land? And at least you must first ask people you know who have lived there several years and see what they have to say about this. You say that there has been a change there, that the land is sprouting with blessing, more than previously, but I have not heard this. You can get the true story from the Jews of Eretz Yisroel.

Regarding what you wrote further that through your efforts a majority of the Jewish people will come there, your words are all astounding. In this matter we say, "Let not he who puts on his sword boast like him who takes it off" (Melachim I 20:11). We cannot use this as one of our reasons to permit immigration to Eretz Yisroel.

May the Holy One, blessed is He, restore our captivity soon, and bring us up to Zion with song, and make us joyous as much as the days of our affliction.

His friend who seeks his peace, Aryeh Leib of Gur.

## **Chapter 61: The Shinover Rav Against Working the Land**

The following letter is printed in Divrei Yechezkel, Likutim:

Monday of Parshas Beshalach, 5657 (1897)

To the honorable Mr. Menashe Shochet and the honorable Mr. Dovid Katz,

You ask why the tzaddikim do not enter into the organization that sends people to work the fields in Eretz Yisroel. The answer is that honest and good men have met with us and told us that we should not support them, and on the contrary, we should tell anyone who has the fear of G-d in his heart to refrain from joining them. The letters that the Yishuvists have from tzaddikim are actually stolen, for the Kitover Rav and the rest wrote their words only regarding buying esrogim from Eretz Yisroel, and they went and printed them under the name of their organization.

I have seen one thing in their books (i.e. Derishas Zion by Avraham Yehuda Slutzky) that proves that their acts are all abominable to Hashem. It is written there that one who lives in Eretz Yisroel, even if he does not fulfill the Torah, has no sin. Boiling gold should be poured on their lips! For they want to lead people astray, that they should go to Eretz Yisroel and walk in the wicked path, as do the settlers in the colonies, who violate Shabbos publicly. Therefore cast out those who induce you to sin, and strengthen the settlement of the Land only by sending your donations to those who study Torah and serve G-d, until G-d lifts up our pride and restores our captivity, soon in our days.

Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam

### **Chapter 62: The Lubavitcher Rebbe Equates Agudah and Zionism**

Sunday 22 Shvat 5684 (1924), Rostovdon

To the honor of the gaon, famous for his Torah and his fear of Heaven, right-hand pillar, strong hammer, descendent of great men, son of gaonim of the land, Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita.

Greetings. Since I wrote you in the past month of Iyar, I have not had the pleasure of reading your words. How much does my soul desire to know what you accomplished in these many days! Surely you and the others have founded a Torah organization as planned.

In the past month of Menachem Av, I received an invitation to a Knessia Gedolah of the gaonim of the world, written with warm words, arousing the heart to come and participate. But when I saw the signature of Dr. Cohen on it, I realized that this certainly has some connection to their Agudah, and I replied to them accordingly. The invitation and my reply are attached. Obviously, I did not accept the invitation.



Recently I obtained some published matter explaining the goals and accomplishments of the Agudath Israel movement, and anyone can see that **their platform is the same as that of the Zionists**. The only difference is that they have the approval of rabbis. The German Agudists obtained this approval with political cunning and tricks, and in this they excelled over their Zionist and Mizrachi counterparts. Whoever reads the speeches of the speakers at the Knessia will see that **the three organizations are connected - Agudah to Mizrachi, and Mizrachi to the Zionists – and all of them as one deny the Torah. But the Agudah has exceeded the other two groups in that it stole the mantle of the rabbis**, and it comes with the power of the Torah. **The Torah girds itself with sackcloth** and says, "These people have made me a weapon..." But all can see who they really are.

And they work with great alacrity, and there is nothing to stop them. They know the right time and the right conditions under which to gather all the rabbis to their convention. Many of the rabbis have surely backed out now that they have seen the direction in which the leaders are headed.

But why haven't you and those with you let me know what you have been able to do to strengthen the Torah? I have heard that there are many who have called for the founding of an organization of religious Jewry based on true Torah principles, and that in Poland there are many who are opposed to the Agudah and call for an organization of religious Jewry and the founding of schools based on the path of truth. Last week I received a letter from a friend, who writes that in Frankfurt am Main a religious organization was founded called "Haachdus." I do not yet know what its goal is. A month ago I received a letter from one of my friends, in which he wrote that the true G-d-fearing Jews of Germany are against the Agudah.

Last week I wrote a letter to my friends in Frankfurt, encouraging them to found a yeshiva without any secular studies. Surely, I said, they would find boys there who wished to learn pure Torah and nothing else. The truth is that there is not even one such yeshiva in all of Germany. If I had someone with the proper qualifications – a Talmudic scholar who truly fears G-d and a knowledge of German – I would send him there at my own expense to found a yeshiva. With this in mind I am turning to you: could you give me such a man of spirit who would take upon himself the job of founding such a yeshiva? What would the monthly salary of such a man be in American dollars?

Experience has shown me that after a few years of hard work we succeeded in founding a beautiful yeshiva in a place where most of the people were real ignorami. And today, thank G-d, there are several beautiful yeshivos there, with many great Torah scholars. This is our portion in life and our job in this world: to light up the dark places of the earth with the light of the Torah.

I remain waiting for your answer. And I hope that G-d will see our affliction and lift up the pride of the Torah and the pride of His people Israel soon.

His friend who seeks his peace, values and honors him with feelings of respect and love and honor for the Torah,

Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn

### **Chapter 63: The Madder Rav Against Joining Agudah**

On Wednesday of Parshas Toldos, 27-28 of Cheshvan (5684/1923), a conference was held in Pest in the offices of the Counsel of Rabbis. It was attended by the greatest rabbis of the country as well as selected lay leaders, and the subject was whether we should join the Agudah organization, and if so in what way. I attended and expressed my opinion several times that we must not join this organization, because of the well-known stories about several things they are doing improperly, stories that were publicized by the rav of Munkacz. They established a Mesivta in Warsaw where secular subjects are taught to rabbinical students. We have received letters from the great rabbis of the Holy Land saying that the Agudah has established there schools where boys and girls learn together. They study the works of Moses Mendelsohn, arousing great protest.

- 1) My opinion was that according to halacha, the Counsel has no authority to join all of Hungarian Jewry with the Agudah. More than forty years ago the tzaddikim and gaonim wrote up and signed the by-laws of the Orthodox kehillos, and no one has the power to impose on this country an organization that originates outside the country. This is not an organization to strengthen Torah study, for instance an associate of rabbis, of children's chadarim or of yeshivos. It is not to strengthen fear of Heaven and service of Hashem Yisborach. Its sole purpose is to save us from the Zionist organization who are unfortunately in power also in the Holy Land. This is the private matter of every individual Jew, to petition government leaders to be saved from them; and in every period G-d sent us Jews who were proficient at this, such as Reb Yitzchok Deutsch and Reb Yitzchok Reich. But why should we join an organization that mixes the sacred and the profane? How can the Counsel force the entire country to join this group?
- 2) Did not a large number of rabbis already sign an agreement to forbid joining this organization, for the reasons mentioned above? One of my students, a reliable rabbi in Switzerland, wrote to me as follows, "The Agudah has done some good for the Torah scholars, but they have many projects that violate halacha." In Orach Chaim 53, the Magen Avraham (70) says that in any matter relating to the public, even a minority has the right to protest. Even if there is a mere rumor that something is being done wrong, a beis din must be set up to investigate. See also the responsum of the Chasam Sofer, siman 11, who rules according to the Raanach that a minority has the right to protest. He also writes that we can combine two witnesses from two different places. In our case, there are many witnesses. I heard oral testimony from a reliable Torah scholar that in one kehillah the Agudah youth held a real dance (known as a "ball") under the pretense of a Purim game – a terrible sin. I have the testimony of my two students in Switzerland, combined with the letter signed by the Hungarian rabbanim. So there are good reasons here for the minority to object against the majority. See what the Mishpat Shalom writes about this in Yoreh Deah siman 1, that the kehillah has the right to forbid the meat slaughtered by a new shochet if the established shochet of

the town is an expert and kosher beyond a shadow of a doubt. But if there are doubts about him, even if no evidence can be found to invalidate him, a minority in the town is entitled to hire another shochet who has a better reputation. All the more so in our case, where we have kosher and reliable witnesses testifying to all the improper things mentioned above, that we have a right to protest against the majority. This is said regarding the leaders of a kehillah; certainly the Counsel has no greater power than the leaders of a kehillah. See Choshen Mishpat, simanim 1-2 regarding the powers of the leaders of a kehillah. And despite all these powers, they have no right to impose on the people something about which there are doubts or rumors, and definitely not something about which there is clear negative testimony.

- 3) In Succah 46a we find that our Sages suspended the mitzvah of taking the Four Species on Shabbos, even on the first day of Succos when it is a Torah commandment, even for the residents of Eretz Yisroel. Although they know the exact day of the calendar and should really be allowed to do the mitzvah, since the Jews in other countries do not know the exact day and they forbade it for them lest someone come to carry the lulav on Shabbos, they forbade it for the residents of Eretz Yisroel as well, so that it should not seem that there are two Torahs. Here as well, many rabbanim already agreed to forbid membership in the Agudah. How can they annul this prohibition? So if the Counsel decides to join Agudah, these rabbanim will have no choice but to reject the decision of the Counsel. This will make it seem like there are two Torahs. This alone is enough reason to object to the proposal of the Counsel.
- 4) The Counsel has no power to rule on this matter, for the Agudah organization has promised to give several million to support the Hungarian yeshivos if they will join Agudah. The Gemora in Bava Basra 43a says that if a man dictated in his will to give a hundred zuzim to the poor people of his city, those poor people are disqualified from being judges or witness in the case, for they are biased. That is exactly the case here: they are biased, for by joining the Agudah they will be able to support and feed the yeshiva students. So they definitely do not have the right to rule on this matter, disregarding the dangers of joining the Agudah.
- 5) It has become known that the Agudists take lightly the prohibition on being alone with women, even married women and forbidden relatives. In Sanhedrin 26b there is a dispute about regarding one who is suspect with women: Rav Nachman says he is still a kosher witness, and Rav Sheshes says, "Forty lashes are upon his shoulders and he is kosher?!" Rava says that Rav Nachman agrees that he is disqualified to testify to permit a woman whose husband is missing. Rashi explains that Rav Nachman's reason for saying that he is kosher is because he holds like Rava who says (27a) that a sinner is only disqualified if he commits violent crime or theft. Rav Sheshes then must hold like Abaye who disqualifies any sinner, even one who eats treife food. Tosafos there says that the case is that there were no witnesses who saw the man in question sinning, only a rumor. The Rema rules in Choshen Mishpat 34:25 that if a man is often with forbidden women and is alone with them, if this is known only through hearsay, he is a kosher witness. This is Rav Nachman's opinion as explained by Tosafos. According to this, if there are witnesses to his sin, he is disqualified. And

according to Rashi, it would depend on the dispute between Abaye and Rava, and since we hold like Abaye in this case, he would be disqualified even based on a rumor.

Now we have established that the German Jews commonly mingle with women, and they have mixed youth organizations. It is impossible that there should never be a transgression of being alone with one, and furthermore this is familiarity with forbidden women. I have heard clear facts about one famous man among them, whose name I do not wish to mention. Therefore it is definitely forbidden to join them on this account, as it states in Avos 1:7: "Do not join a wicked man." The Avos Derabbi Nosson adds, "Even for Torah." The Tosafos Yom Tov says that this comes from a tradition from Sinai, which is like the words of the Torah. Therefore, it should not even occur to anyone that the Counsel should have power to make this decision, against the prohibitions of the Torah, G-d forbid.

- 6) I have explained the dangers and stumbling blocks that will come about from joining them based on what the Chasam Sofer says in Gittin 55b. The Gemora quotes the verse, "Fortunate is the man who fears constantly" (Mishlei 28:14). But in Berachos 60a it tells of a man who was afraid, and was told, "You are a sinner, for it says, 'The sinners feared in Zion' (Yishaya 33:14)." The Gemora in Berachos poses this contradiction, and resolves it by saying that one must be afraid in the case of words of the Torah. The Chasam Sofer explains that if something wrong has already been done and now there is a possibility of stumbling in sin, fortunate is the man who fears constantly. But if the possibility of sin does not yet exist and he brings it into existence, he is a sinner. In the present case, I know of several kehillos whose rav was forced to step down and leave town because of slander from Germany: the author of Yerios Shlomo, rav of Makava, almost had to move to Grossvardein. The author of Ani Yisroel, rav of Finfkirchen, had to live with his son in Grossvardein. Rabbi Yishaya Deutsch left his post in Dyola and lived in dire poverty. The travails of the rav of Kamaren are also well known. It is known to me that the disciples of Moses Mendelsohn ruined two countries, Moravia and Bohemia. From the province of Trentsch until the province of Tortz and Orva, as well as some of Galicia, was spoiled.
- 7) Some have mocked them, calling them "Agudas Esav". One rav objected and told me that this mockery is out of place, and only serves to make the Agudists angry. So let me tell a story. A friend of mine once wanted very much to meet a certain German rabbi who was well known as a scholar and tzaddik, and also an expert in secular wisdom. When he came to visit him, he noticed a strange thing: when a priest passed by carrying idolatrous images, the rabbi lifted up his children so that they could get a better look. This is the opposite of the traditional practice of tzaddikim, that the parents guard and close the eyes of their little children so that they should not see these idols. Since these educated German Jews admire idols, we can apply the Gemora in Megillah 25b, "All mockery is forbidden except for the mockery of idolatry." The words of our Sages are sharp and on the mark!
- 8) Here is a simple reason why the Counsel cannot take any action. A few months ago there was a gathering in Hungary to elect rabbanim and lay leaders, and it is

known that many Shabbos violators voted, as well as many members of Mizrachi, an organization that was already banned by the gedolim, just like the Zionists - it is known that they are united. I know of one of those elected who is a Shabbos violator. That is definitely against the rules of the Orthodox kehillos of Hungary. Now, it is clear that this election was a preparation for the present conference on whether to join the Agudah. People like those elected will certainly want to join the Agudah. Even at this past gathering, many good religious Jews were present and they saw that the leaders had already decided to join Agudah. They wanted to force the good Jews to agree, so they left in protest so that the enactment of our rabbis would not be violated.

I stand guard at my post as always, not to join them at all, not even to touch them, but to keep far from them. It is a great mitzvah to make all efforts, fences within fences, to stay away from them. Perhaps we should found our own organization like the rabbanim of Eretz Yisroel.

Waiting as always for the redemption of Hashem speedily, in the wink of an eye,

Mordechai Leib Winkler  
Madd, Tuesday of Vayetze, 5684 (1923)

#### **Chapter 64: The Official Statement of the Headquarters of Hungary Orthodox Kehillos**

To the rabbis and leaders of the national counsel:

We have heard the sound of confusion in our camp, that many are unclear about the meaning and purpose of the decision reached already regarding joining the Agudas Yisroel organization, during the general conference held on Tuesday of Parshas Toldos of this year (5684/1923). In order that this misunderstanding not become a cause for disputes and fighting among religious Jews, we have decided to publish the following statement, which will be crystal clear and leave no room for doubts.

**The General Counsel of the Religious Jewry of Hungary has decided that no private person, no group, and no kehillah is permitted to join the Agudah organization, or to pay them any membership fees.**

This was our entire purpose in the aforementioned decision of Tuesday of Parshas Toldos. All actions and efforts to raise the pride of the Torah and fear of Heaven in our country, in matters pertaining to the Jewish people anywhere and at any time, to fight against the heretics and irreligious, are supported by us provided that they are undertaken after listening to our opinion and getting our permission. We also take part in this fight and support those mighty men who struggle to uphold the Torah, against the foxes who destroy the vineyards. This statement should put all arguments to rest and there will be peace upon Israel.

All this was written and finalized by the committee of the central counsel on this Tuesday, the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar Rishon, 5684 (1924), in the capital Budapest.

Chaim Elazar Hakohein Hartstein, advisor of the office  
Avraham M. S. Frankel, president of the central counsel

(See Chapter ?? for a later decision (5696/1936) reinforcing the above.)

### **Chapter 65: The Rogatchover Gaon Writes to a Rabbi in Jerusalem Against Agudah**

Dvinsk Purim Katan 5684 (1924)

I received your letter and stood trembling. At this time, I returned from the land of blood. I received a few letters about what happened with the Agudah. The meaning of "agudah" is a braid or a knot or a twist. The implication is that someone glued it or bound it together, but thereby separated them from everything else. The thing that separates them is also counted in the number... Therefore I do not want to join the number for I do not know who made the bundle (agudah) and with what he bundled them. My main concern is that they bundled it with gold strings, and then the lulav would fall apart, and there would be no agudah at all, only a bundle of vegetables, as mentioned in the Yerushalmi.

Yosef Rosen

### **Chapter 67: The Agudas Hakodesh of Jerusalem Protests Against Agudah, and Against Rabbi Y. C. Zonenfeld and the Vaad Haashkenazi For Joining Agudah**

Jerusalem, Thursday of Parshas Eikev, 5683 (1923)

Peace and all good and all blessings of the Torah, may he be blessed from Zion, the rav, the great gaon, tower of strength, who stands in the breach and saves us from sin, to remove from the students of Avraham Avinu those who walk in the wrong path, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita.

We would like to bring to your attention that many years ago, already before the War, we organized ourselves here as the Agudas Hakodesh, at the behest of the many elders, scholars and righteous men, many of whom have already gone on to the next world to arouse mercy, that their merit might protect us, the orphaned generation, orphans of orphans, left like children without a father and like sheep without a shepherd. They who have passed on, as well as we, pray to our Merciful Father that he should bring an end to our troubles, our spiritual trouble, which have increased immeasurably. Also our rabbi the Lev Haivri (Rabbi Akiva Yosef Schlessinger), who encouraged us to found this Agudas Hakodesh, has passed away. We are certain that the word of Hashem will stand forever, that He will fulfill the verse with which Rabbi Schlessinger began his book, that

Hashem will save us with the three hundred men who do not bow to the baalim and silver idols and the like, or prostrate themselves for a silver coin.

But unfortunately, woe to us if we say it and woe to us if we do not say it, the German rabbi has come from Germany bearing the books of Mendelsohn and his disciples, to destroy and uproot, G-d forbid, the spirit of Jewry in the world. He has become very powerful in the Holy City, he has founded schools and many empty people called teachers have come to teach in them. The many excommunications against them by the scholars and tzaddikim - the one by 72 tzaddikim who gathered at the great convention of 5626 (1866) in Miholvitz, as described in Lev Haivri, and those signed by scholars and tzaddikim in Jerusalem – have not helped. For they come from the source of Haman and Amalek, may his name be erased, who recognize their Master and intend to rebel against Him.

And now this was the clever plan of the snake, the Satan: to establish schools under the name "Agudath Israel", and to write propaganda to excite people about them under the cloak of righteousness and holiness, like Esav, who cloaks himself with the tallis of Yaakov Avinu. They say they are following in the old Jewish way. Regarding this Yaakov Avinu said prophetically, "Save me from my brother, from Esav." He is the wicked Esav, but he disguises himself as my brother. In the same way, the army of the king of Arad changed their language to make themselves appear to be Canaanites, so that the Jews would not recognize them as the descendents of Esav (Rashi on Bamidbar 21:1).

The Agudah, through its newspaper "Kol Yisroel," has erected here two golden calves (the schools). The comparison to the golden calves was made by Rabbi Hillel of Kolomaya in his work Maskil El Dal, where he writes that nothing like this was done since the golden calves built by Yeravam ben Nevat. The first golden calf is the schools called "Doresh LeTzion" founded by Rabbi Yitzchok Prag in the year 5626 (1866) through the efforts of Yosef Blumenthal of Paris, where science and gentile languages are taught by wicked teachers, and lehavdil, also the holy Torah, creating a forbidden mixture. And in 5677 (1917) this school came under the auspices of Pekidim Vaamarkalim in Amsterdam, and under the directorship of Dr. M. Auerbach and Yosanan Binyamin Halevi Horowitz (as printed in Luach Eretz Yisroel, 5677), representatives of the general Agudas Hayereim in Frankfurt am Main. They had made additional schools in all the settlements in Eretz Yisroel, known as colonies, in which foreign languages were taught. Because of these schools all the old chadarim were uprooted, unfortunately. Then the school closed down due to lack of funds from Germany, and they made a great noise in the newspaper "Kol Yisroel" until the Pekidim Vaaamarkalim responded to them and they reopened the gates of defilement.

The second golden calf, made by the same people, is the girls schools, in which the teachers themselves are girls from the new generation. Our organization, Agudas Hakodesh, made an open protest against them when they were founded, for they were in violation of the serious prohibition made by all the gedolim of Jerusalem many years ago, not to make vocational schools for girls or boys. But they do not care about this. They sing publicly every day, in violation of the law prohibiting men to hear a woman singing.

They say they are improving Torah observance – woe to those who call darkness light and evil good! We protested against all this, raising our voice like a shofar in the Batei Machseh shul, in the presence of the Rav of the Vaad Haashkenazi and president of Agudath Israel (Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld).

As long as they do not remove these stumbling blocks and golden calves from Jerusalem, the holy city, and from our holy land, our Agudas Hakodesh will have no connection with or recognition of Agudath Israel and their Knessia Gedolah. Therefore we, in the name of all Agudas Hakodesh members, are completely willing to follow your counsel and not join Agudath Israel at all. We will only strengthen our own Agudas Hakodesh whose purpose is holy to Hashem, to make one organization to do the will of our Father in heaven with a complete heart.

Please act according to your wisdom and publicize our protest in the world. The best thing would be to act quickly and convey our protest to the heads of the Knessia who are gathering in Vienna, and especially to gaonim and tzaddikim, such as the rav, gaon and tzaddik author of Chofetz Chaim, and the rav and gaon Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, rav and rosh yeshiva of Slabodka, and the like.

May the Holy One, blessed is He, raise our pride, the pride of His people and His holy city through the raising of the pride of the holy Torah, and may the verse be fulfilled: "And all the pride of the wicked I will cut down, the pride of the tzaddik will be exalted" (Tehillim 75:11). May we merit to live and see the light of the king moshiach, may he be revealed soon in our days. Peace to you and all who accompany you. Bowing in your honor, we have signed for the sake of Hashem, to raise the pride of truth and peace, in the name of the whole Agudas Hakodesh, in the holy mountain, Jerusalem, waiting for your reply.

The gabboim and leaders of Agudas Hakodesh in Eretz Yisroel:

Shlomo son of Rabbi Hillel Wexler, formerly rav of Hirberz.

Shmuel Hillel Shenker, son of Rabbi Avraham of Kovno, formerly rav of Alexot, founder and rosh yeshiva of the Mesivta of Slabodka, and son-in-law of the gaon and tzaddik Moreinu Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, rosh yeshiva of Ohr Chadash in Jerusalem.

## **Chapter 68: Another Letter From the Zealots of Jerusalem**

A Protest by the Religious Jews of Jerusalem  
against those who are misled and mislead others

In the local newspaper of the Agudah "Kol Yisroel" issue 10, Parshas Vayishlach, this 16<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev, there appeared the letter of the main leader of Agudah in Warsaw, Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levine, in which he wrote the following words: "Certainly the Balfour Declaration was a hint from Divine Providence to remember our Holy Land."



**G-d forbid that we, the Jewish people, believers children of believers in Hashem and in the prophets of truth and justice, should call the Balfour Declaration any sort of Divine signal. For we must believe simply in the coming of the true moshiach, and only he will redeem Israel from its exile.** Then the Balfour Declaration will not even be mentioned or remembered by us, G-d forbid.... Regarding those who feel they are being remembered by this declaration, the Rambam wrote, "Anyone who does not believe in him (moshiach) or does not wait for his coming (i.e. he goes after events and calls them redemption or remembrance), not only does he deny the other prophets, but he denies the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu as well etc. (Melachim 11:1). All the more so one who believes in the promise of the nations, calling it a Divine signal. Regarding such people it is written, "'His (David's) enemies I will clothe with shame' (Tehillim 132:18) – this means those who dispute with him. 'And his crown will shine upon him' – on him and upon those who are quiet (i.e. quietly wait for the coming of moshiach and the redemption of Hashem) (Pesikta Rabasi, end of Chapter 34). And so it states, "Israel who trust in the shadow of their Creator are blessed and perfect and they give benefit to the world. But when they turn aside from after their Creator and trust in the laws of the gentiles, they are cursed and bad and give no benefit to the world" (Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer, Chapter 9).

This new ideology that calls the promise of the gentiles a Divine signal is foreign to us. It is this error that caused many Jews to go astray and follow this vanity, this foreign redemption. At the time of the destruction of the Temple, there were also some Jews who put their hopes on the promises of the gentiles. In the end their hopes turned out to be vanity and emptiness. For when our enemies promise, we cannot hope for any justice or good results. See the Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 8:6, which says that to any promise of the gentiles we apply the words, "Their mouths speak vainly and their right hand is the right hand of falsehood" (Tehillim 144:11). And see Bava Basra 91b: "Whoever agrees to them falls into their hands; whoever trusts in them, his becomes theirs." The prophet says regarding the time of the destruction (Eichah 4:17): "Our eyes still longed for the vain help, we waited hopefully for a nation that would not save."

These mistaken people have found support in the Yerushalmi (Maaser Sheni 5:2), which says that the Temple will be rebuilt before the kingdom of the house of David is restored. But see the book Olas Tamid, written by the Munkaczer Rav shlita, which brings many proofs that the Talmud Bavli does not hold that way, and the halacha never follows the Yerushalmi when it goes against the Bavli. He also writes that Rabbi Chaim Nathanson in his work Avodah Tamah disproves their entire theory that the rebuilding of the Temple will occur before the coming of moshiach. The Rambam also writes twice (Melachim 11:1 and 11:4) that the king moshiach will build the Temple. And so the Munkaczer Rav writes in Divrei Torah, Chapter 42: "The Gemora in Shabbos 31a says that a person will be asked on his day of judgment, 'Did you hope for the redemption?' Rashi explains: 'For the words of the prophets.' This means that **we must believe that moshiach will come as is promised in the words of the prophets, that Eliyahu the prophet will come beforehand in a miraculous way to bring the news, not like the false, unclean views of all the Zionist parties, the worst of which are the hypocritical Agudists.** Chazal say (Sotah 22b) that one should be especially cautious of the hypocrites, who makes

themselves appear to be very religious." And regarding the final redemption, we were told explicitly by the great tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Tikunim 69): "Regarding the final redemption of the king moshiach, it is written (Devarim 32:12), 'Hashem alone will give him rest, and there will be no other power with Him.'"

And we, the faithful Jews, believe and must believe that after all the difficulties and great misfortunes that have come upon us, our redemption will be soon. But G-d forbid to make the redemption into a physical, natural process. It will not be by human power, for a human redemption – and certainly the promise of gentile nations - is not called redemption. This is what Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz, of righteous memory, writes in his work *Ahavas Yonasan* on the haftorah for Parshas Vaeschanan (see above, Chapter 3). Our redemption, the building of our holy Temple and the building of our holy land will all happen in a miraculous way. The Munkaczer Rav in *Olas Tamid* (p. 15) finds a hint to this in the words of our prayer, "Lift up a banner to gather our exiles." The word "nes" – banner – can also mean miracle. With signs and wonders, with miracles and amazing acts, with great fear and Divine revelation, G-d will act Himself, in His glory, on behalf of His people, may it be soon.

Rabbi Avraham Azulai, in his work *Chesed L'avraham* (1:17), writes this explicitly: "G-d will judge His house and Israel, according to the covenant of tradition, in order to bring them nearer to the redemption and the good promised to them by the prophets. This good will be immeasurable and unimaginable, such that the redemption from Egypt and its miracles will not even be mentioned anymore, for it will pale in comparison to the future redemption, as it says, 'They will no longer say, "By the life of Hashem Who brought Israel out of Egypt," but "By the life of Hashem, Who brought Israel out of all the lands"' (Yirmiyah 23:7-8). There will be miracles and revelation of the Divine Presence to the Jewish people in a wondrous way, and all will say, this is the day for which we hoped, as it says, 'This is Hashem for Whom we hoped' (Yishaya 25:9). The word 'this' implies that they will be able to point with a finger at the revelation of the Divine Presence. Eliyahu the prophet will appear, and moshiach will be revealed. Moshe Rabbeinu will be revealed to them with the generation of the wilderness; the Divine Presence will be revealed upon them, and the tribes encamped in order will receive their tikun from the Divine Presence. The Temple will descend, already built, and the Jews will come to the rebuilt Jerusalem, the Divine Presence with them as it was when they left Egypt. There will be so many miracles then that the mouth is unable to speak them; the mind is unable to grasp them. They will open up the sources of wisdom, and this will guide them in the redemption."

And now, who can come and take it upon himself to deny offhand (unknowingly or, G-d forbid, intentionally) the words of the living G-d, or to turn them upside down or to reinterpret them in a natural way? And all the more so to exchange them, G-d forbid, for the declaration of a gentile, a declaration which was called by the gedolei yisroel "Tzoras Baal Peor" – the misfortune of Baal Peor, and not without reason. For this declaration has brought very great misfortune upon the Jewish people, and it would have better for us had it not been made. It has darkened the eyes of the Jewish people, and unfortunately led to the most serious sins in the Torah: idolatry, immorality and the shedding of Jewish blood,

may Hashem avenge it. In the introduction to the book Amudei Arazim, p. 4a, the author tells us that the source of this substitute redemption is the work of the Satan, sent by Hashem. The work of the Satan has succeeded, as the Gemora says (Tamid 32a), "The Satan is victorious." Rashi explains that the Satan is victorious and is able to lead people astray. Rabbeinu Gershom says, "**The Satan is victorious, for he leads them astray and gives them a redemption, and in the end he brings them down to Gehinom.**"

Rabbi Levine writes further, "Certainly the building of the city Tel Aviv was also the finger of Providence." The Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita already came out against this statement, and he proclaimed with a strong voice to the rebbes of Poland, see his words. And see also the addenda to the Zohar, v. 1 p. 38 in the Raya Mehemna: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'If Hashem will not build a house, in vain do its builders work on it' (Tehillim 127:1)? This is the Samech Mem and the snake." And we are believers, children of believers, in the words of the tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who says (Zohar v. 1 pp. 111, 134, 183, v. 3 p. 221, and other places) that the building of Zion and Jerusalem will not be done by human effort at all, only the work of the Creator. And so it says in the Pesikta Rabasi, end of Chapter 26, "'Shake the dust off yourself, get up and sit, Jerusalem' (Yishaya 52:2) – humans built you, humans destroyed you; but in the future I will build you, as it says, 'Hashem builds Jerusalem; He gathers in the exiles of Israel' (Tehillim 147:2)." And G-d will shake up this entire land as the Chesed L'avraham says (ibid.), "The Holy One, blessed is He, will shake up Eretz Yisroel as one shakes up a tallis, and He will shake off all the idolworshippers and the idols themselves from Jerusalem, and all the bodies of the unclean who are buried near the holy places, and all the defiled places there." I found that his source is the Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer Chapter 34, and the Zohar v. 3 p. 72, and in the Zaharei Chamah there, and in Yalkut Shimoni on Shmuel, end of 134.

Rabbi Levine continues, "I express this idea constantly, at all times and in all hours." He would have been better off if he had made his living by cleaning sewers instead of making his living from the Agudah, which compels him to lower himself and write such things. We sincerely hope that he will never write or express this again, G-d forbid. The copper snake was made by Moshe Rabbeinu to focus Jewish hearts on Heaven, and he made it at G-d's command, as a reminder of the miracle that occurred. Nevertheless, when Chizkiyahu, king of Yehuda, saw that the Jewish people were straying after it, he ground it up, and the Sages approved of what he did. All the more so that this misfortune [Agudah] should not come into the world again. It has fallen and will not arise again. When we in Jerusalem will hear of its downfall, all the scholars and those who fear Hashem will say, "Blessed is He Who uprooted this idolatry from our holy land." Then this writer (Rabbi Levine) will consider us his friends, for we have enlightened his eyes. If he admits to the truth, it will be to his credit.

And to the leaders of Agudah here, we say: Be very careful from now on and guard the mouth of your newspaper Kol Yisroel (as one of your writers himself advises in issue 57). If you do not guard it and it becomes open to all writers, whoever they may be, whatever they may write, as long as they are members of Agudah – then you must know that your newspaper will fall under the scholars and tzaddikim of the generation who

forbade the reading of the secular newspapers. The same is true of the kashrus notices printed in your newspaper – it must be under the supervision of the beis din, not open to all, supervised only by the editor of the newspaper or the Agudah political leadership. One of the reasons of the rabbis, scholars, and tzaddikim of the generation who forbade joining the Agudah was that there are many aspects of the Agudah that are not considered bad in the context of modernized German Jewry but for us are considered bad. Even if one of them recognizes that his friend is off the path of Torah, they flatter each other, each one saying to the other, "You protect me and I will protect you." They copy each other's words in their newspapers, and between the lines they declare constantly the Baal Peor misfortune. They will eventually unite with the Zionists, as soon as the Zionists settle their disagreements with them.

But we have fulfilled our obligation with this protest, we have saved our own souls; and may He who builds His crown in Heaven, and His group (agudah) He founded on earth, break apart the Agudah of dishonest judgment, and let all Israel become one group (agudah) to do His will with a full heart, and through this may we merit the coming of the true righteous redeemer and the building of the Temple by Hashem, speedily in our days, amein.

The Beis Din of Chareidim in the Holy City

### **Chapter 69: The Lubavitcher Rebbe Writes to the Rogatchover Gaon**

Sunday 21 Shvat 5684 (1924) Rostovdon

To the master of Torah and fear of G-d, prince of the people of the G-d of Avraham, Rabbi Yosef shlita,

Recently I obtained some published matter explaining the goals and accomplishments of the leaders of Agudath Israel. A copy is attached. It contains many matters, most of them concerning the building of Eretz Yisroel: to unite the people of Israel with the Land of Israel. 1) To found special centers for matters relating to Eretz Yisroel. 2) Agudah founded the organization Neveh Yisroel, a business center in Jaffa. 3) To work for the building of the land in a broader way, through the organization Bayis Venachalah for the purchase of land. 4) To provide training in farming techniques to those planning to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel. 5) To make it possible for pioneers to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel. 6) To assist them in getting settled in Eretz Yisroel, and to unite all spiritual projects, vocational training, Torah education, and charity organizations.

These are all the goals of the leaders of Agudah revealed to us in print, impossible to deny. Besides that we have their thoughts and plans, which they are wisely concealing from us until the opportune time.

But these Agudah leaders, German politicians, in order to actualize their plans, have acted more cleverly than their [secretly acknowledged] allies, the Mizrachists and the Zionists (for the three organizations are connected - Agudah to Mizrachi, and Mizrachi to

the Zionists). They have dug a tunnel under the chairs of the rabbis, attracting to their organization the gedolei Torah (for falsehood – politics - desired the crown of truth – the power of Torah), in order to use their scepter, and they have cast their net: the Knessia last Elul.

The Knessia itself was arranged with political cunning to turn aside the hearts of the gedolei Torah - whoever read the invitation would think that it was a small group of pure-hearted individuals who desired only the elevation of Torah. Unbelievably, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tammuz they printed in "Hakol" a Zionist declaration (see attached copy), and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> they wrote the letter of invitation without mentioning a word about the declaration of the previous day, but on the contrary, encouraging and asking everyone to come to the great conference that will be attended by the choicest of the Am Yisroel, to lift up the pride of Torah and religion etc. etc. **How despicable and audacious is this style! To tell such flat and astounding lies! How much flattery etc. etc. is in this letter! What terrible hypocrisy and swindling!** Their whole purpose is just to get the gedolei hador to come, thereby capturing the hearts of all their admirers, and bringing a storm into the camp of Israel. I do not know if the same letter I received was sent to all rabbis, or only to me, but in any case, after reading such a letter, who would not run to this important conference, to which gedolei yisroel are coming to make plans for the elevation of the pride of Torah. In this manner they have captured the gedolei yisroel in their net. Is there any greater crime than this?

Besides this, the leaders of the Agudah have stolen the mantle of Israel, and with their power – the power of Torah – they want to force the entire Jewish people to enter the Agudah, as the Gerrer Rebbe said in his speech in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah. By the power of the Knessia, they are able to speak in the name of the Hebrew people (so they think, and that is why they called the Knessia), as Mr. Kirschenbaum said in his speech.

These are their goals. And the extent to which they are not interested in taking the opinions of the rabbis into account is clear from the speech of Mr. Yitzchok Breuer, who said that everything is prearranged and organized, there are committees on every matter relating to the Jewish people, and so the Knessia is not involved with drawing up the by-laws of the Agudah, since all that was already done by the Executive Committee. And when Levine (the Gerrer Rebbe's brother-in-law) requested certain changes in the Agudah, they replied that all that was the business of the committee. **This all shows how much they do not take into account and do not wish to take into account the opinion of the rabbis. They want the rabbis only to be their weapon, to stamp a hechsher on every wicked idea that occurs to their minds.**

It is true that in every generation they (the wicked Jews) arise against us to destroy us, but not in such a terrible way as this. In the past we have always known who our friends are and who our enemies are. But these enemies have disguised themselves with borrowed garments and put on innocent faces, so that we cannot see who they are, friends or enemies. All of them together are taking by storm the world and the Jewish camp, in the name of Torah. The speaker Yitzchok Breuer delivers a "parliamentary declaration with the power of the Torah," Rosenheim speaks with the power of Torah. But I do not know

from where all these took their power. With this weapon they are making a storm in the Jewish camp, and there is nothing to stop them.

The people of the G-d of Avraham, clinging truthfully to the Torah, knows well that the last word in all Jewish matters belongs only to the gedolim of Torah and fear of G-d, and we are not able or willing to accept the yoke of the politicians, who are liars, who have plundered the mantle of Israel and want to smash the Jewish skull, may Hashem protect us.

And so, in the name of thousands of Jews with pure hearts and straight minds, I turn to his honor, the master of Torah and fear of G-d, asking him to express his opinion, the daas Torah on the matter of the goals of the Agudath Israel leaders in general, and on the matters relating to Eretz Yisroel specifically. **Is it possible according to Torah that Jewish matters relating to Torah should be decided by the majority vote of a group of people that includes many who are not bnei Torah, and take the fear of Heaven lightly?** Their wisdom in politics is greater than their fear of Hashem. **Please save the Jewish people while it yet lives!** Express a clear daas Torah. And let not the sinners afflict us anymore, and may Hashem have mercy and take away from us those who try to help us against our will, and those who wish to rule over us through the power of politics and to make us violate the Torah against our will.

May you receive live, peace and blessing from the Master of peace. With feeling of boundless respect,

Yosef Yitzchok Scheersohn

### **Chapter 70: Rabbi Yonasan Steiff Speaks Out Against an Agudah Group Founded in Budapest**

Warning!

Let us be strong for our people!

I have heard that some of the members of our kehillah are founding in our city a group called "Agudah". As is well known, many great rabbis and tzaddikim of our country see in this idea a terrible danger to the Torah in general, and especially to the youth.

Therefore I am warning those who fear G-d among our kehillah **not to join this group at all.**

Already several years ago (Kislev 5684 (1923)), the question of joining the Agudah was considered by the Landsounsel. At that time the great gaon the rav of Veitzen, author of Maasei Lamelech, was present, as well as the Madder Rav, author of Levushei Mordechai, and the Semihalier Rav, author of the Responsa of Maharshag. They all cried out against the Agudah, and the agreement was that "only for the physical needs of the Jewish people and for the outside world – to speak in high places in the name of all religious Jewry for the good of the public – for these purposes we make peace with the

Agudah, but as far as internal matters, specific religious questions, and especially the founding of local branches, we are not permitted to do this in our country." The entire commission of 100 people – 40 rabbis and 60 laymen – signed on this.

And I have already expressed my opinion many times: that I do not approve at all of founding here an "Agudah", and I see this as bringing in destruction and not strengthening of Torah. And despite this, several people arose to found this group against my will. The Agudah itself has a law that in any place and any city, before founding a branch, they must obtain permission from the rabbis and dayanim of the city, who stand guard over it. Since I do not agree to found an "Agudah" here, whatever they have done is null and void.

I hereby ask all who listen to me not to assist this group at all. We already have in our country the organization of Orthodox kehillos – the "Landscounsel" – to which we may not add or subtract.

May whoever listens to me dwell safely, seeing children and grandchildren who study Torah and do mitzvos based on the traditions passed down to us from our rabbis, until a kohein arises who wears the Urim Vetumim, may it be soon.

On this I have signed, here in the Khal Yereim in Pest, Kislev 5696 (1935)

Yonasan Steiff

### **Chapter 71: The Office of Hungarian Orthodox Kehillos Denies Involvement in the Budapest Agudah Branch**

Friday, 24 Kislev 5696 (1935)

Peace and blessing and all good to our honored friend, the rabbi, the great scholar, tzaddik, foundation of the world, pious man, beauty of the country, of noble ancestry, who stands up in the breach, Rabbi Naftali Teitelbaum shlita, rav of Nirbator.

We were honored by your two letters and their attached papers. Before we continue, please accept our warm thanks for your words from the heart, written for the benefit of our office. We appreciate the fact that you are standing ready at all times to defend the honor of our office so that we might be able to act for the strengthening of Torah and emunah for the benefit of Hungarian Jews.

We are happy that your views on the question of the Agudah matches our opinion in all details. It is self-understood that our office stands from afar in all ways from what is being done in this area by certain laymen in the capital whose think it important to found a branch of Agudah which is strongly opposed to the Mizrachists, who have increased recently, to the sorrow of all religious Jews here.

We want to stress that the respectable men who are heading this Budapest branch of Agudah did not want to ask us, but took action without our knowledge, both in the founding of the branch and in the notice they placed in the newspapers of all that took place at their conference. This is because they know already that our office stands on the foundation of the decision to oppose founding such an Agudah branch. In order that no one in the rest of the country think that this was done with our approval, and lest this step cause the Agudah to be considered in other parts of the country, we decided to publicize our opinion and clarify our opposition in the newspapers. You will certainly see the necessity of this, so that certain groups should not have an opportunity to drive a wedge between us by claiming that our office approved of what was done.

Seeking your peace with all signs of love, honor and respect, in the name of the Central Office, your friend, wishing you a good Shabbos,

Shmuel Zanvil Cahana Frankel

**Chapter 72: Rabbi Naftali Teitelbaum of Nirbator Praises the Munkaczer Rav for Keeping Agudah Out of Hungary**

Friday, 14 Kislev 5696 (1935)

Peace to the honored rav, great scholar, famous tzaddik, crown and beauty of Israel, right-hand pillar, who mends fences and stands in breaches, of noble ancestry, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz.

I received your letter and had great pleasure from your sweet and pure words emanating from a pure heart, to strengthen me in this highly important matter. I am very happy to be able to announce that at the conference I encountered no great opposition, and had no heavy battle to wage, for the rabbis of Debrecin and Marob were in agreement with us, and even the Tcharner Rav adopted the policy of silence. It was only a few laymen from Pest who persisted in their mistaken opinion, and the president opposed them strongly. Thank G-d, we succeeded in preventing their plans from coming to fruition, at least for now. May Hashem Yisborach help us that the staff of wickedness not rest on the lot of the righteous, and may we see the fulfillment of the verse, "Every tongue that arises to debate with you you shall defeat" (Yishaya 54:17). And may the name of Heaven be sanctified through us as we hope, to see the elevation of the pride of Torah and the pride of Israel soon in our days, amein.

Seeking your peace and bowing from afar,

Naftali Teitelbaum

**Chapter 73: The Shaproner Rav Defends Hungarian Jewry from the Agudah's Onslaughts**



After the decision of the Hungarian rabbis to stay far away from the Agudah, the Agudists were very upset, and certain Agudists wrote in protest against the gedolei yisroel. Then Rabbi Shimon Yisroel Posen, the rav of Shapron (Edinburg), wrote an open letter in the Orthodox newspaper "Yiddishe Tzeitung", Parshas Beshalach 5696 (1936):

Shimon Yisroel Posen  
Rav of Shapron

I know my own low value, but our Sages say, "Wherever there is a desecration of Hashem's name, we do not defer to the honor of a greater person" (Berachos 19b). I chanced upon a page of the newspaper "Israelite" (from Jan. 23, 936) and I saw what they wrote there about the scholarly rabbis of the Central Office of Hungarian Orthodox kehillos in Pest, and their decision against the Agudah. And I wondered: how can we be silent in the face of such incitement to sin? I have not come to take up the honor of the scholarly rabbis, for this fly's breath will not harm them. Nor have I come to deal with what he writes against our great gaon the Munkaczer Rebbe shlita, although it is fitting to mourn on the concealment of the Divine Presence when we see these heretics speaking against the tzaddik of the generation and thinking that they are doing no wrong. A few weeks ago we saw similarly shocking words in the newspaper "Jidui Oishag" (Dec. 23, 935), where one person wrote that he was afraid people would suspect him of going to greet the Munkaczer Rebbe on his recent visit to Pest. Yes, we must mourn, but I say to myself as the Gemora says (Bava Kama 59b), "Are you great enough to mourn for Jerusalem?"

However, regarding what he writes about the religious situation in our country, I will cry out with a loud voice: Wake up, sleepers, to battle against this inciter! In his anger he reveals his ignorance. He writes, "Ever since the Hungarian Orthodox kehillos were founded, there is no spiritual life in our streets, because no Agudah branches have yet been founded." See what he is exchanging for what! Anyone who knows what is going on in our country knows that, thank G-d, in the recent years, yeshivos have increased in various places, raising up students who fear G-d and understand His word, the halacha. They bring estranged Jews under the wings of the Divine Presence. These yeshivos take in the children of poor families, who suffer from the mockery of their own family because of their great determination to learn Torah.

By contrast, let us see the great bountiful blessing brought by this writer's Agudah upon the land, Germany, where it was founded. I saw German Jewry myself, for I am a child of Germany. There are Agudah branches in every corner, and they have newspapers with which they encourage learning. And how much did it help them? The Torah in their land is placed in a corner. They are proficient only in the wisdom of the gentiles. And even now that the enemy (Hitler) has given them a slap with his ruler and many of them have gone off to the Holy Land, there too they teach the vanities of the nations in the schools they have founded. Although they claim they have improved in that their children "also" spend a few hours on religious studies, everything is mixed: light and darkness coexisting on the holy soil and in the midst of Jerusalem! How then did this writer have the audacity to praise the dead more than the alive?

We know that in our country as well, many of the youth are caught in the nets of the inciters on all sides. Who in this final generation can boast that he has found a cure for this plague, and laugh in the face of the Satan? But from looking at the world around us we have learned that there is no cure other than the medicine of life, the holy Torah, learned in the traditional way passed down by our holy ancestors; combined with faith in the sages and tzaddikim, followers of the disciples of the holy and awesome Baal Shem Tov, may his merit protect us.

In fact, I have checked into the motives of this writer, and I see that none of these facts will pacify him. On the contrary, he is bitter over our refusal to adopt this way of combining the unclean and the clean, the middle school with the yeshiva. He is challenging the Torah of Moshe, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, who said, "The new is forbidden by the Torah." His great zeal in fighting the schools is well known. Of course we accept the law of the government in whose shadow we live, requiring secular education. But we know that this is among the multitude of tests that Hashem sends us in this bitter exile. The rule in this matter is that when we do some secular study out of necessity, because of the law, Hashem will certainly help us and we will remain unaffected by it. But when we do more than is required, we enter the domain of uncleanness, may Hashem spare us. For this previous generations were willing to give their lives. There was already once such a sinful proposal, more than sixty years ago, when Hildesheimer wished to turn the people away from the traditional path and the rabbis of the time rebuked him, especially the famous tzaddik Rabbi Hillel Lipshitz, until he backed down. Our children's growth is only in the chadarim and yeshivos, where they are nourished on simple faith without any crookness, to believe that every letter of the holy Torah is build on endless foundations. This faith cannot be brought to us by those who grew up on the knees of gentiles. We have witnessed even the religious among them mocking the words of Chazal and holy books, which their small minds could not fathom.

Therefore, arise, sleepers of our country, and see what this westerly wind is bringing to our borders. Stand guard! We salute those rabbis, chassidim and righteous men who have stood in this breach. The inciter now wants to turn away the hearts of the people by pouring ridicule upon the central offices of the Orthodox kehillos of our country, for their opposition to "yishuv Eretz Yisroel". Who am I to speak about this subject? But it is Torah and I must learn. Surely even those opposed to our great rabbi [of Munkacz], if they learn Torah, are aware of the words of the Tur, Orach Chaim 208, in the name of the Sefer Hamitzvos, that one should not say the words, "and we will eat its fruit and be sated from its good," for **we must not desire the land for its fruit**. And the Bach defends our text on the grounds that it refers to the return of the Divine Presence, **for now without the Presence there is only bad there, and defilement resides there**. All the more so if the wicked live in the holy land. The Bach says that **even one who truly wishes to keep the word of Hashem in the Holy Land will be unable to, for the wicked have made the land unclean together with all that grows from it**.<sup>7</sup> If so, who would have the nerve

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<sup>7</sup> It would be in order here to quote the entire text of the Bach: "The Tur writes further that some say, 'and we will eat from its fruit and be sated from its good,' but one should not say it because we must not desire the land for its fruit. This argument is astounding to me, for the holiness of the land is a product of the

to trouble the Creator, so to speak, to create such fruits on His holy land, against His will? Only through the Creator, Who will purify His land when His presence returns to Zion, will we go there, with the coming of moshiach, soon in our days, amein.

Shimon Yisroel Posen

### **Chapter 74: An Agudah Branch is Founded in Munkacz**

In every place, it is only a few youths who found the local Agudath Yisroel branch, a few here and a few there. In every city and every country the youths jump to the fore. This is the opposite of the way of the holy Torah, to look to the elders for opinion and to the aged for wisdom. "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you." And so it is in our city, Munkacz. It is a city full of sages and scholar, older talmidei chachomim, expert dayanim, famous gedolei yisroel, under the leadership of the Rebbe shlita, who fight against all sins, and against the constantly changing plans of people from all the different groups of our time, including the Agudah. Yet a group of eleven youths gathered (give or take one or two) to found an Agudah branch. The building of youth is destruction (Megillah 31b). One or two older laymen joined them, but they were only following the initiative of the youths. Just as one coin in a box makes a lot of noise, they made a great noise together with Agudath Israel youths from other places, saying, "Let us gather and found an Agudah, let us deal wisely with the Zionists and Mizrachists lest they grow..." They pour sulfur on the fire, and then "...they also join our enemies," bringing us into a two-front war. They cast their net and called a conference of mostly young people in Chopp, the place where the ban on the Agudah was signed 14 years ago (see above, Chapters 25-33). There they decided to found Zeirei Agudath Israel in this small but high-quality country (Carpathian Ruthenia), in which a handful of G-d-fearing Chassidic Jews made their home, most of them simple believers as in days of old. They did this despite the fact that most of the local rabbanim, leaders, judges, scholars and tzaddikim were against the Agudah.

They added insult to injury by declaring that the headquarters of Carpathian Ruthenian Agudah would be in Munkacz, of all places, the home of the gadol hador, the Rav shlita, the most zealous fighter against Agudah and Zionism under any name! Although they are

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influence of the heavenly land, and it extends into its fruit, which are nourished from the holiness of the Divine Presence which dwells in the midst of the land. This is why the Torah warns at the end of Parshas Masei (Bamidbar 35:34), 'Do not defile the land in which you live, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem, who dwells in the midst of the children of Israel.' The Torah is saying that if we defile the land, the defilement will extend into fruit that grows from it, and the Divine Presence will leave the land, as it says, 'In which I dwell,' that Hashem dwells directly in the land itself. It will depart because of the defilement. The next step is that Hashem will take his Presence out from the midst of the children of Israel. For until that time, the children of Israel were the sanctuary of Hashem, for the Divine Presence actually dwelt in their midst. **But now when they eat the fruit that is nourished from the defilement of the land, the Divine Presence leaves them.** For when the defilement enters into the midst of the children of Israel together with the eating of fruit, the Divine Presence correspondingly leaves Israel. Therefore, there is good reason to insert into this blessing, 'We will eat from its fruit and be sated from its good,' for when we eat from its fruit we are being nourished from the holiness of the Divine Presence and its purity, and we are sated from its goodness."

an insignificant number of people, yet they founded this branch as planned, and no faraway observer can tell that this was the work of a mere handful of people.

They printed in the newspaper a brazen lie, that their conference in Chopp was held with the permission and approval of the rav of Chopp, Rabbi Yitzchok Tzvi Lebovitch, author of Shulchan Hoezer. Now let us print his denial and rebuke to them, which he published at the time in an open notice:

Tuesday of Parshas Ki Seitzei, 5695 (1935)

### Open Letter

A false rumor reached my ears: that the gathering of the Zeirei Agudath Israel, which the Munkacz Agudah branch called in Chopp, took place with my approval, in accordance with the Agudah by-laws. Therefore I have come to publicize the truth: **that this is a lie! They never consulted me about any part of this matter.** They have truly violated the by-laws of their Agudah, which prohibit any Agudah activity without the permission of the local rav.

On this I have signed, Yitzchok Tzvi Lebovitch<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This letter was published in the Orthodox newspaper "Yiddishe Tzeitung". Besides this, we print here a letter written by the rav of Chopp to someone who asked him about the subject:

"All the claims about me made by these men of falsehood are false; everything is fabricated. The entire founding of the Agudah here was done against my will and without my knowledge. A few weeks before the conference, the son of the Nitra Rav of blessed memory, who is an Agudah leader, came to my house together with another man. He told me that he was coming here to build support for the Agudah, saying, 'Although I know that you are against it, since I recognize the importance of it and you do not, I feel compelled to do what is required of me for the good of the Jewish people, to strengthen Torah.' I told him that the Agudah's own by-laws prohibit him from founding an Agudah branch here without my approval. Therefore, I said, I am protesting, and I will take all action to make sure that no one attends your speeches. When he heard this, he left town without carrying on any speeches or activities. The Agudah leadership also sent me a long letter, to which I did not respond.

"Later I heard that the Agudah leadership in Nitra had given up on doing anything here, since it was impossible to get my permission.

"A few days before the conference, I heard that the Munkacz branch of Agudah had called a gathering here, saying that no permission from the local rav was necessary. I did not rest and had no peace as I researched the matter and sought ways to stop the conference from taking place. But to my disappointment, I received no answers from either side. I had worked in vain. Still I raised my voice and protested that this conference was taking place against the will of the local rav. On the day of the conference, I did not see any of their people, and none of them came to me. But that night as I was attending a wedding, the son of Reb Leib of Kvd. who now resides in Helmetz, with his friend Hochheizer from Kashau, came to me. They said they had come to honor me with a visit as befits the rav of a town. I said to them, 'Now you come, and not before the conference?' They replied that they were not leaders in the Agudah and they know nothing about the decisions made by it. They had only come in response to a call in Munkacz to come to this gathering. They had assumed that the conference would be nothing wrong, only a forum to suggest new ideas that would be acceptable to all. I replied that surely this was done against the will of the Munkaczer Rav, and he would certainly be very angry at them for attending. As far as the central concept of Agudah, I told them that in my opinion there would be no benefit in it until all the gedolei hador and tzaddikim gathered to

## Chapter 75: The Agudists Falsely Use the Vizhnitzer Rebbe's Name

After the decision to found the Agudah of Carpathian Ruthenia with its headquarters in Munkacz, the young founders of the Munkacz Agudah also spread rumors and printed in their newspapers "Dos Yiddishe Volksblatt"<sup>9</sup> a letter from the Vizhnitzer Rebbe shlita, saying that it is a mitzvah to found an Agudah. They wanted to make it appear as though this tzaddik was mixing into Munkacz's affairs and calling for the founding of this Agudah in Munkacz.

In order that these liars not succeed in convincing anyone, we print here the Vizhnitzer Rebbe's letter of denial:

Yisroel, son of the Tzaddik of  
**Vizhnitz**  
Moreinu Harav Boruch of righteous memory

Thursday of Parshas Tzav, 5695 (1935), Grosswardein

Life and peace and all good to my friend, the scholarly rav, well known pious man, fear of Hashem is his storehouse, Rabbi Yitzchok Tzvi shlita, rav of Chopp.

I received your letter, and here is my reply. You must know that I did not know or hear anything about this until I received your letter. Until then I did not hear whether they called a conference in your town, or anything about the founding of an Agudah branch in Munkacz. Obviously, then, I do not know what decision they reached at the conference. And in truth, **it is hard for me to believe that one of my followers would make false statements about me.** Surely there is some mistake here. This is what I thought proper to reply out of respect for you.

Your friend who seeks your peace, waiting for the redemption of Hashem soon,

Yisroel, son of the Tzaddik Moreinu Harav Boruch, of righteous memory

## Chapter 76: Rabbi Elazar Shapiro of Lancut, Rabbi Mordechai Zev Halberstam of Gribov, and Rabbi Yaakov of Korima Deny Supporting the Agudah

While we are discussing denials, let us publicize the letters of some other great rabbis whose signatures were printed as supporters of the Agudah organization, and who wrote

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discuss the matter, and similar things. In the end they agreed with my points, and they left me in peace. The following day I heard that some of the religious members of our community had attended the conference, and I rebuked them for it. Besides all this, I know nothing about the subject."

<sup>9</sup> A newspaper that was banned by the batei dinim of Ungvar and Munkacz, as well as the beis din of Jerusalem under the leadership of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, because it had printed words of mockery of the Torah and mitzvos; now they have already stopped printing it.

signed letters stating that they had never signed or given their approval to the Agudah at all:

Regarding what you wrote that they printed my signature in the newspaper 'Haderech,' **I never signed, nor did I give anyone permission to sign my name**, not the Agudists, not the Zionists and not the Mizrachists and the like. You can publicize this in my name.

Elazar Shapiro, rav of Lancut

Regarding my signature on the Kol Korei of the Agudas Shlumei Emunei Yisroel, I never signed that Kol Korei, and I am still opposed as always.

Mordechai Zev Halberstam, rav of Gribov

I admit to having signed my name, but it never occurred to me that my signature on the Kol Korei for the Knessia in Vienna would be considered as if I had joined the Agudah. Had I known that my signature would be used this way, I would certainly never have signed my name. Now I nullify my signature; let it be as though I had never signed.

Signed here in Korima, Yaakov son of Rabbi Moshe

I also hereby nullify my previous signature. Yaakov Meir, son of Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel Hakohein, rav of Kapash.

### **Chapter 77: Rabbi Hillel Weinberger of Serdaheli Denies Support**

Sunday of Parshas Ki Sisa, 5695 (1935)

Great peace from on high to the holy rebbe, gaon and well-known tzaddik, leader of the exiles, strongest of shepherds, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro shlita, rav of Munkacz.

After bowing and prostrating before the Rebbe shlita, I bring good news about the wedding...

Recently I heard something that made me very angry. Certain writers spread a false rumor about me, that I, G-d forbid, called for the founding of a Zeirei Agudath Israel branch here. As soon as I heard about these lies, I felt compelled to let the Rebbe know that on the contrary, I rejected this idea with all sorts of excuses. I have already made known on many occasions that I am opposed to the Agudah organization. Let it be known that almost all of the youth in the Agudah here are well-known as brazen characters who do not listen to me.

Ending with all kinds of blessings and with bowing and prostration, a servant to the servants of Hashem,

Hillel ben Hadassah

## **Chapter 78: Rabbi Yosef Kahana of Ungvar Against Agudah**

The Executive Office of the Kollel  
"Shomrei Hachomos"  
In the Holy City of Jerusalem

Ungvar, Sunday of Parshas Devarim 5693 (1933)

Life and peace and all good to the leaders of Agudath Israel.

I received your letter. I cannot agree to the founding here of a branch of Agudath Israel. It was founded by a few boys, perhaps ten or twelve in number. We have heard here the speeches given in Svalova and Kashau by the rav of Satmar against Agudah. Also, the chassidim who spent Shavuot in Belz came back with fiery zeal against the Agudah. Our disposition against the Agudah is especially strengthened after we saw in the newspaper "Beferies", June 6 of this year, an article from Jerusalem stating that in a short time the Agudists and the Zionists will unite. It would be impossible to [join the Agudah and] quiet down this storm. May Hashem give us the privilege of going quickly to greet the righteous redeemer, amen selah.

Peace from your friend,

Yosef Elimelech Kahana

## **Chapter 79: Rabbi Shalom Eliezer Halberstam of Rotzperta Against Agudah**

Thursday of Parshas Terumah 5696 (1936)

Life and peace to the holy rav and gaon, well-known tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Elazar shlita, rav of Munkacz.

I received the letter and the booklets sent to me by the publisher at your request. I hasten to reply out of respect for you that I am a friend to all who fear Hashem, and I join the great and righteous rabbanim with their fiery letters in saying that it is forbidden to join the Agudah. Why should I write at length about this subject, which is so well-treated in the booklets? They have left almost no room to add.

May Hashem Yisborach send His help in these days of miracles, and may we merit the blotting out of Amalek soon in our days, for great have been my sorrows and the outcry of the children of Israel in all their dwelling places.

Your friend who seeks your peace, awaiting the redemption soon with the coming of the righteous redeemer,

Shalom Eliezer Halberstam

Son of the Tzanzer Rav

### **Chapter 80: Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichthal Speaks Against the Defilement of the Land and the Failure of Agudah**

Sunday of Parshas Yisro, 5696 (1936), Pishtian

To the editor of Yiddishe Tzeitung, Munkacz.

Please allow room for my reasoned words in your newspaper. They are meant to complete the picture described by the rav of Edinburg shlita (see above, Chapter 73). Although I never got involved in politics - blessed is Hashem Who saved me from this - I cannot hold myself back from expressing how impressed I was by the words of that tzaddik. Especially the words of the Bach that the rav brought in his letter penetrate to the innermost part of the Jew and cut his heart. Therefore I come to lend my support to his words, although he does not need my approval.

The rabbi writing in your newspaper in the previous issue quoted the holy words of the Bach in Orach Chaim 208, who says that the holiness of the lower Eretz Yisroel is influenced by the holiness of the upper Eretz Yisroel. This holiness enters its fruit, and by eating its fruit we are nourished from the holiness of the Divine Presence and its purity. On the other hand, if, G-d forbid, the land becomes defiled, the defilement spreads to its fruits as well, and when we eat fruit that is nourished from the defilement of the land, that defilement enters the children of Israel, G-d spare us. The holiness then leaves them and the Divine Presence departs from the midst of the Israel. These are his words.

Our teacher the Shlah writes a similar thing in Parshas Lech Lecha. He writes at length there about the holiness of Eretz Yisroel, and then says: "The land below is directly opposite the Eretz Yisroel above. We cannot merit Eretz Yisroel except by removing the covering, the klipah. And if not, G-d forbid, then it is the nakedness of the land, for it is known that the Eretz Yisroel above is the sod of Zion, and Jerusalem is surrounded by the klipos, and they are called coverings. For around Mount Zion is Esav and Amalek."

Now that the building of Eretz Yisroel has become an issue, it would befit every Jew to learn these texts, in order to get some concept of what the true Eretz Yisroel is. The Shlah continues there: "You can remember this by using the verse, 'It is a land that devours its inhabitants.' It devours those who wish to live in it peacefully and with strength, only to eat its fruit." We see that, like the Bach, he writes that the holiness of the lower Eretz Yisroel is dependent on the holiness of the upper Eretz Yisroel, and that is why it is necessary to first remove the covering and the klipah. And if not, it is the nakedness of the land, G-d spare us, for Amalek dwells around it. **This is all the work of Amalek, to defile the land and to remove the holiness in order to prevent the redemption.** This is explained at length in the introduction to the book Eshkol Hakofer on the Megillah, written by the Beis Yosef's wife's grandfather.



And it seems to me that this is hinted in the Zohar at the end of Parshas Beshalach, on the verse, "Hashem is at war with Amalek from generation to generation." The Zohar says, "The words 'midor dor' are written without the letter vav, meaning from those who live above and those who live below." The meaning is that Amalek's goal is to stop Israel from dwelling in the Eretz Yisroel above, and consequently they do not dwell below. Rather he dwells there together with his group. We can also explain the verse "midor dor" according to the Bach, who says that the defilement enters the fruits and those who eat them, expelling the holiness from their bodies. Thus the fruit becomes like thorns in the Jews' bodies. Therefore it says "midor dor" written as if it were pronounced "dardar" meaning thorns. For this is the goal of Amalek: to defile the land so that its fruit becomes like thorns to Israel, may G-d spare us.

Now a new movement has sprung up, calling Eretz Yisroel "Palestine", not as our fathers and teachers always called it. This shows that the movement is not from the Side of Holiness. See the Zohar on Parshas Noach, page 73: "When Israel was worthy, the land was called by its name: Eretz Yisroel. When they were unworthy, the land was called a different name."

Now I would like to take this opportunity to copy here what my young but scholarly son, Shalom, wrote to me last summer when he was in Warsaw with the great gaon and master of Torah Rabbi Menachem Ziemba shlita. He spoke words of Torah with him for a few hours, and at one point the conversation turned to the Agudah movement. Rabbi Ziemba said, "**Even in Poland the Agudah did not improve anything.** At the beginning they erred in thinking that it would help." My son said he was shocked that Rabbi Ziemba, one of the main leaders of Agudah, could say such a thing. Rabbi Ziemba replied, "What can I do? That is how it is. We have only one thing, the holy Torah. But the young generation is all running into the hachsharah (farming training in preparation for emigration to Eretz Yisroel). **It makes no difference if they are Zionists or Agudists. By doing this they are leaving the Torah behind.** Only the newspapers make it look better than it really is." My son is the trustworthy witness to this statement.

In truth, **no human efforts will accomplish anything towards lifting up the pride of Zion and Jerusalem**, until Hashem looks down from heaven and pours upon us a spirit of purity, lighting us up with a new light upon Zion, hidden since the six days of creation. This is what the Rosh says in his responsa, section 4, siman 20, quoted by the Tur Orach Chaim, siman 59: that this is what we are requesting every day in our prayers when we say the words, "Shine a new light upon Zion" – that Hashem bring back the hidden light that shone during the six days of creation. This "shining of the hidden light" is a general concept including all miracles and salvation. It was for this that King David prayed when he said (Tehillim 80:20), "Let Your face shine, and we will be saved." We continue in our prayers, "And may we all merit its light speedily." **But until that time, when Hashem brings back the hidden light, we have no other job than to occupy ourselves with Torah**, teaching many students in the chadarim and the yeshivos according to the traditional ways of our fathers, in the normal way and not as a political movement or a party.

One great rav from Poland, one of the elder gedolei hador, came to visit me and expressed great sorrow over the various political movements of our time. He said, "The simple Jew has stopped existing in our time. I mean, a Jew who knows he is a Jew, he must learn and daven because Avraham Avinu was also a Jew and he learned and davened before the Creator. This has completely ended in our time, in the young generation. Instead, one learns daf yomi because it's a party thing – the party tells you to do it. All that one does, even for Yiddishkeit, has only the character of the party. The party requires it. We must, of course, know and understand the party through and through, and so we must read all the newspapers of the party. And with this we waste most of the time that could have been used for Torah study. All the youths carry around in their handbags many newspapers, different kinds, and they wile away the precious time into vanity and emptiness. The main thing is that everything is done for one goal: to build the party, not to put effort into raising the flag of plain Torah.<sup>10</sup> The plain Jew has ceased to exist among us. And if we say to them, 'What will be with the young generation?' They laugh at us. These are the result of the Agudah's efforts in our country."

Anyone in whom the spark of truth is not completely extinguished will have to admit to the truth of that old sage's words. May Hashem Yisborach plant in us love for His holy Torah, and open the eyes of all Israel so that they might recognize and know that only through learning the holy Torah in the old, simple way will we merit the redemption, soon in our days. The Zohar Chadash says that the final redemption will take place in the merit of Torah. And may we merit that a new light shine upon Zion, and may we all merit its light speedily, amein.

Yissachar Shlomo Teichthal

(rav of Fishtian, rosh yeshiva of Moriah Shem, author of Responsa Mishnas Sachir)

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<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Simcha Frankel Teumim writes in a letter dated Thursday of Parshas Ki Savo, 5689 (1929): "My son-in-law was in Vienna last Thursday at the Knessia, and he spoke out publicly against the Agudah leaders who send their sons and daughters to secular schools, all for the sake of increasing their honorable appearance. He spoke on this for a long time, until they tried to cut short his speech, and he paid no attention to them.

Rabbi Asher Lemel Spitzer, rav of Kirchdorf, wrote in a letter dated Friday of Parshas Ki Seitzei, 5695: "It is know that for many years I have been among those who left the Agudah. Still, just after last Succos I was at the Agudah conference in Pressburg on the advice of Rabbi Dovid Schreiber. We had been together in Carlsbad, and I had told him my reasons for leaving the Agudah. He also told me his reasons for leaving. I told him that I had received an invitation to come to a conference of Agudah delegates in Pressburg, but I was not planning to go. He said, 'No, on the contrary, you should go and tell them the problems you found, and perhaps they will be willing to fix them. And even if not, it will at least become publicized that religious Jews should not be in the Agudah.' So I took his advice and went, and I enumerated to them all the faults of the Agudah I knew. I told them that because of these reasons I had kept away from it, although the Agudah was at first so beloved to me that I made efforts to spread it to Slovakia and America. I said that if they would promise to fix all the problems, and I would see that they were actually keeping their promise, then I would come back and work for the benefit of Agudah. The head of the conference, Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levine, promised me that they would do what I suggested. But a few days later, I saw that they were continuing to do what I held to be wrong. Therefore I made up my mind to be permanently severed from the Agudah, and I have not replied to any letter or notice that they sent me."

## Chapter 81: Levine Defends the Agudah But Admits That There Were Secular Studies in the Mesivta

The Agudah leaders' love for their own movement caused them to cover up all their faults and to deny everything. Sometimes, however, it was impossible for them to ignore everything, so they gave other answers: that the problems were not their fault, and that they were looking only to do good. Here is one such partial admission from the Agudah leader Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levine:

Dear Friends,

This is in reply to your letter of 21 Elul of this year. All the things stated by [Rabbi Simcha Nosson Greenburg] the rav of Kezmark in his speech [at Kashau] are completely false. I cannot believe that they spread false rumors about the great Mesivta in which hundreds of talmidim, full of scholarship and fear of Hashem, study. They already have a reputation around the world, and many of the former students are now serving as eminent rabbis in the congregations of Poland. **It is true that at the beginning they studied secular subjects**, but that program was discontinued long ago.

Of course, the statements about the relationship of my great father-in-law, the Rebbe shlita, to the Mesivta and the Agudah are false.

In general, I do not see the need to deny allegations that everyone knows to be false. The rav of Kezmark was speaking about a yeshiva that was far from his place and about things that happened 15 years ago. As the saying goes, whoever wishes to lie should place his evidence far away.

I bless you with a kesiva vachasimah tovah, a year of redemption and salvation and all good. With great honor and blessings of the Agudah,

Yitzchok Meir Levine  
Warsaw, 27 Elul 5695  
Daf Yomi: Bava Basra 70

This letter was distributed by the Agudath Israel Organization of Carpathian Ruthenia and Eastern Slovakia, with its headquarters in Munkacz.

The rav of Kezmark responded:

I saw in the Yiddishe Nochrichten of the 13<sup>th</sup> day of this month a letter by Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Levine of Warsaw. Any reader can see that his letter is full of craft and cunning. Yet his mouth slipped and he admitted unshamefully that in the Mesivta of Warsaw they did have secular studies. In this he confirmed my claims at the conference of rabbis in Kashau, where I related how I had visited the Mesivta of Warsaw together with the Munkaczer Rav shlita, and we saw that they studied a mixture of Torah and secular subjects. We found that all the reasons cited by the Maharam Schick (Responsa

Yoreh Deah 335) and other great rabbis to prohibit Hildesheimer's rabbinical seminary in Eisenstadt, Hungary in 1868 apply to this seminary – called a "Mesivta" – in Warsaw. When they gave us 18 and 19-year-old boys to test, boys who were on the fifth level of Torah studies and were soon to be ordained as rabbis, we were astounded to see that such young people who were not conversant in halacha, especially those that a rabbi must know, were to be given permission to act as judges and rule on halachic questions. Their rebbe apologized to us and said that if they had not given them such a heavy load of secular subjects, they would definitely have been successful in their Torah studies. We also met with the head of the secular instructors.

I will send you the testimony given at the rabbinical conference in Chopp, 5682 (1922), from which it will be clear to all that what I said at Kashau was all true. In fact, I had only revealed one headbreadth of the problem, leaving the other two handbreadths covered. My main goal was only to quiet down the noise made by the young people who rose up with audacity against the great and distinguished older rabbanim. I saw that it was not the time to keep quiet, so I explained at length the subject of settling Eretz Yisroel and the subject of education, and I also mentioned the matter of the Mesivta. My purpose was to show that one must not deprecate or belittle the honor of the rabbanim, gaonim and tzaddikim who stand outside the Agudah, for they have good reasons. Although we may not simply sit with folded hands while the young generation is in grave danger of falling completely into the hands of the heretics, may G-d spare us, still we must recognize the flaws of the Agudah and rectify them. We must search for a way in which the organization can be acceptable to all good Jews, so that all of religious Jewry might come together in one conference, on the foundation of Orthodoxy as established by our holy and scholarly teachers of righteous memory.

With this I have fulfilled my obligation to clear myself of slander, and may Hashem rebuke the Satan and may the mouths of those who speak lies be closed.

On this I have signed here in Kezmark, Monday of Parshas Bereishis, 5696 (1935),

Simcha Nosson Greenburg

### **Chapter 82: The Chiddushei Harim Against Secular Studies in Cheder**

Once we are on the subject of secular studies, it would not be amiss to print a few letters from gedolim of previous generations on the subject. The following letter by the Chiddushei Harim was printed in Siach Sarfei Kodesh, volume 1, p. 4 (Mesorah edition, Lodz):

Friday, Erev Rosh Hashanah 5604 (1844)

Life, peace and all good to my good friend, the wise and praiseworthy, wealthy leader, man of understanding, Avraham Winovir.

I have not yet left on my trip. When I visited you, we spoke about the evil planned by the wicked and sinners of our people – to stop the cheder children, on the breath of whose mouth the world stands, and to make a new system according to their wishes. I followed your advice and visited Mr. Rosen. I spoke with him at length, and he said that he was not helping [the founders of the new school], but at the same time it was out of the question to him to take action against it, since it seemed fine to him. I cannot understand him, for all of Judaism depends on this! Perhaps he considers himself a righteous man although he transgresses the entire Torah, and so he wants others to be righteous like him. What can we say? Woe to us that such a thing has happened in our days! It is not enough for them that they transgress the Torah, and no one speaks to them at all about it; they have to be like thorns in the eyes of all who mention the name of Israel who hold on to the Torah of Hashem in the world. Nothing like this has happened since the day Israel became a holy nation!

I ask and beg of you, who have wisdom and knowledge, to do all you can in this matter, so that their plans not come to anything. Let this not be a small matter in your eyes, **for one cannot estimate or tell the results of changing even in a small way the system of the cheder children, whom we are not allowed to disturb even for the building of the Temple, and certainly not to study languages. It is absolutely impossible that words of Torah could enter a child if his heart is turned to other things.** I hope that you will be able to accomplish a great deal, only let the G-d of Israel be your help. Whoever does a good thing for the Jewish people acquires for himself life in the World to Come, especially in a great and serious matter such as this. May Hashem give you a kesivah vachasimah tovah.

Your friend who seeks your peace,

Yitzchok Meir, son of Rabbi Y. of righteous memory

### **Chapter 83: The Maharsham Against Dr. Jung's Gymnasium**

When Dr. Meir Jung proposed to found a Hebrew gymnasium in Cracow, Rabbi Shalom Mordechai Hakohein of Brezan, author of Responsa Maharsham, wrote the following open letter. It was printed in the booklet "Machzikei Hadas", Lvov, 29 Elul 5666 (1906):

May He Who hears the sound of the shofar inscribe for a good life in the book all those exceptionally pious Jews who fear Hashem, the leaders of the group Machzikei Hadas.

Today your precious letter was brought before me, regarding the fact that Rabbi Meir, known as Dr. Jung, founded an educational institute called a gymnasium. What can I say and what can I speak? Who does not know that in our country in general and in Cracow especially - enjoying a choice and high reputation in the entire country, full of precious boys who study Torah diligently - when the destroyer comes to destroy the city, many will drink from the bitter, curse-bearing waters, and then the Torah will melt away! Even if Rabbi Dr. Jung intends to bring some improvement, the negative outweighs the positive. Who asked him to do this, to trample the courtyards of our country, the smite

the flocks of holy sheep, and to give them to drink water mixed with snake poison? To take away the faithful plants and say, destroy, destroy, down to the foundation? The past is behind us, but our hope is still not lost. My heart says that when Dr. Jung reads my words and the words of all the gedolei hador, emanating from the depths of the heart, his heart will be opened and he will place the fear of Hashem and His greatness before his eyes. He will repair the damage he has done and then return to his home, never again to go in the crooked path and contravene the opinion of all the gedolei hador. It is known that Chazal call the sage who goes to war against all the other sages a "zakein mamrei". A man must bow his head like a reed to listen to the voice of those who are greater and better than he, so that he not become a disgrace for generations to come; this is his honor, his glory, his beauty. The greatness of a wise man is his ability to admit the truth. May Hashem pour upon us His spirit from on high, and may the earth be filled with knowledge like waters cover the sea.

Shalom Mordechai Hakohein, rav of Brezan

### **Chapter 84: The Atunier Rebbe Against Dr. Jung's Gymnasium**

To the perfectly faithful of Israel, who stand in the breach, upright in their hearts, leaders of the group Machzikei Hadas.

I received your letter regarding the idea of Dr. Jung to found a Hebrew gymnasium to trap the souls of the youth of our brethren, the children of Israel in their net. How greatly is my heart pained over the breach in the generation and desecration of the name and the holy Torah in this project! Anyone of pure heart will understand well that this will be a source of destruction and a doorstep to poison for Jewish children in whom the spark of Judaism has not yet died down. I have always told my followers never to think of offering their children to the Molech of the Hebrew gymnasium, for it is dyed the color of Judaism but inside it lies in wait for ambush. In my opinion, there is an obligation on all the gedolim of our generation not to keep quiet at such a time, but to raise their voices like a shofar and to warn Jews to keep their children very far away from the Hebrew gymnasium. And in every city they should work with all their might to prevent such schools from being founded. I also express my feelings of gratitude to you, who have gone out to strengthen Torah leaders and institutions. May Hashem be with you and carry out your plans, and may a feeling of holiness affect the hearts of Jews, so that they stay far from the words of these reformers and their reforms.

Peace from your friend,

Chaim, son of the tzaddik Rabbi Boruch, of righteous memory

### **Chapter 85: The Alexander Rebbe Against Dr. Jung's Gymnasium**

The following letter was written by Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisroel Yitzchok of Alexander, and it is printed in his book "Yismach Yisroel" on the Torah, at the end of Devarim:

To the great and famous rabbis and judges of Cracow.

I received your letter about the plot of Dr. Jung, who wanted to found a gymnasium in which Talmud would also be taught, in order to spread his net and entrap clean souls. Although it is not my practice to express my opinion about matters greater than me, in this case I was afraid of transgressing the negative commandment, "You shall not be allowed to hide yourself" (Devarim 22:3). If this is said when someone's money is in danger of going lost, all the more so when his body is in danger of going lost, and even more so when his soul is in danger of going lost and never seeing light again, G-d forbid. How can I sit idle and watch the destruction of my people? I will not debate with those men who are wise in their own eyes, who walk in the spirit of the day according to their own minds, against the view of the holy Torah and its sages, for they will not listen to my words. Rather I will address myself to those whose thoughts wander and they vacillate from one side of the fence to the other, saying, "Torah with derech erez is a good thing" (Pirkei Avos 2:2). This is not a legal ruling, but rather an explanation of a mistake, to show them how they are making darkness into light.

Look and give attention the insult to the holy Torah from this evil concept! They use it [the Torah] as a cloak to cover up the plague that lies under it, to destroy its holy power and to uproot all its foundations, and to suck out its blood, its living soul. Didn't Chazal teach us (Nedarim 62a) not to make Torah a crown for self-aggrandizement? This was said even if one does not, G-d forbid, insult its honor in the slightest, but wears it as his crown of beauty, walking in its path, not turning from it right or left all the days of his life. Since he does it for his own honor, wearing its honorable garments for his own glory, relative to the precious honor of the Torah this is considered dishonor, an unforgivable offense. He is using a holy vessel for his own purposes and his life is taken out of the world. All the more so if someone strips the Torah of its beautiful garments and puts them on her handmaid as a disguise, until the handmaid takes the place of her mistress. She tramples her mistress with her feet and forces her to do demeaning labor, breaking her spirit. The holy Torah girds itself with sackcloth and wallows in ashes, crying bitterly, saying, "Am I not the mistress?" But her handmaid laughs at her words. She furthers her sin by trapping innocent souls, who also laugh at the Torah's words, as we have unfortunately seen many times. Such a thing has happened in our days, may Hashem have mercy soon and lift up the pride of Torah and fear.

My brothers and friends, listen to me and may Hashem listen to you. Turn your ear and listen to the words of your prophets, your parents, your teachers, gedolei yisroel and tzaddikim of our generation. They are called "the eyes of the congregation". The wise man's eyes are in his head, and he sees the consequences of his actions. Prophets are called in the Scriptures "tzofim" – watchmen – for just as watchman stand guard on a high tower and warn the people of a city that the enemy is coming, hoping to lay siege to the city before the people notice, since they are low down and cannot see far – so too the sages of the Torah, who study the Torah of Hashem which lights up the eyes, are the watchmen who stand at watch. They see trouble coming from afar, before the general populace realizes it, and they warn them to escape with their lives (see Yechezkel 33:1-9). They are commanded to do this: not to do violence to Hashem's Torah and desecrate

His holy name, but to make known the distinction between defiled and clean, to divide between the sacred and the profane, so that defiled and clean, sacred and profane do not become mixed, G-d forbid. Our entire goal and job is to repair the first sin, through which the evil and the good became mixed. We are obligated to sort and separate the evil from the good, and throw away the evil so that we remain with only the good. Then we will merit the eternal good.

Therefore, how crucial it is to hearken to the straightforward words of our elders and teachers, the greatest tzaddikim of our time! Why should the children of Israel not listen to them? Why? It is only the screen of victory and the blindness of bias that leads these people to seal their ears from hearing good and close their eyes from seeing evil.

Therefore I ask my brethren: please remove the screen, and then you will see with your own eyes, hear with your own ears and understand with your own heart that our words are correct, and our way is the straight, desirable and good path. Then you will not go in the crooked paths that lead backwards, not forwards. Do not go on that path, but raise your children with Torah and pure fear of Hashem, in the ways of our fathers and not in the new, counterfeit ways and the destruction of Torah, G-d forbid. I trust that the true seed and perfectly faithful of Israel will listen to our words, and not go after vanity and nothingness, but will rejoice with the true Torah, the words of the living G-d. In this merit may Hashem complete a good sealing for you in the book of life, blessing, success, redemption and salvation, in accordance with the prayers of one who cries over the misfortunes of the time and hopes and awaits that soon Hashem will have mercy on His people, and the earth will be full of knowledge, and all mankind will join as one to serve Him with complete and true service,

Yerachmiel Yisroel Yitzchok

### **Chapter 86: Rabbi Issachar Dov of Belz Against Secular Studies in Cheder**

I heard that there was to be a conference in your city Kauno (??) to discuss various suggestions and formulate new rules for the education of Jewish children. But then I saw the announcement of the conference printed in the newspapers, and I saw that a terrible mistake was being made by great people. I began to tremble violently, and my body was filled with fever and chills for two days straight, for I saw that your plan was to combine the holy Torah with other studies. All the irreligious of our people in all the cities, enemies of the holy Torah, and all the newspapers, which are devoid of Torah and fear of Heaven, are rejoicing at this idea. For about 25 years already, the wicked Jews have wanted to tread this path and make such schools. And all the gaonim and tzaddikim have cried out that this would cause damage to the youth of the blessed people, swallowing up all holiness from them. In certain places in Hungary where for the last 20 years they have done this, thinking that they did it for the sake of Heaven, the negative results are already visible and obvious to all, and they themselves already regret it. And in all the places that did not follow their example, thank G-d, the high quality of the youth it is obvious to all. We must continue to worry about the majority of our country, where, thank G-d, the shuls and batei medrash are full of Torah and fear of Heaven, and fathers try their hardest to find Heaven-fearing melamdin to whom to entrust their sons. When they hear this news



about the mingling of Torah and other studies, G-d forbid, they will cool off, saying, "If the most famous rabbis of our time were the ones who initiated this idea, it must be good and fine." Is it right that, because there are some places where Torah study has declined, we should make reforms like this to bring down and damage those who are still strong in Torah and fear of Heaven, and wish to continue educating their sons in the old ways of our holy forbears?

And, G-d forbid, when this thing becomes known in other countries, such as Poland, which is in Russia, where everyone, thank G-d, brings up his children with Torah and fear of Heaven in the old way, it will be very dangerous for them to see that this thing was approved by one of the most famous rabbis of the time. This will be an even bigger danger in the Holy Land, where for many years the wicked have been trying their hardest to found schools where a mixture of subjects is taught. They have already spent a vast amount of money on this. Thank G-d, all the Jews there have stood up to them with every ounce of their strength and blood to save their sheep from those who would swallow them up. Now, what answer will they give their attackers?

Actually, even in those places that are weak in Torah and fear of Heaven, we must look for other ideas and ways to strengthen them. But by mingling the holy Torah with other studies we can hope for no salvation, and on the contrary, if there are still some fathers there who fear Hashem and boys in whom the fire of holiness still burns, they will certainly be damaged by this. Furthermore, just as we cannot bend the heavens down to earth, so too no man can take it upon himself to guarantee that all the teachers in all the places will have no tinge of heresy, G-d forbid. But even if that one-in-a-thousand uncorrupted teacher could be found, still we could not consider joining together Torah and other studies. The question should not even be brought up at a conference, just as there is no discussion about permitting other explicit prohibitions of the Torah. The great danger in this for Jewish children is known to all. Since this matter has already been decided and voted on by the gedolei yisroel, gaonim and tzaddikim of the past, of righteous memory, and pronounced a damaging influence on the Torah, it has the status of a rabbinic prohibition, which no future court can repeal unless they are greater than the previous court.

Therefore we must look for a different way to strengthen Torah and learning, keeping on the path tread by our holy ancestors, not building new houses. The Gemora in Yevamos 63a gives us this advice: "Fill in the hole [in the wall] rather than widen and beautify it; beautify it rather than rebuild the entire wall, for whoever builds becomes poor." Rashi explains that we must find a way to repair the old, not build anew.

These are the words of one who seeks your peace and writes for the honor of the holy Torah and so that the young sheep suffer no injury. May Hashem help us to see soon the uplifting of the pride of the holy Torah and of the Jewish people.

Issachar Dov of Belz

## **Chapter 87: Galician Rabbis Against the New Agudist Schools**

Monday of Chayei Sarah

It is already well-known that Dr. Jung wanted to found a school for Torah and secular studies together, and at that time all the gaonim and tzaddikim of the generation, of righteous memory, came out against him with an open public protest, and absolutely forbade such a school. Therefore we, the undersigned, also come to publicize our opinion that it is forbidden to mix secular studies with holy studies in the chadarim and yeshivos, in the diaspora or in Eretz Yisroel. We are certain that remnant of Israel who desire truth will not transgress our words, especially since this has already been forbidden by a gathering of the sages of the previous generation; let us not descend in holiness, and let there be peace.

Isaac Isaiah Halberstam of Cracow, son of the Tsanzer Rav  
Chuna Halberstam of Reisha  
Elazar Halevi Rosenfeld of Ishpitzin  
Menachem Mendel Horowitz of Melitz  
Asher Meyer Halberstam of Bochnia

### **Chapter 88: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Halberstam of Pristik Responds to Arguments for Secular Studies in Cheder**

I received your letter. The main reason for the proposed permission to agree to secular studies in the cheder was that the government requires secular studies, and if the Jewish schools do not provide it the boys will be forced to sit in government schools with bare heads. To this I say as follows:

- 1) If someone is forced to commit a sin, G-d does not hold it against him. G-d forbid that because of this we should permit a sin to be done with our own hands, to desecrate the holy cheder by learning in it the gentile languages.
- 2) A decree of the government is likely to be retracted in the future. But to encourage the study of gentile languages in cheder is a sin, and one sin leads to more sins.
- 3) Why did these young activists not make themselves heard in the government and attempt to get them to allow the boys to cover their heads? For every small matter they travel to the capital and speak to the ministers, and suddenly on this question they keep quiet and reach a compromise, leading the Jewish people astray from the path passed down to us by our holy forefathers, may their merit protect us.
- 4) We have heard that some of the wealthy men of Cracow are calling for secular studies in the cheder without consulting the gedolei hador. This is a great error, for if any change is to be made, it must be the gedolim who do it, for they or their fathers were the ones who forbade the well-known cheder in Eastern Galicia. The mouth that forbade must be the mouth that permits. This cannot just be done quietly. If such a thing happens in Cracow, it may become a precedent for the entire country, G-d forbid.

Do not consider me wrong for making noise about this. Although the Gerrer Rebbe has permitted it, we have the right to disagree, for wherever there is a desecration of Hashem's name, we do not defer to the honor of a greater person. We have begun this mitzvah of disputing those who permitted the new, which is forbidden by the Torah. They [the Agudists in Poland] have established "foundations of the Torah," but in reality it is a nullification of the foundations of the Torah.

You mentioned the example of Padgorza. But one question is not answered by posing another. The main thing I wish to do now is to let you know that the majority is on our side, forbidding any mixture of secular studies in cheder in any way. We hope to Hashem Yisborach that He not desert His people and let them go down the wrong path. Your friend who seeks your peace,

Menachem Mendel Halberstam

**Chapter 89: The Old Yishuv Protests Against the Hebrew-Speaking Cheder in Pesach Tikvah**

The Committee to Continue the Old Style of Education  
Under the leadership of the Rav, shlita  
And the Beth Din Zedek of the Ashkenazic Community of Jerusalem

10 Kislev 5684 (1923)

To the great rabbis, halachic authorities, who mend fences and stand in breaches,  
The Beth Din Zedek of the Ashkenazic Community of Jerusalem.

We were shocked to hear that Agudath Israel here founded a Hebrew-speaking Talmud Torah in Pesach Tikvah. This news disturbs all hearts in our community, for we have been fighting this with all our might for the last five years, and now the religious themselves come and permit it! They claim that a certain scholarly rav took responsibility for permitting this, and that he permitted it only temporarily. But in a difficult time like this, when the fence is more ripped open than closed, could there have been such a permission given, G-d forbid, even temporarily?

Our great rabbis! You are the remainder of the righteous who are left in Eretz Yisroel and in our holy city. The eyes of all Israel are upon you! Please solve this problem soon, while there is still time, mending the fences and standing in the breaches as always. Enclosed is a letter of protest from the sages and rabbanim of yeshivos of Jerusalem. Please formulate your opinion about this, for the sake of the peace of the community, and for the sake of the honor of the holy Torah and Jerusalem, the holy city!

Menachem Mendel Deutsch  
Raphael Chaim Zevi Wallace  
Isaiah Asher Zelig Margulies

Israel Isaac Halevy Reisman  
Joseph Hoffman  
Moses Friedman  
Moses Aaron Tunkeling  
Abish Eisen  
Joseph Nota Auerbach  
Alter Cohen  
Jacob Mordechai Brandwein  
Aaron Abraham Zlotky

The following is the reply they received from the Beis Din, with the stamp of Rabbi Y. C. Zonenfeld:

To the dear rabbis, righteous and pious men of deeds, whose names are printed above:

In reply to your letter, we are honored to let you know that the founding of the Hebrew-speaking cheder in the Pesach Tikvah settlement was done without our permission, to change the tradition system of education. It is also hard to believe that Agudath Israel could have founded a cheder that goes against the system of education used in the chadarim of Jerusalem, the holy city, since it is well-known that the foundation stone of Agudath Israel is (in their own words) the guarding of the tradition handed down by our forefathers. G-d forbid to change anything! We are of one mind with you, dear rabbis, in your holy work to protect and defend the old style of education. May Hashem give all of us one heart to serve Him with truth and innocence.

Signing on behalf of the Beth Din Zedek of the Ashkenazic Community of Jerusalem,

Mordechai Leib Rubin  
Isaac Frankel  
Dov Zevi Krelenstein

The words written by the Beth Din Zedek were said truthfully and justly, and it is obvious that there is an obligation to stand in the breach and mend the fence as much as we can. May Hashem Yisborach have mercy on our Holy Land and its inhabitants, that there should always be people who stand in breaches and mend fences, so that we do not move one iota from the tradition of our fathers regarding the education of our sons. Experience has shown that anyone who introduces any changes in this causes the multitude to sin and brings down holy Jewish children to destruction. I have already made known my opinion that the suffering of the Jewish people in all places where they live can be largely blamed on the fact that the old style of teaching children has stopped. May Hashem Yisborach have mercy and send us the just authority, the righteous moshiach, soon. Hoping for imminent redemption,

Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld

## **Chapter 90: The Daas Torah Published Against the Hebrew-Speaking Girls' School**

Then, in the year 5685 (1925) it became known to the Committee to Continue the Old Style of Education that the Agudah in Frankfurt sent female teachers from Germany to teach the girls in their school in Jerusalem. They also taught the unclean language "Ivrit" and other languages and studies. The Agudah leaders in Jerusalem, who received their salaries from Germany, also agreed to this. Then, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, the sages and rabbis of Jerusalem sat together and wrote up a legal ruling entitled "Daas Torah," and sent it to the Agudah of Frankfurt. Later a reply arrived from Frankfurt, saying that they did not accept this "Daas Torah." They would be satisfied with nothing but Ivrit, and that the Hebrew teachers from Germany should teach the Jerusalem girls.

At this point a letter was sent to the Agudah leaders in Jerusalem, and its text was as follows:

To the honorable staff of the Agudath Israel Center of Jerusalem,

We have heard that you wish to make changes in the system of girls' education. We are therefore sending you a copy of the "Daas Torah" of sages and rabbis of Jerusalem, written on 20 Tammuz of this year, 5685 (1925):

With Hashem's help, Jewish immigration to the Holy Land and the Holy City from various countries has increased, and in some of those countries the style of girls' education is different from that practiced here in Jerusalem. Some people have therefore felt the need to introduce changes in the religious girls' schools under the auspices of Agudath Israel, such as the study of modern Hebrew and the like. Therefore we have come to strengthen the old system of girls' education, to say that nothing should be changed, from the rules for selecting teachers to the subjects taught. Everything should continue in the same straight path, in the way established by the founders of these institutions. Jews coming from various lands must relate to our community in accordance with the rule that one must follow the stringencies of the place to which he moves, this holy place, without budging an inch from the tradition and the customs of our fathers, the gaonim and tzaddikim of the time, who have lived in the Holy City, from which light, Torah, and strengthening of tradition has come out to the entire world.

On this we have affixed our signatures of this 20<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, 5685

.....

At the bottom of the letter was a postscript written by our great and righteous teacher, the Rav shlita:

I give my blessing to those signing, for the way to preserve the holy Torah is by not deviating from the customs of our fathers and mothers, as we have seen in the past.

All those who want external change are showing that they have changed inside as well. They are testifying on themselves that they do not care about the traditions of our holy ancestors, and this is the way of the reformers, may Hashem Yisborach save us from them. On this I have signed,

Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld

### **Chapter 91: Sephardim Protest Against the Hiring of Dr. Auerbach**

In the year 5686 (1926) Dr. Moshe Auerbach came from Frankfurt to run the Sephardic chadarim of Jerusalem, which were supported by the Agudah in Frankfurt. The greatest Sephardic rabbis then came out against him with the following letter of protest:

10 Adar 5686 (1926)

To the honorable rabbi, administrator of Agudath Israel, shlita:

After friendly and respectful greetings, we turn to you because it has become known to us that Agudath Israel abroad is sending Dr. Auerbach to be the principal of Talmud Torah Bnei Zion. Therefore we have come to let you know that these schools are the only ones for the Sephardic community that continue in the old style of education passed down to the Jewish people by tradition from generation to generation, whose purpose is only to increase and strengthen Torah, to plant in the hearts of the children only Torah and fear of G-d. They are the last remaining holdouts from which we can expect the uplifting of the pride of Torah among Sephardim, a pride which has recently taken a terrifying drop, due to the new modern schools (Alliance Israelite Universelle). We see that most of the children who graduate from our Talmud Torah enter the Yeshiva Porat Yosef and advance in Torah learning. Some of them are exceptional in their Torah and fear of Heaven, following in the path of our fathers and our fathers' fathers. We express our great thanks and blessing to Agudath Israel here for supporting these schools and thus saving the Sephardic community from spiritual destruction, for "if there are no kids, there will be no goats."

Experience has shown that when a person with the title "doctor" is the principal of a Talmud Torah, the spirit of that Talmud Torah is in great danger. Under a doctor, the Talmud Torah is inevitable renamed a "school" (beis sefer), and changes in the curriculum are made. Furthermore, experience has shown that the name "doctor" itself is harmful to the spiritual development of the children. They begin to look at the principal as a symbol of working hard in secular studies and attaining the distinction of doctor, not laboring in Torah and fear of Heaven as scholars of previous times did, and the end result could be destruction of the holy Torah. This is especially true among the Sephardim, whose Talmud Torah schools are in decline. What a terrible disgrace this would be for the Sephardic scholars of Jerusalem, the holy city, the city of sages and scholars, who are more capable than anyone of educating their sons and daughters in the straight and proper path, as in all times!

We ask: for holy education in the old Jewish way, Torah and fear of Heaven without any modernity, must we import an educator from Germany who bears the title of "doctor"? The very name "doctor" is extremely harmful to the boys and girls of the Holy City. Who knows how much harm it could do?

Therefore we ask you to be zealous for Hashem and stand in this breach, to save the last remaining Sephardic Talmud Torahs, for, unlike the Ashkenazim, we have no other Torah schools. Please convey to Agudath Israel leadership abroad that we are completely opposed to the idea that the principal of the Talmud Torah should be a doctor. It is well known that the various modern schools have wrought destruction in the Sephardic community, to the point that there are almost no more young people among us who are knowledgeable in Torah. Only those choice few who did not go to the modern schools have any Torah knowledge. We hope that you will close this breach and save many pure souls from the holy flocks from foreign influences, thus strengthening Torah and fear of Heaven.

In the merit of the breath of the mouths of cheder children, on whom the world stands, may we merit to see the building of Zion and Jerusalem and the uplifting of the pride of the Torah with the coming of the righteous redeemer, soon in our days, amein.

Chaim Shaul Dowek Hakohein  
Yosef Yedid Halevy  
Ezra Harari Raful

The Seal of the Beis Din of the Aleppo Community in Jerusalem

Avraham Aminoff  
Shlomo Tzofioff

The Seal of the Board of Bucharian Jewry in Jerusalem

Yaakov Chaim Sofer

The Seal of Yeshiva Shoshanim Ledavid and the Babylonian Community of Jerusalem

Eliyahu Moshe Maaravi

The Seal of Yeshiva Yagdil Torah of the Damascus Community in Jerusalem

### **Chapter 92: Rabbi Yosef Yedid Halevy Against Teaching in Hebrew**

The following is another ruling written by Rabbi Yosef Yedid Halevy, rabbi of the Aleppo community and rabbi of Bucharian Houses in Jerusalem. The ruling was also endorsed by Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld and by Rabbi Chaim Shaul Dowek:

Jerusalem, 18 Iyar 5688 (1928), Lag Baomer.

To the honored and esteemed man, lover of Torah and mitzvos, active in holy matters, Jacob Abraham Sathon, head of the organization Yesod Hadas in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

I received your letter in which you wrote at length about the necessity of teaching the Hebrew language to Jewish children. In this matter, I am in a difficult dilemma. If I say it is forbidden to teach Hebrew, the language of our forefathers, what an embarrassment that would be! But if I do not forbid it, we see with our eyes the negative consequences of learning the Hebrew language, since the modern irreligious writers have written so many books in Hebrew. They speak in Hebrew and they transgress the Torah. All their books are heresy and immorality. They think one can be a Jew merely by speaking Hebrew and being a nationalist, without Torah. We see that in their schools the children are trained by the thousands to violate the Sabbath and to deny the entire Torah. This is well-known to everyone - they keep only the language and the land (not the sanctity of the land). We are seeing the fulfillment of the words of the prophet (Yechezkel 7:22), "The immoral will come and desecrate it."

It is known that "when it is time to act for Hashem, we transgress the Torah." In cases where we must close a breach in the Torah, a temporary transgression is sometimes permitted, such as in the case of Eliyahu who built an altar on Mt. Carmel. In our case, I do not know what the big sin is if we do not teach Hebrew. Is it such a great mitzvah to teach only in Hebrew? Is it not enough to teach the meaning of the Torah in the spoken language of the country, as Jews have always learned it in all the countries of their exile, from the destruction of the Temple until now? The entire Talmud was written in Aramaic, the language they spoke then. The Rambam and several Gaonim wrote their books in Arabic. They saw no insult to the Holy Tongue in this, for Arabic was the language of the populace then. What is important, however, is to explain the Torah according to the traditions of our Sages, according to Rashi and the Ramban and so on. Our language was only called "the Holy Tongue" because the Torah was given in it, as the Ramban writes. Even in the outhouse and the bathhouse one may speak mundane words in Hebrew, while words of Torah may not be spoken there even in another language. From this we see that the main criterion for holiness is not in the language but in the subject of the speech, and the holiness of the Holy Tongue comes only from the power of the Torah.

If you would only see with your eyes some of the evil deeds of those who study Hebrew here, you would certainly say that one must tear his garments and recite the words "Blessed is the true Judge" over their desecrations of Torah. Whoever teaches Hebrew language uses the books written by these people. Besides all this, teaching Hebrew wastes precious time that could be used for Torah study, taking away the holy breath of cheder children from Torah on which the world stands. Instead, they are speaking vanity and pursuit of wind, empty matters, forbidden words which cannot be mentioned. The greatest danger is that if a child learns to speak Hebrew fluently, he will be attracted to reading the new literature, which is filled with immorality and heresy, and their newspapers, which corrupt the soul. A child is, after all, a child. If you are upset over the



children in your country reading Spanish newspapers which are full of immorality, pursuing their desires and violating the Torah in order to fulfill their desires, you must know that if they learn Hebrew the danger is even greater. For besides reading immorality, they will become deliberately irreligious and complete disbelievers by reading the Hebrew literature.

Therefore my advice to you is that no changes should be introduced in the language of instruction. They should teach in Arabic or in the language of the country, Spanish. Do not open the door to bring in the new spirit of education, G-d forbid, for in one moment you could lose all that you worked so hard to build all these years. Be strong to increase and beautify the Torah, and do not let your hand rest from this great endeavor of incomparable merit, running a cheder for 300 children and teaching Torah and fear of Hashem. May Hashem's will in your hands be successful.

Signing in honor of the Torah will strength and peace,

Yosef Yedid Halevy

I have read what the great gaon, rabbi of our brethren the Aleppo community, Rabbi Yosef Yedid Halevy, has written. His words are like medicine for the eyes, and we may not budge from them one iota. Praiseworthy is the righteous man who walks in the holy and paved path of previous generations, and may the merit of cheder children stand by all those who work in this area. May they merit to see the comforting of Zion and the building of the Temple, soon in our days.

Signing for the elevation of the honor of Torah, the Beth Din Zedek of the Ashkenazic Community of Jerusalem.

Mordechai Leib Rubin  
Yitzchok Frankel  
Dov Tzvi Krelenstein

I have seen the letter by Rabbi Yosef Yedid Halevy and the Beth Din Zedek, and G-d forbid to go against their words. Waiting for imminent redemption,

Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld

My health is weak and my life is difficult, so I have entrusted this approbation to Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld and his court. One must follow their ruling. They are very knowledgeable and experienced in this area, and Hashem approves of their ruling. Signing on this 49<sup>th</sup> day of the Counting of the Omer,

Chaim Shaul Dowek, head of the Kabbalistic yeshiva Rechovos Hanahar

**Chapter 93: Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes Kollelim Protest the New Agudah Collection Boxes**

The following is the letter of protest by the Galician Kollel in Jerusalem against the Agudah's practice of placing their Yishuv Fund boxes alongside the old Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity boxes. Actually, hundreds of other rabbanim from other kehillos signed letters of protest, but in consideration of lack of space, we have printed only this letter from Kollel Chibas Jerusalem, together with the signature of the rav, Rabbi Y.C. Zonenfeld of righteous memory.

### Mass Protest Gathering!

A mass protest took place on 23 Teves of this year in the Beis Medrash Tzion Hametzuyenes of Kollel Galicia in Jerusalem against Agudath Israel, for usurping the rights of thousands of members of the Galician community in the Holy Land, by placing charity boxes for their Yishuv Fund and other funds in the towns of Galicia.

To our rabbis, lights of the Diaspora, and all Jews:

Agudath Israel has made a great breach in the walls of the Old Yishuv, in the walls of the ancient institution of the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity box, on which the entire Yishuv depends. They pay no heed to the severe prohibition of placing any charity box other than the box of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. They pay no heed to the great responsibility of providing for our kollel's thousands of members - religious scholars, elderly men and women, widows and orphans – whose livelihood depends on this. They permitted themselves to place new collection boxes in Galicia called "Yishuv Fund" to usurp the established rights of the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes fund, which is the entire foundation of the existence of the religious Old Yishuv in the Holy Land. They are taking away the livelihood of thousands of poor and downtrodden people.

This same Agudath Israel that announces at all its gatherings that it stands for strengthening the Old Yishuv who continue in the Jewish tradition, and utter opposition to all new things being done in Eretz Yisroel, this same Agudath Israel which, at all its Knessios and gatherings, accepted resolutions to strengthen the institutions of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, which was founded by the holy rabbis of early generations – this same Agudah has now aimed its weapons and fired its arrows into the innermost heart of the Old Yishuv, to demolish, obliterate and destroy the holy institution of the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity box by spreading its new boxes in all Jewish homes in Galicia, taking away the life of such a large and holy community as our kollel.

All those who write to us from the cities of Galicia bring to our attention the great danger in store, G-d forbid, for the entire foundation of our kollel, from the collection boxes of the Agudah, which are increasingly common due to the enthusiasm of the youth. This knife is already being felt in our flesh. In every city in which the Agudah has been able to place its collection boxes, our kollel income has taken a terrifying drop. The question of the life of our thousands of members presents itself here with all its fearfulness.

For this reason a great assembly of rabbanim of scholars gathered for a great and powerful protest here in Jerusalem, at which the following resolutions were unanimously accepted:

- 1) The entire Galician community in the Holy Land protests with full strength against Agudath Israel, which has permitted itself to place its collection boxes in the cities of Galicia.
- 2) Our entire community proclaims a severe ban, under the authority of the holy Torah and of the rabbis of past generations, not to accept the collection boxes of Agudath Israel or any other collection boxes in any Jewish home in Galicia, only the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity box in its original form.
- 3) Our entire community expresses its sharp protest against any sort of compromise in any form that might be reached with Agudath Israel regarding the placing of its collection boxes.
- 4) This protest gathering asks all the rabbis of Galicia to follow the aforementioned ban, to come together as one and close this breach against those who would destroy the walls of our kollel by placing collection boxes for other organizations.
- 5) This protest gathering asks the central offices of the kollel in Jerusalem to send the details of these resolutions to the presidents, rabbis and fundraisers of our kollel in all the cities of Galicia.

With this we fulfill the obligation placed upon us. Together with the details of the protest, we are sending the bans signed by the Beth Din Zedek of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld shlita. We ask the fundraisers and leaders in every city to spread around the ban of the Beth Din Zedek together with our protest in all Jewish homes and in all shuls and batei medrash, in order to close up this breach made by Agudath Israel and other groups with their collection boxes. For this purpose every man should use all means at his disposal. At the same time, they should strengthen the institution of the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity box and the foundations of our kollel, which at the present time need great protection and care so that they should not bow to all the outside pressure.

The Jews of Galicia should see the central leadership of our kollel in Jerusalem as the sole representative of all Galician Jewry in all matters relating to Eretz Yisroel. Let Agudath Israel go its own way and we will go our way. Let Agudath Israel seek income from countries that do not have kollelim in the Holy Land and do not have Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charity boxes to support their countrymen. Let it not try to push aside our kollel. After all, the Agudah is not responsible for the sustenance of thousands of souls in the Holy Land as our kollel is. Agudath Israel is responsible only for dangerous steps like this step of placing its collection boxes in a country that already has its own kollel in the Holy Land, a kollel that is completely responsible for poverty-stricken people, to protect their rights and property.

If the Agudah claims to speak for religious Jewry, it must take care in its steps not to miss its mark, and not to build itself on the ruins of a great and holy community like ours. Let the Agudah take care to protect its own honor and reputation, and keep far from such

acts. For not by the destruction and ruin of the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes institutions will it reach its goals. May peace be upon us and all Israel.

The Administration of Kollel Chibas Jerusalem of the Galician Community

Solomon Perlman  
Abraham Brandwein  
Elisha Segal Landau  
Nachman Kahana  
Samuel Wilner  
Elazar Brandfeld  
Ben Zion Blugrind  
Israel Noah Saltz  
Nissan Schiff  
Joel Baruchson

I also wish to reinstate the well-known prohibition made by rabbis of previous generations, may their merit protect us, against the placing of charity boxes other than that of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. It is especially forbidden for the donor to switch his contribution from Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes to any other charity, for it is obvious that anyone who touches the charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes and decreases its income even slightly, is playing with the very lives of those who sit at the holy labor of Torah and service of Hashem, for whose existence the charity was founded and maintained by all the great rabbis of the past. Touching this charity is like stealing from the consecrated objects of the Temple. One must be concerned that he not be burnt by the coals of the departed righteous men of the past. We are certain that our good Jewish brethren will not give any aid to the sinners. Those who desire blessing should try to increase their contributions, and then they will merit the blessing of all good things, and will see a speedy redemption for our people and for every individual.

Waiting for the redemption soon,

Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld

### **Chapter 94: Responsa Minchas Elazar 5:16**

I have seen the section in Responsa Avnei Nezer entitled "The Laws of Settling Eretz Yisroel" (Yoreh Deah volume 2, chapters 454 and onward). With Hashem's help I will deal with each of his arguments in turn, and at the end determine the halachic conclusion.

The Rambam in his Sefer Hamitzvos does not count the positive commandment to take possession of the Land and live in it, and the Ramban disagrees with him and holds it should be counted. The Megillas Esther argues that the Rambam was justified in not counting it because it does not apply nowadays, and the Rambam only counts mitzvos

that apply for all generations, not temporary ones.<sup>11</sup> The Avnei Nezer (454:4) asks that if so, why did the Rambam count terumah, maaser and challah, which do not apply today? Even in the time of Ezra and the Second Temple they did not apply by Torah law according to the Rambam's view. Clearly, says the Avnei Nezer, a mitzvah that will come back into force in the times of Moshiach is considered a permanent mitzvah and is counted by the Rambam.

Anyone reading this Avnei Nezer is very surprised: why did he choose to ask from terumah and challah which apply at least by Rabbinic law nowadays? He could have asked from the laws of sacrifices and the Temple which are not kept at all now, and will come into force only in the times of Moshiach when the Temple is built. Yet the Rambam counts all these laws in his Sefer Hamitzvos, so we see that he counts mitzvos that will come back into force in the times of Moshiach, not as the Megillas Esther says. Certainly the Megillas Esther knew this.

But the answer is that the mitzvah to conquer the land, take possession of it and settle it was a one-time commandment that was carried out before the First Temple was built, and it will never come back into force as it was then. It was due to the sin of the Golden Calf that this semi-natural conquest became necessary: "I will not drive them out to make room in one year, lest the land be desolate and the animals of the field be too many for you. Little by little I will drive them out to make room for you, until you are fruitful and inherit the land" (Shemos 23:29-30). Thus after the conquest of Yehoshua, the Jews people were subjugated by one nation after another, one kingdom after another, and saved by the leadership of the Judges. They experienced many wars and travails until

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<sup>11</sup> Here is the text of the Megillas Esther: "It is clear to me that the reason why the Rav did not count it is because the mitzvah to take possession of and settle the Land only applied in the time of Moshe, Yehoshua, Dovid and so on until the Jewish people were exiled from their land. But after they were exiled from their land this mitzvah does not apply, until the time of the coming of Moshiach. For on the contrary, according to what the Sages say at the end of Kesubos, we were commanded not to rebel against the nations, to go and conquer the Land by force. They proved this from the verse, "I adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem." They derived from this verse that Israel may not go up as a wall. The Ramban is correct that conquering the Land is an obligatory war, but this is only at a time when we are not subjugated to the nations. The Ramban points out that the Sages spoke in extreme language about the greatness of living in the Land, but these statements were only said as long as the Temple stood. Now there is no mitzvah to live there. This is also what Tosafos says in Kesubos 110b ('Rabbi Chaim Cohen used to say that nowadays it is not a mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel, for there are many mitzvos dependent on the land and many punishments, and we cannot be careful of them').

"Another proof that there is no mitzvah is the statement of Rav Yehudah there, 'Anyone who goes up from Babylonia to Eretz Yisroel transgresses a positive commandment, as it says, "To Babylonia they will be brought and there they will remain" (Yirmiyah 27:22).' If there were a mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel at all times, how could a prophet arise after Moshe and contradict his words? A prophet has no right to add anything to the Torah, much less to contradict it.

"As far as the statement that the Ramban quotes from the Sifri that they cried and read this verse, 'And you shall take possession of it and live in it', it seems to me that they cried because they had no way to fulfill this verse, for the Temple had already been destroyed. The proof to this is that they tore their clothing, which would indicate that they were mourning for the loss of the Temple. If this mitzvah applied even after the Destruction, why did they cry and tear their clothing? They could fulfill the mitzvah even now. So it is clear that this mitzvah does not apply after the destruction of the Temple, may it be built speedily in our days."

finally, after centuries, in the time of Shlomo Hamelech, they were privileged to reach a peaceful existence and build the Temple, as commanded by Hashem through a prophet.

The building of the long-awaited Third Temple in the times of Moshiach will proceed in a completely different manner. The Rambam (Melachim 12:2) codifies the opinion of Shmuel (Sanhedrin 99a) that the times of Moshiach will be the same as this world except that the Jewish people will not be subjugated to the nations. But this only means that the world in general after the coming of Moshiach will proceed according to the same natural laws. Certainly the Rambam and Shmuel agree that the coming of Moshiach and his ascension to the throne will not take place in a natural way as in the First Temple, let alone the Second Temple. The coming of Moshiach will be announced in advance by a prophet (Rambam Melachim 12:2); he himself will be a prophet close to Moshe Rabbeinu's level (Rambam Teshuva 9:2), and he will be able to tell each Jew what tribe he comes from (Melachim 12:3). He will succeed in getting all Jews to repent (Melachim 11:4), a feat no one could accomplish under normal conditions. When the Rambam says he will "fight the wars of Hashem" (ibid.), he does not mean physical wars against the nations as in ancient times.

This is why the Rambam did not count the mitzvah to conquer the land and settle it: because it does not apply nowadays, and even in the times of Moshiach the commandment will not apply to all of the Jewish people like other mitzvos, for it will not be they who conquer the land; this will be Moshiach's job.<sup>12</sup> This holy king will take the land and divide it up among the twelve tribes with his inspiration from Hashem, as the Rambam says (Melachim 12:3). Moshiach will also separate out a thirteenth portion of land for himself. It will not proceed in the manner of conquest and division as took place before the building of the First Temple, in the time when this one-time commandment applied. Even the return to Eretz Yisroel at the building of the Second Temple, although it involved no conquest, had to have the sanction of the prophets of Hashem Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the Men of the Great Assembly, Daniel, Ezra and Nechemiah, speaking in the name of Hashem, as our Sages have said in many places.

However one might ask: why did the Rambam count in Sefer Hamitzvos the mitzvah of building the Temple? This mitzvah also does not apply during exile, and even when Moshiach comes the Temple will not be rebuilt through human effort as were the First and Second Temples. It will come down from heaven already built and completed. Rashi and Tosafos in Succah (41a) use this fact to explain why there is a possibility that it might be built on Yom Tov, when building is forbidden. Since it will not be a physical act of building, why did the Rambam count it in his Sefer Hamitzvos? The answer is that the Rambam did not hold like Rashi and Tosafos, but held that the Temple will indeed be built through human effort, under the direction of Moshiach. This is apparent from his statement (Melachim 11:1) that Moshiach will rebuild the Temple. As to the possibility

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<sup>12</sup> According to this, when the Megillas Esther says that "after they were exiled from their land this mitzvah does not apply, until the time of the coming of Moshiach," he means that in the time of Moshiach the mitzvah will return but it will be Moshiach's job, not a mitzvah for all the Jews as it was in ancient times.

that it may be built on Yom Tov, see the commentary Aruch Laner on Succah who explains how the Rambam understood that Gemora.

The Avnei Nezer, after rejecting the Megillas Esther, is left with the question of why the Rambam left out the mitzvah of taking possession of Eretz Yisroel. On this he offers a novel solution: that the mitzvah of taking possession the Land is included in the mitzvah of destroying the Seven Canaanite Nations, which the Rambam does count. We find that the Rambam counts the mitzvah to build the Temple, but does not count the mitzvah to make the Ark. The Ramban objects, and the Megillas Esther defends the Rambam by saying that the original Ark will be discovered when the Temple is rebuilt, and thus there will never be a need to make another one. The Avnei Nezer is not satisfied with this answer, because we see that the Rambam counted the mitzvah to destroy the Seven Canaanite Nations (#187), although their destruction was already completed in the time of Dovid. The Rambam himself explains that since no set time frame was given for this mitzvah, and theoretically, if the Seven Nations were still in existence today, the mitzvah could be fulfilled today, it is considered a permanent mitzvah and must be counted. Similarly, argues the Avnei Nezer, he should have counted the mitzvah to make the Ark because theoretically, if the Ark were to go lost, we would have to make another one even today. But the real reason he does not count the mitzvah to make the Ark is because it is included in the mitzvah to build the Temple. The whole purpose of the Temple is to house the Ark, so once he counted the mitzvah to built the Temple, the Rambam saw no necessity to count the building of the Ark as a separate command. The same is true in our case: the whole purpose of destroying the Seven Nations is in order to take possession of Eretz Yisroel. Therefore once he had counted the mitzvah to destroy them, he saw no necessity to count taking possession of the Land as a separate mitzvah.

It seems that part of the motivation for the Avnei Nezer's reasoning was the need to explain why the Rambam counts the mitzvah to destroy the Seven Nations, a mitzvah which can never be fulfilled since it has already been fulfilled. The Avnei Nezer explains that this mitzvah really includes the mitzvah to take possession of and settle Eretz Yisroel, a mitzvah which can be fulfilled in our time. But the Rambam himself deals with the question of why he counted this mitzvah, and gives a different answer: because theoretically, if the Seven Nations had not already been destroyed, we would be able to fulfill the mitzvah today. This renders the Avnei Nezer's answer superfluous. We see here how far that Avnei Nezer went to answer his question, a question which is answered quite neatly by the Megillas Esther, as we have explained it above.

The Avnei Nezer's comparison between the mitzvah to build the Ark and the mitzvah to destroy the Seven Nations is also very shaky. Hashem Yisborach has promised us that the Ark will come out of hiding at the time of the redemption, and thus there will definitely never be a need for another one, and its building should not be considered a permanent mitzvah. Members of the Seven Nations, on the other hand, still exist today, only they are mixed into the rest of the nations, and we have no way of identifying them. If a way were devised to identify them, we could fulfill the mitzvah of destroying them today.<sup>13</sup> (It is

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<sup>13</sup> The language of the Rambam in Mitzvah #187 suggests that the problem is not that they cannot be identified today, but that they no longer exist at all today, because their destruction was completed by

possible that there exist groups of people in the world who have a tradition or documents that they are descended from the Seven Nations. A similar tradition must be posited to explain why the Rambam rules (Melachim 10:8) that the descendants of Keturah, as well as the Ishmaelites who mingled with them, are obligated in circumcision even today.)

The Megillas Esther asks that if the Ramban is correct that the mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisroel applies even during exile, then how could Yirmiyah the prophet say, "They will be brought to Babylonia and there they will remain until the day I revisit them, said Hashem." (27:22) Rav Yehudah interprets this verse to mean that any Jew is forbidden to go to Eretz Yisroel during exile (Kesubos 110b). If there is a mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisroel even during exile, it comes out that according to Rav Yehudah the prophet forbade us to fulfill a mitzvah. This violates the principle that "a prophet may not add to the Torah," and he may certainly not abrogate any part of it.<sup>14</sup>

The Avnei Nezer answers that the mitzvah is really to live in Eretz Yisroel, not to travel there. Traveling there is only a preparation for the mitzvah, and therefore the prophet's prohibition on traveling to Eretz Yisroel can take hold. This is similar to what the Rashbash says (responsa #1), that if one makes an oath not to travel to Eretz Yisroel, his oath takes effect, because his oath did not directly contradict the Torah.

But his comparison to the laws of oaths is no comparison at all. For the rule that an oath does not take effect when it contradicts (or unnecessarily repeats) a mitzvah of the Torah applies only when the oath corresponds exactly to the mitzvah. If the terms of the oath are slightly different, they can take effect even on a Torah prohibition. For example, the Torah forbids us to eat even a minute amount of non-kosher food, but the punishment of lashes is incurred only for eating an olive-sized piece. If a man swore not to eat even a minute amount of non-kosher food, he has added the punishment of lashes, so his oath takes effect (Tosafos Shevuos 23b). So too in the case of Eretz Yisroel: the Rashbash says that since the mitzvah is living there, not traveling, if one swears not to travel there his oath takes effect.

But when it comes to the rule that a prophet may not change the Torah, it is obvious that such technical differences do not matter. If a prophet were to say that from now on we may eat minute amounts of non-kosher food, less than the size of an olive, we would not

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Dovid. He says that some of them escaped and mixed into the nations, but his implication is that the mitzvah does not apply to those individuals, perhaps because they no longer exist as a nation in Eretz Canaan. For all intents and purposes, the mitzvah of destroying the Seven Nations has already been fulfilled by Dovid, and thus can never be fulfilled again. Nevertheless it counts as a mitzvah since no time frame was originally given for its fulfillment.

<sup>14</sup> The principle that a prophet may not change (lechadesh davar) any part of the Torah applies whenever a prophet adds to the Torah, even if he does not abrogate any of the mitzvos. Why then does the Megillas Esther address this question to the Ramban? The answer is that a prophet may not make a permanent change to the Torah, but he may convey a temporary command. So if the Torah contains no directives as to where Jews should live during exile, the prophet may tell them that G-d wants them in Babylonia. But if, as the Ramban seems to say, G-d wants them in Eretz Yisroel even during exile, then how could the prophet say that G-d wants them in other lands for the entire duration of the exile? A prophet may suspend laws of the Torah temporarily, but in this case the command is so general and long-lasting that it stands in contradiction to what G-d wants of the Jews during exile.



listen to him. The clear proof to this is from Megillah 2b, where the Gemora quotes a statement that the special forms of the letters mem, nun, tzadik, peh, and chof were introduced by the prophets. On this the Gemora objects: a prophet is not allowed to add anything! Now, these letters make no difference in halacha, and they certainly involve no prohibition punishable by lashes. Still, a prophet may not add them. The Gemora revises the statement to say that both forms of the letters had always existed, only the prophets introduced the rule as to which one goes in the middle of a word and which at the end of a word. On this too the Gemora objects: a prophet is not allowed to add anything! Whether this form of the letter is used in the middle of a word or at the end involves no prohibition or punishment, and still a prophet has no right to tamper with it. Here too, if there were a Torah mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel even today, the prophet would have no right to command us not to go there. This proves that the mitzvah does not apply today.

After writing the above, I read the responsum of the Rashbash. He actually does not write there that the traveling to Eretz Yisroel is only secondary to the mitzvah. His words are: "And so it is with traveling to and living in Eretz Yisroel: the mitzvah itself is living, and the step before that is traveling there. If one is outside Eretz Yisroel, he cannot enter the land without traveling there..." So he says that traveling is a necessary step one must take before fulfilling the mitzvah of living in the Land. Since the mitzvah is impossible without this traveling, it is not secondary but central to the mitzvah. Afterwards the Rashbash writes that if one swears not to travel to Eretz Yisroel the oath takes effect, and it is not considered swearing not to perform a mitzvah. He gives an analogy: one who swears that he will not knead matzos, or that he will not bake them, or one who swears that he will not make a succah. These oaths take effect, because making the matza or the succah is only a preparation for the mitzvah, a necessary step toward doing the mitzvah.

His words need great study, for in my opinion there is no comparison. One who swears not to knead or bake matza or not to make a succah could still fulfill the mitzvos with matza or a succah made by someone else, for his oath cannot forbid others from making these items. But if he swears not to travel to Eretz Yisroel, there is no way for him to fulfill the mitzvah of living there, so the oath is directly contradicting the mitzvah. All this has no bearing on the subject, for even if the Rashbash is correct that the oath takes effect, the rule that a prophet cannot contradict the Torah would still apply here.

The Avnei Nezer continues in section 18: "According to this, if a man lives in Eretz Yisroel and has no livelihood there, but lives on the money sent to him from abroad, such that his source of sustenance is still from the angels that rule over the other lands, what kind of settling Eretz Yisroel is this?" I and all others who read these words are shocked. Who does not know about the enactments of our forbears, rabbis as holy as angels, the Beis Yosef and the Alshich, may their merit protect us, that all money donated in all countries to Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes funds, even money given by women before lighting candles, should be sent to Eretz Yisroel to support the poor kollel members who occupy themselves with Torah and service of G-d. We must be the ones to support them with the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes funds. These enactments are printed in the work Meginei Eretz Yisroel, which contains the responsa of the Berditchover Rav, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner,

the Brisker Rav, and other gaonim. It also contains the signatures of many Chassidic Rebbes, disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, and many later rabbis who continued to support this practice. One need not bring proof to such a well-known thing. What Torah scholar in what country does not know about this, especially if he is a gadol hador? (I myself saw the public letter printed by the Shinover Rebbe in support of the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness kollel. He wrote there in the name of the Ohev Yisroel that one can measure the amount of holiness in the soul of a Jew by the degree to which he supports the charity of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness for the poor of Eretz Yisroel.)

How then can we believe that such strange words against the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness system emanated from the pen of the great gaon, the author of Avnei Nezer? Later, at the beginning of chapter 456, which is also about Eretz Yisroel, the Avnei Nezer's son, who published his work, wrote: "The following responsum was found in scattered papers among the manuscripts, and they were gathered and made into one responsum." From this we can deduce that perhaps the earlier sections as well (chapter 454) were tampered with. Various pieces written by the author were gathered, whereas the author never intended them to be together. Perhaps there was another piece of paper lost among the manuscripts, in which the author proved himself wrong and retracted his words. May Hashem, Who is good, make atonement.

He goes on in section 18 to quote the Alshich's comment on the verse, "And He will give me bread to eat and a garment to wear" (Bereishis 28:20). According to the Alshich, Yaakov Avinu was praying that His sustenance not come through the angel in charge of the land in which he would be living, but directly from Hashem. The Avnei Nezer says many more words of Torah, all with the effect of weakening, G-d forbid, the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness system, in which money is sent from abroad to support those living in the Holy Land. The holy Alshich himself, together with the Beis Yosef, was the one who made the enactment of sending charity to Eretz Yisroel. How can the Avnei Nezer use his own words to undermine his enactment? I cannot believe that these things came from the mouth of the great gaon and tzaddik, the author of Avnei Nezer .

Even more painful is the fact that in our time, the Avnei Nezer's words are being used by the sinners who wish to imitate those heretics, the Zionists, against whom the Avnei Nezer himself together with all the gedolim of his generation fought. The Zionists are destroying the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness system, and their entire purpose is to work the fields of Eretz Yisroel, to buy land and set up colonies. Through this the Torah and Jewish belief will melt away, in the Holy Land and elsewhere, especially the belief in the coming of Moshiach, which is one of the Thirteen Principles of Belief. The Agudists in this area are the same as the Zionists, only worse, since they are hypocrites, and our Sages say (Sotah ) that one should be more afraid of hypocrites who pretend to be good than from those who are openly bad. I have written about this matter at length in my commentary Olas Tamid on the tractate Tamid.

At the end of the responsum the Avnei Nezer sums up his position as follows: "In short, the true mitzvah of settling in Eretz Yisroel is when he gets his sustenance from the profits of Eretz Yisroel. But if money is sent to him from abroad as a gift from the people

of another country, in my humble opinion this is not the true and complete mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel; still he fulfills the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel. And in my opinion, the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel only applies to a righteous man, such that if all Jews were like him they would be redeemed..." How is it possible to say that the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel is only when a man gets his livelihood from the profits of Eretz Yisroel? How could Hashem Yisborach command us to do something that is not in our control? A man cannot control whether he will have a livelihood from Eretz Yisroel or not. Our eyes see that many of the colonies need the continual help of those organizations or philanthropists abroad who established them (such as Rothschild). Without this help they do not have enough to live on, although they are working the soil like serfs. Their only profit is the profit of their evil inclination and the Satan, who made most of them leave behind their faith and their Torah, may Hashem have mercy. How can we say that this is the mitzvah of the Torah, that one should fulfill the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel only in such a way that he makes a profit from the soil there? What should he do if the expenses turn out to be more than the returns? How could one say such a thing? Would the Holy One, blessed is He, deal unfairly with His creations?<sup>15</sup>

Also, he writes that the mitzvah only applies to a righteous man such that if all Jews were like him they would be redeemed. This contradicts his previous words. For if the mitzvah was given for ignorant farmers, we cannot say that if all Jews were like this ignorant farmer they would be redeemed right away – then what would become of Torah study? Don't the Sages say that the redemption will come only in the merit of Torah study (Bava Basra 8a)? And if the mitzvah was given for someone who was a Torah scholar already when he lived outside Eretz Yisroel, and then he came to Eretz Yisroel to be a chalutz (chalutz means to take off, so a chalutz is one who takes off from himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven), to stop learning Torah and become a farmer – don't the Sages say, "All the times for redemption have passed, and the only thing lacking is repentance." The Rambam rules this way in his laws of Teshuva, 7:5: "When they repent at the end of their exile, they will be redeemed immediately." What kind of repentance is this, that he stops learning Torah in order to plow in the plowing season and plant in the planting season, and become involved with physical working of the land? Can we say regarding this that if all Jews were like him they would be redeemed? Is there anything more shocking and painful than this? Just as one cannot smash a barrel and save the wine inside, and just as one cannot cut off the head of an animal without killing it, so too a Jew cannot cut his head off from Torah study without causing his spiritual death.

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<sup>15</sup> There is a rule, stated by the Rema in Orach Chaim 656, that one is not obligated to spend more than a fifth of his money to fulfill a positive commandment. Certainly, then, he is not obligated to spend all his money, and certainly he is not obligated to take charity money to do a mitzvah. Therefore even if there is a mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel, one is not obligated to do it if he knows that he will not have a livelihood there and he will have to live on charity. The Minchas Elazar agrees that Hashem has nothing against a person who refrains from going to Eretz Yisroel for that reason. The Minchas Elazar's question seems to be concerned with people who are already living in Eretz Yisroel and trying to make a living there, but failing. He asks: is it their fault that they failed? Why should Hashem give them any less reward for the mitzvah than those who are living there self-sufficiently? Yet the Avnei Nezer seems to say that they would, in fact, get less reward.

It is not really necessary to write at length about the Avnei Nezer's points, for others have already disagreed with him. How can a man claim to be righteous enough to go to Eretz Yisroel and work its soil? He may have a sin of which he is unaware, and then he is no longer righteous, as all the Rishonim say. The Avnei Nezer writes further that even if one is not righteous, if his rebbe is righteous Eretz Yisroel will accept him and he may go there and work in the colonies. This statement has given rise to all kinds of convoluted logic, creating an unholy mixture of Chassidus and Zionism. It seems that even if someone commits every sin in the Torah, if he is a follower of a tzaddik then he is also a tzaddik. Can we or are we allowed to believe that such things came out of the mouth of the famously righteous gaon the Avnei Nezer?

The Avnei Nezer also says that if one owns a field in Eretz Yisroel and makes money from it, even if he lives outside Eretz Yisroel he fulfills the mitzvah of dwelling in Eretz Yisroel. But the Rashbash, who is one of the Rishonim who holds that there is a mitzvah to dwell in Eretz Yisroel even during exile, disagrees explicitly with this. In responsum #1, he writes: "Wherever there is food and shelter there is settlement, and it is possible for a man to own gardens and orchards and houses, the core of a settlement, and yet not live there. So we see that creating a settlement is not considered dwelling."

Now let us quote the words of the earliest of the Rishonim, on whom our Torah is based: Rabbeinu Maharam of Rottenburg, quoted by the Tashbatz 559, regarding the mitzvah of going to Eretz Yisroel: "This is only if he accepts upon himself to be exceptionally strict and careful of any type of sin, and he will fulfill the mitzvos that apply in Eretz Yisroel. For if he sins there, he will be punished more than if he had sinned in the rest of the world. The Torah says (Devarim 11:12) that Hashem your G-d looks after the land; His eyes are always on it. One who rebels against the King in His palace is much worse than one who rebels outside the palace. This is why it is called 'a land that eats its inhabitants' (Bamidbar 13:32). Regarding those who wish to go there and act with lightheaded and quarrelsome behavior, Yirmiyah (2:7) said, 'You came and defiled My land,' and Yishaya (1:12) said, 'Who asked this of you, to trample My courtyards?'" These are the words of the Tashbatz.

Who can read these holy words, spoken with the fire of Hashem, emanating with holiness and purity from the mouth of the great gaon, the greatest of the Rishonim, the Maharam of Rottenburg, and not tremble to walk in the path of the Zionists? Or their twins the Agudists and the Yishuvists, or any other name by which they are known. The common denominator is that they are lacking the spirit of the holy Torah and the true faith in the coming of Moshiach, may it be soon.

It is also well known that the greatest of the Acharonim, Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz, in his work Ahavas Yonasan, forbade any return to the Holy Land during exile, even with permission from the nations. In the Haftorah for Parshas Vaeschanan we read: "Go up on a high mountain, announcer of Zion; lift up your voice with strength, announcer of Jerusalem; lift it up, do not fear, say to the cities of Judah: here is your G-d" (Yishaya 40:9). Rashi notes that the word "announcer" is in the feminine, while later on (52:7) the word "announcer" is used in the same sense, but in the masculine. Rashi explains that if

the Jewish people deserves it, the redemption will come quickly like a man, but if not, it will be weak like a woman and will be delayed until the End. Based on this, Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz explains the verse in Shir Hashirim (2:7), "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to arouse or awaken the love before she desires." Here too, the word "techpatz" – she desires – is in the feminine. The meaning is that the Jewish people, who is the speaker in this verse, cries out to the nations (the "daughters of Jerusalem") with a curse and an oath: "Do not arouse and do not awaken the love towards the ingathering of Israel!" Even if all the Jews are ready to go to Jerusalem, and all the nations agree, still she cries out that, G-d forbid, she will not go there. For the end is hidden, and perhaps now is not the true time, only a temporary moment of favor. In a short time they will sin, and be forced into exile again, G-d forbid, and that exile will be worse than the previous one. Therefore she requested that they not go until "she desires," that is, until the time arrives when the earth is filled with knowledge. After that time, the Creator promises that the Jewish people will never lack anything, for that is the true time. Therefore, the prophet Yishaya calls the announcer feminine, for the end of the exile will be slow in coming, but once it comes, "Lift up your voice with strength" – for there will be nothing to fear. There will never be, G-d forbid, another exile, for "say to the cities of Judah, here is your G-d" – He Himself will come and redeem you.

And so, religious Jewish brethren, take these words to heart, for they are not mere words, but our life, our belief, our Torah is at stake. Let us and our children and grandchildren keep very far in all ways from all these groups, so as not to fall into their net. For they are truly destroying the Land and preventing the redemption. Carefully guard the enactment of our teachers and ancestors – G-d of Meir, answer me! – and increase your donations to the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes funds. In his merit, may we merit the redemption amongst the faithful of the chosen people, the son of David, our righteous moshiach, soon in our days, amein.

For a long time after writing the above, I was still troubled by a question. The Gemora says explicitly in Gittin 8b that if a Jew buys a field in Eretz Yisroel or even in Syria, we may ask a non-Jew to write the document on Shabbos if necessary, because when it comes to settling in Eretz Yisroel the Sages waved the prohibition of asking a non-Jew to do work on Shabbos. This statement is also found in Bava Kama 80b, and codified by the Rambam in his Laws of Shabbos (6:11). If so, the Rambam contradicts himself, for here he is saying that settling in Eretz Yisroel is a mitzvah, and in Sefer Hamitzvos he does not count settling Eretz Yisroel among the mitzvos that apply in our time, after the destruction of the Temple. The outstanding gaon Rabbi Yosef Rosen of Dinaburg has already raised this question in one of his works, and he leaves the contradiction in the Rambam as an unsolved mystery.

This halacha is brought in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 306:11, and the Rema says in the name of the Ohr Zarua that the document must be written in the gentile language. This follows the opinions that writing the gentile language is not a Torah violation of Shabbos, only a Rabbinic one; since a non-Jew is writing, that makes it two steps away from a Torah violation. The Gemora says that the rule applies even in Syria; see the Magen Avraham who questions why this should be so.

However, in my humble opinion we could answer by differentiating between the time of the Gemora, which was shortly after the destruction of the Temple, and today. The Gemora says in Megillah 10a, "I heard that we may offer sacrifices although there is no Temple." The issue of offering the Korban Pesach, should we receive permission to do so, has been discussed by Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Chasam Sofer. The author of the work Avodah Tamah, after a lengthy analysis, concludes that we may not. In a section entitled "The Defilement of the Congregation", he writes that since we are all defiled from dead bodies, and a defiled congregation cannot offer sacrifices without the atonement of the Kohein Gadol's forehead plate, today as there is no forehead plate we cannot do it. This is all because we are defiled. But in the time of the Tannaim and Amoraim they still had the ashes of the red heifer, as the Tosefta (Parah 3) states: "The ashes descended with them to Babylonia..." Rabbi Yaakov Emden also says this in Sheilas Yaavetz 1:89, and he brings proof from Chagigah 25a, "The group purifies its wine and oil in Galilee." The same proof is cited by the Mishneh Lamelech in the Laws of Mourners, Chapter 3. It is also known that the Arizal instructed his disciples never to use practical kabbalah, since we have no ashes of the red heifer in our time to become clean. The Talmudic Sages, he says, had the right to use it because they still had some ashes of the red heifer in a secret place for exceptional individuals to use.

Since they could become clean, that is why the Sages waived the prohibition of asking a non-Jew to do work in order to facilitate Jews living in Eretz Yisroel and nearby Syria, to keep the Jewish settlement alive in Jerusalem and its environs, so that they could purify themselves and offer sacrifices if permission were ever granted. But if no Jews lived there, who would offer the sacrifices if permission were granted? Jews would have to travel in from afar, a difficult journey in those days, over dangerous roads and stormy seas, and by the time they arrived perhaps the government would revoke its permission. So this buying of property on Shabbos was permitted not because of the positive commandment to settle in Eretz Yisroel – a commandment that does not apply after the destruction of the Temple – but due to an enactment of the Sages that Jews should live in Eretz Yisroel. They made the prohibition on asking a non-Jew to do work, and they suspended their own prohibition in this case. One should not be surprised that they permitted asking a non-Jew to do work for a reason other than a Torah commandment, for we find that they permitted asking a non-Jew to light a candle for the sake of one Shabbos – pleasurable eating on Shabbos – even in a case when the Jew has already eaten the main part of the meal and thus there is no Torah commandment to eat any more according to any opinion. Now there is no contradiction: the Rambam did not count this in the Sefer Hamitzvos because it is not from the Torah, but in the Yad Hachazakah in the laws of Shabbos the Rambam follows his practice of bringing all the laws in the Talmud, past, present or future, and so he brings this law that in Talmudic times one could buy property in Eretz Yisroel on Shabbos and ask the non-Jew to write the document. It was necessary in that period, but nowadays when we have no ashes of the red heifer and cannot bring sacrifices, it should not be considered even a Rabbinic mitzvah.

We mentioned above that Syria has the same status as Eretz Yisroel for this purpose, and one may buy property there by asking a non-Jew to write on Shabbos. The Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 331:1) state that if a Jew buys a field in Syria, he has a Rabbinic obligation to separate terumah and maaser even nowadays. The same halacha is stated by the Mabit (2:196). But as far as we know, this halacha is not kept by the Jews of Syria. This question has been raised in the responsa Beis Dino Shel Shlomo (Orach Chaim, end of siman 2) and in the responsa of Ram Galante (a grandson of the Maharam Galante). The Beis Dino Shel Shlomo testifies that no one ever kept terumos and maaseros in Syria, even as far back as the time of the Rishonim. Only a few rabbis were strict about it in his time. The Radvaz (2:659) testifies that no one protested against those who did not keep the laws of terumos and maaseros in Syria. Mahari Pinto in his responsa Nivchar Mikesef (Yoreh 23) leans toward a strict ruling on the vines of Syria. Still, we need an explanation for why, according to the Radvaz, no one protested against those who did not keep the laws. If this is a real Rabbinic prohibition, why did no one protest? So this seems to support my contention above, that this was an enactment meant only for Talmudic times, so that Jews would be ready to bring the Pesach offering in large numbers, although there was no Temple.<sup>16</sup> When the Syrian Jews saw that the Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisroel and Jerusalem itself was almost gone, they decided that it was enough if Jews kept the Rabbinic obligations of terumah and maaser in Eretz Yisroel and not in Syria. This explains the old Jewish custom in Syria – if Jews are not prophets, they are the children of prophets – and that is why no one protested against them, as the Radvaz says.

However, we can still ask: a Rabbinic enactment is always in force, even when the reason no longer applies, until it is repealed by a later beis din. This is stated clearly by the Gemora in Beitzah (5b), that when the prohibition to ascend Mt. Sinai was due to the Divine Presence and later the Divine Presence departed, one would have thought that the prohibition is automatically gone, and requires no specific sign to repeal it, yet the Torah says that the Jews were only allowed to ascent the mountain after hearing the sound of the horn. Here too, although the enactment about buying property was only so that Jews should be close to Jerusalem and be ready to bring the Pesach offering en masse, should the opportunity present itself, and now the Jewish settlement was gone from the Holy City for several hundred years, until the time of the Ramban when there were not even ten Jews in Jerusalem, as he writes in his letter, still we need another beis din to permit it.

But we can say that most likely it was repealed in the time of the Amoraim or later, since we see that even in ancient times the Syrian Jews did not keep this, and Jews are not to

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<sup>16</sup> This translator fails to understand what the Minchas Elazar means here. The obligation of terumah and maaser in Eretz Yisroel (and in Syria which has the same status) has nothing to do with the fact that the Sages encouraged Jews to live there in case the government would grant permission to bring the Pesach offering. The Minchas Elazar himself never saw this obligation of terumah and maaser as contradictory to the Rambam's position that there is no mitzvah to settle in Eretz Yisroel nowadays. Only the law that one may ask the non-Jew to write on Shabbos troubled him, and this he explained by saying that there was a Rabbinic encouragement to live in Eretz Yisroel in the time when Jews were ritually clean. If the Rabbinic obligation of terumos and maaseros was in order to encourage Jews to live there, it should have ceased when the ashes of the red heifer went lost.

be suspected of violating the halacha. Surely they must have known that there was a later beis din that repealed it. Therefore, the Rabbi Yosef Caro wrote in Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch the halacha that one must keep the laws of maaser, since he did not know for certain that they repealed it. But the Radvaz says that we do not protest against those who do not keep them because they must know that it was repealed.

The reason for their thinking that the enactment was certainly repealed was as follows: we find that the Tannaim at the time of the destruction of the Temple, under Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, passed several new enactments to provide for the possibility that the Temple might be rebuilt any minute. For example, they forbade the new crop of grain for the entire second day of Pesach, lest the Temple be suddenly rebuilt and the Omer offering need to be brought before the new crop may be eaten. These enactments consoled the people and gave life to their pained souls, to wait for the building of the Third Temple any day. Fifty years later, when Rabbi Akiva thought that Bar Kochba was Moshiach, Rabbi Yochanan ben Torasa said to him, "Akiva, grass will grow on your jaws before the son of David comes" (Yerushalmi Taanis 4:4). Fifty years later, in the time of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, we find the following words occurring many times in the Zohar, "Oh, the exile is stretching so long!" So we see that Hashem revealed to them that this last bitter exile would last hundreds of years. So why should they sit and wait in Jerusalem? Furthermore, they were almost totally expelled from Jerusalem. So the enactment of terumos and maaseros in Syria was surely repealed in the time of the Tannaim and Amoraim. Since this was likely, no one protested against those who did not keep terumos and maaseros in Syria. And do not ask me why Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai's enactments were not repealed as well, for we do not compare one enactment to another.

Someone showed me that the great Talmudic scholar, master of perfecting the texts, Rabbi Yishaya Pick (Berlin), in his commentary on the Mishnah entitled Yesh Seder Lamishnah, printed in Vilna, on Challah 4:11, speaks about this law that we may ask a non-Jew to write the document on Shabbos. He says, "Know that the Rif in Gittin and Bava Kama does not mention this law, and neither does the Rosh in Gittin. The Rosh in Bava Kama does bring it, but he leaves out the part about Syria. And the Tur in Orach Chaim 306 makes no mention of the law that one who buys a house in Eretz Yisroel is allowed to ask the non-Jew to write on Shabbos. Probably the reason for the Rif, Rosh and Tur is that they hold that the obligation of settling Eretz Yisroel only applied in the times when the Jewish people lived in its land. But now, due to our many sins, what settling of Eretz Yisroel can there be in this? See Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 409 who permit the raising of sheep and goats in Eretz Yisroel nowadays, since the land is not in Jewish hands. From the omission of the Rosh and the Tur, it seems that nowadays, when gentiles rule over the land and they have the power to expel Jews from wherever they live, and certainly considering the opinion of Rabbeinu Chaim Cohen (Tosafos Kesubos 110b) that it is not a mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel nowadays, it is no longer permitted to have the non-Jew write the document on Shabbos. However, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 306:11) does codify this law, and he seems to hold that even in our time it is permitted. In my humble opinion, it is not clear whether it is permitted, considering all the reasons mentioned above."



Rabbi Yishaya Pick writes more on this subject. Now, I know this can be debated further. Regarding what he says that "gentiles rule over the land and they have the power to expel Jews from wherever they live," the gentiles who unfortunately call themselves Jews will reply that now they have the weak reed of the Balfour Declaration (the Baal-Peor disaster). But the true intent of the British has already been revealed. In truth, the land will not be ours until the Holy One, blessed is He, returns it to us through Moshiach, may it be soon in our days. Whoever wishes to know the truth can find it in these words.

The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 306:20) provides a different rationale as to why the Sages permitted buying property in Eretz Yisroel on Shabbos. Since we see that the Torah prohibits a Jew from selling or giving land to a gentile in Eretz Yisroel (lo sechanem), the Sages were lax about the laws of Shabbos in order to reinforce the opposite: Jews buying land in Eretz Yisroel. The Sages realized that if Jews stopped buying land in Eretz Yisroel, they would move out and thus transgress "lo sechanem", for although they would not sell directly to the gentiles, the gentiles would obviously not leave the land empty and ownerless. However, this explanation of the Magen Avraham is questionable, because just as there is no mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisroel nowadays, there is no prohibition on selling land to a gentile, for the two commandments go hand in hand.

Earlier we wrote, based on the Tosefta, that the Amoraim had the ashes of the red heifer. But this is questionable, for the Tosefta says as follows: "Rabbi Shimon says: Their ashes went down with them to Babylonia. They said to him: But then it became defiled by the gentile land! He said to them: The Sages only decreed that the gentile lands should be defiled after they returned from Babylonian exile." So during the Second Temple era, and certainly after the destruction of the Second Temple, during exile, in the times of the Tannaim and Amoraim, if they had taken any ashes of the red heifer with them out of Eretz Yisroel, it would have become defiled by the gentile lands. Still, those Tannaim who lived in Eretz Yisroel after the destruction could still have used the ashes of the red heifer, and thus our words were correct that the Sages enacted that Jews should live in Eretz Yisroel so that they might be able to offer a sacrifice.

Someone showed me now the responsa Haelef Lecha Shlomo by Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (Even Hoezer 2:118) in which he rules according to the Rambam that there is no mitzvah nowadays to live in Eretz Yisroel. He brings proof from the righteous rabbanim and chassidim who had the ability to move to Eretz Yisroel yet did not, and he cites the example of Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin. I do not understand why he mentioned only him, who was smuggled out of prison, where he had been because of the informing against him, and over the border, out of Russia, as we received the story by tradition from our holy forefathers (my grandfather, Rabbi Y. Shmelka of Sasov, was one of the foremost activists in getting him out of prison and into the Austrian empire). So it is obvious that he could not choose to move to whichever country he wished, for perhaps Turkey, which ruled over Eretz Yisroel, was politically subservient to Russia at that time, and might have extradited him back into the hands of the wicked Russians, as he was considered an

anti-government criminal, accused of trying to establish a Jewish government. So he found asylum through the efforts of the citizens of Tchernowitz, Austria. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger should rather have cited the other righteous rabbis and chassidim, almost all of whom did not move to Eretz Yisroel, although they were free and secure and could have moved without any obstacles. Had they held that there was a mitzvah to settle in Eretz Yisroel, they would certainly have done it – some of them would have given their lives just to fulfill a small Rabbinic commandment, all the more so a Torah commandment.

And who is greater than our teacher, my grandfather, the Pnei Yehoshua, who comments on the Gemora in Kesubos 111a, "Rabbi Elazar said: Whoever lives in Eretz Yisroel lives without sin." The Pnei Yehoshua says that if one lives there to enjoy the beautiful fruits of Eretz Yisroel, or for other personal benefits, then the land does not atone for his sins. It is no better, he says, than Yom Kippur, which only atones for those who repent and believe in its atonement. So certainly one who does not desire the mitzvah and the holiness of Eretz Yisroel, only the benefit of his body, does not get the atonement it provides.<sup>17</sup>

These words are a great rebuke to those who go now to Palestine. Not only do they go only to better their financial status (so they think), but they do not believe, and actually insult the belief in the coming of Moshiach, for whom we wait every day. There is snake poison in the hearts of every one of the members of these destructive organizations, whatever their names may be, and certainly regarding them it was said, "And you came and defiled My land," as the Pnei Yehoshua says there.

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<sup>17</sup> Here is the complete text of the Pnei Yehoshua: "Rabbi Elazar said: Whoever lives in Eretz Yisroel lives without sin, as it says, 'And let not those who dwell in Jerusalem say that they are sick, for the nation that lives there is forgiven of sin' (Yishaya 33:24). This is only speaking about someone who lives there for the sake of the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisroel, which is a place of holiness, in order that the merit of Eretz Yisroel might protect him, that he not come to sin. Then, even if sometimes he does stumble in sin (chet), or even a deliberate sin (avon), because his evil inclination overpowered him, the merit of living in Eretz Yisroel will probably bring about that he does not go to bed that night without repenting of his sin. For after he has sinned and he finds himself standing in a holy place, surely he will regret his actions and repent and be healed. But if someone lives there by chance, or because he was born there, or to enjoy the beautiful fruits, or similar reasons, and certainly one who rebels against it and makes light of the holiness of the land, to follow his evil inclination – about such a dead person the Torah did not speak. On the contrary, regarding him it is said, "And you came and defiled My land, and My inheritance you made an abomination" (Yirmiyah 2:7). Therefore we find that when the sins of our forefathers mounted, we went into exile from our land, and the place where the Temple once stood became desolate. Where was the promise that 'the nation that lives there is forgiven of sin'? So it must be as I am saying. Even without this proof, it makes sense that it should be that way, for even if we say that Eretz Yisroel atones completely, it cannot be better than Yom Kippur, which atones completely, and yet if one says, 'I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone,' Yom Kippur does not atone. So you must admit that when it says, 'whoever lives in Eretz Yisroel lives without sin,' it means even if he commits some sin, temporarily forgetting about the holiness of the land as his evil inclination overpowered him. In such a case the merit of Eretz Yisroel causes him to regret the sin, as said above."

See also the Pnei Yehoshua on Pesachim (8b), where the Gemora says, "Why are there no fruits of Ginosar in Jerusalem? So that Jews ascending for the festivals should not say, if we had only come to eat these fruits it would have been enough reason to come, and thus their coming would turn out not to be for the sake of the mitzvah." The Pnei Yehoshua explains that if they come for a reason other than the mitzvah, they do not have the benefit of the Torah's promise that one going to do a mitzvah will not be harmed.

See also what the Responsa Beis Shlomo says (Yoreh Deah 2:94) that the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisroel does not supercede honor to father and mother. See also the Sephardic Responsa Mayim Rabim (Yoreh Deah 48).

And see Otzar Hachaim on the 613 Mitzvos, by my wife's grandfather, may his merit protect us, under the positive commandment to take possession of Eretz Yisroel: "Regarding why settling Eretz Yisroel was not counted as a mitzvah, the reason is that something is only counted as a mitzvah if it can be fulfilled with human power. But a mitzvah that requires G-d's help and prophecy cannot be counted in the number. And we do not find any mitzvah that a person should be a prophet or have Divine inspiration. How could Hashem command us a mitzvah that we are incapable of fulfilling...and the same is true of all the wars. And such a mitzvah does not come into the count in any situation. And it is forbidden to make any ways or conquering without the command of a prophet. And a mitzvah which is dependent upon prophecy cannot be counted as a mitzvah...and on the contrary, we are foresworn not to rebel against the governments, but must accept their authority with love until the coming of the righteous Moshiach. And this will not happen in a natural way, but with numerous signs and wonders."

This concurs with much of what we have said above: that we cannot say like the Avnei Nezer that it is a mitzvah to work the land in Eretz Yisroel and that if it does not bear fruit one does not fulfill the mitzvah. But that is not in our power: to force the Master and the Creator of the world, may His name be blessed. And similarly the rest of his words are shocking, with apologies to his honor.

It may also be that in our days, since these new, quickly-spreading groups have made this the center of their heretical ideology, even the Ramban and those who hold like him would agree that we should not put effort into this mitzvah. It is better to do nothing. This is comparable to the one-stone altar called a matzeivah, which was used by the Avos and was beloved to Hashem at that time, but later became forbidden because the idol worshippers made it part of their religion (Rashi on Devarim 16:22).

And so I have seen just now in the book Divrei Yechezkel by the Shinnover Rebbe, in the letters at the end of the sefer (which has just been printed). See there what he writes against the Zionists who found colonies and the like, that they are destroying our Holy Land. And the main thing is to strengthen the Old Yishuv in Eretz Yisroel by contributing generously to the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes funds, as our forefathers did.

And see Divrei Sofrim by Rabbi Tzadok Hakohein from Lublin (paragraph 14), who concludes that the halacha is like the Megillas Esther on the Rambam, who says that the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel was only in the time when the Temple stood.

May we merit to fulfill the mitzvah of our G-d and go back upright to our land with the gathering of the exiles and the coming of Moshiach, may it be soon in our days.

Chaim Elazar Shapiro

## Chapter 95: Another Letter From the Minchas Elazar

Wednesday of Parshas Pinchas, 5691 (1931), at the Teplitz resort.

To my honored friend and friend of the Jewish people, who has done many good deeds, the great rabbi and gaon, tower of strength, banner of his people, of superior lineage, Rabbi Avraham Chaim Dovid Schreiber, shlita, president of the Galician kollel in the Holy Land.

I received your letter through the post office of Munkacz and despite my suffering and illness, may Hashem Yisborach heal me quickly, my love compels me to respond to your letter immediately. I will address your points in order, with Hashem's help.

Regarding the book Os Chaim Veshalom, it is a rare book and I have only one copy, and when you come to my house I will try to make it available to you.

Regarding the Agudah, I am surprised to hear that the booklets printed here were never sent to you or never reached you. The booklets were written by the scholarly and righteous rabbis and they discuss the extent of the problem with many general facts and details, explaining how the Agudah is opposed to the pillars of Hungarian Orthodoxy, which is our way that we have inherited from our holy ancestors, may their merit protect us. I do not have a copy of the pamphlet here because I am in a resort spa. But I will still do your bidding and briefly write a few facts, with Hashem's help, according to the amount of time and energy I have, as I remember them.

1) Regarding the school in Warsaw which they call a "Mesivta" on its stationery and building, we look not at the name but at the reason why our teachers, the great Maharam Schick, the Ksav Sofer, the Divrei Chaim and all their contemporaries in Hungary and Galicia forbade such schools: because they combine secular studies with Torah studies and halacha under one roof, the defiled and the clean together. It makes no difference which language it is – Hungarian in Hungary, German in Germany, Polish in Poland – this is forbidden under the Torah, for the words of the rabbis are more strict than Torah. Nine years ago the Gerrer Rebbe called me in his letter – I have all the original copies of his letters, if you wish to see them – to come see the Mesivta, so that I could see that all the emissaries I had sent before who had told me bad things about it were slandering it, just like the cup that was found in the bags of Yosef's brothers. There were no such secular studies there at all. But I came together with the rav of Kezmark and saw that there were definitely secular studies there. This is not the place to write at length about this, but briefly, after testing the boys who were a month away from rabbinic ordination, when I asked them three questions about the laws of treifos and three simple questions about the Rema and the Shach in Yoreh Deah, they were unable to answer at all, except for one student who answered a simple question in a doubtful way. And on the Gemora, Rashi and Tosafos of the first chapter of Kiddushin which they had just learned the previous semester, we asked them about the opinion of the Rambam about chupah being a valid method of betrothal, and it was as foreign to them as Spanish is to us. And their rebbe there, the brother-in-law of Reb Naftali, dayan of Warsaw, said, "What can I do?"

This they don't know; the secular studies they make them learn." Then I went to the principle of secular studies, and he told me in German, "Here in this seminary we cannot offer more than four levels. There in the Zionist Mizrachi seminary they have up to eight. And there they get bigger concessions from the state. Because here very much weight is placed on Talmudic studies and Shulchan Aruch." And after this test I said in my heart, behold these two teachers both speak the truth, unfortunately. Because these two things are contradictory, especially when under one roof. Each one pushes the other out.

They say that the Mesivta has become better, but for us it makes no difference. Even if they can get semicha there, it is forbidden to us under the prohibition of our holy forefathers and rabbis, may their merit protect us, to accept any rabbi or dayan from this school. And therefore it is forbidden for us to join such an organization as the Agudah that has such seminaries.

- 2) Under the auspices of this Agudah there are seminaries in Berlin and other German cities, as well as other countries, which are made like pork according to the standard of cleanness of the Temple, under the Hildesheimer system. Perhaps in the non-Jewish cities, where the previous Jewish generations have already been captured by the heresy, they serve the purpose of making clean the defiled. This is analogous to the peasants in many areas of southern Tyrol, who are able to eat a small amount of arsenic, an amount that would kill any other person, as I have written at length before. But for us, as far as our traditions from our fathers, this defiles the clean in the entire sense of the word. Who permitted us to join them in one organization and to do what they did in Warsaw?
- 3) Let us return to Poland and my visit there. Part of the purpose of my trip was to visit the graves of our ancestors and teachers in the various cities of Poland, and to gauge the Jewish situation there today. I came, for example, to cities like Shidlovitz and Koznitz, which were once full of Torah scholars, chassidim, G-d-fearing Jews, large batei midrashim full of people learning Gemora, Rashi and Tosafos every day and every night, their candles were never extinguished, many hundreds of boys and young men. And now – woe to us! I found them empty, dark. Why did this happen? I found out the answer from acquaintances there, rabbis who considered themselves neutral, not opposed to Gur but who had not joined Agudah, since they foresaw the great ruination that would come of them, even then at the beginning. And they said to me, "What should we say? The Zionists took all the empty Jews who were once lightheaded sinners and made them into complete gentiles. The Mizrachim took the ignorant masses and workers who had previously had a little bit of faith, and they made them into heretics. And the Agudists took the boys who learned in the beis medrash away from their learning<sup>18</sup>, and put them in seminaries. And the reason is obvious and

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<sup>18</sup> On such a case we could apply the words of the Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:1, "Acher looked and cut the plants. Who was Acher? Elisha ben Abuya, who used to kill Torah scholars. They said, any student that he saw progressing in Torah, he would kill. And not only that, but he would go into the house of study and see little children sitting before their books, and he would say, 'What are these people doing here? This one would make a good builder, this one would make a good carpenter, this one would make a good fisherman, this one would make a good tailor.' And when they heard what he said they would leave the study hall and go away. On him Scripture says, 'Do not allow your mouth to make your flesh sin.'" This is all brought in

revealed, that at the beginning a boy knew that if he succeeded in his learning and could say novel explanations and answer up a Tosafos and a Pnei Yehoshua, and spent a lot of time studying the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah or the Shach Choshen Mishpat, then he would become a man of distinction, an honored Torah scholar, as our Rabbis said: "Because at the beginning one learns for his own benefit, in the end he will learn for the sake of the mitzvah." And now in all the study halls the Agudists have intruded, and speakers from the Agudah come every week and every day. They hang signs in advance saying, "Tomorrow the great speaker, Harav Hagaon so-and-so will speak in this beis medrash on the subject of Agudah and settling Eretz Yisroel. His speech will be given in Ivrit (the Hebrew language of the Agudah, which is identical to the language of the Mizrachists and the Zionists, down to the last detail): 'Let us go to our land and work its vineyards! Let us arise and go! The time has already come for our redemption, to take our land! Balfour, may he live, will save us!'" (And the coming of Moshiach is not even mentioned.)<sup>19</sup> Woe to us! Besides the fact that it is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith – "I will wait for him to come every day – and the Rambam (Melachim 11:1) writes that anyone who does not believe in the coming of Moshiach, or one who does not wait for his coming, is considered a complete denier of the Torah of Moses. This is the way of the modern groups – they are preventing the redemption, unfortunately. Because when the boys in the beis medrash hear that learning Gemora, Rashi, Tosafos and Shulchan Aruch is not their final hope and goal, but rather to reach the level of being able to speak in Hebrew like this Agudist speaker, Harav Hagaon so-and-so, and their great goal is to go to Eretz Yisroel, to the fields of our land – they turn all their attention to the books of the Zionists which deal with this subject. And the only difference between them is what the Agudists say, that everything should happen through the spirit of Torah. The Mizrachists have also said the same thing, and in the Mizrachi organization there were many gedolim from Lithuania, and it is well known that they instigated people to join their organizations, just as the Agudists do now. But everything is false, without even a kernel of truth. In any case, this is why the study halls of Poland emptied out.

- 4) A great righteous man in Poland, who is not an Agudist, sent us a small book, which was used for education in the Agudist schools for boys about nine years of

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an abridged form in Tosafos, Chagigah 15a. Now, Acher only instigated children with his mouth, but in our days the Agudah does this with actions, with vain dreams of Palestine and with their hachsharah camps, may G-d spare us.

<sup>19</sup> In the newspaper of the Agudah, Darkeinu, issue 38, Thursday Parshas Naso, 5695 (1935), one writer writes as follows: "One who looks with an open eye at the development of the situation in Eretz Yisroel truly sees signs of the beginning of the redemption. We see the hand of Providence gathering one by one the children of Israel from the lands of their dispersal to Eretz Yisroel, as it is said, 'Hashem builds Jerusalem; He gathers in the dispersed of Israel.'" These are his exact words. "The hairs of the head stand on end when we see this black on white, written in the newspaper of a party that still calls itself charedi. Is this not complete heresy, denial – may G-d spare us – of the faith in the coming of Moshiach, may it be soon, that we believe will be a miraculous event, with the gathering of all the dispersed of Israel together, not like this redemption of development of Eretz Yisroel in these days through the permission of gentile leaders and with the efforts of sinners who are of Jewish birth, with their armies and organizations, by the handing down of certificates – can they apply to this the verse "Hashem builds Jerusalem"? May G-d spare us! And see a more lengthy example of this above in Chapter 68.

age. It was full of songs and poetry, "Let us go to our land," "Let us take our soil, to plant our vineyards," just like the songs of the Zionists. And afterwards, the story about the shoshana (i.e. girl) Rivka... And when you have a chance to pass through Mukachevo, please come by for a few hours to my house and I will show you all this. In these ways they want to help the fool, i.e. to defile the heart of Jews young and old.

- 5) And now we will speak a bit about the destruction of the Holy Land, that is, the kollelim of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, about which I raised an outcry during my debate with the Gerrer Rebbe, as soon as I had traveled from Warsaw to Gur together with the rav of Kezmark and others of our friends. This debate lasted about six hours in the afternoon, including some of the night, and almost all of it was about the Agudah. On many points he at first conceded I was right and promised before two kosher witnesses to change – to change the name "Agudah" and replace it with another name which he would choose in the honor of his fathers of righteous memory, and to change the place, i.e. to stop colonizing the Holy Land and only contribute to the funds of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, and to change the actions, i.e. the education system and the Mesivta, which we had found to be defiled ("mesoavta"), to remove all the secular studies and it should be like all the proper yeshivos – all this he promised me many times with his own mouth. And he promised to make a gathering on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz in Warsaw. 21 men would be present, 10 from our side and 10 from the Agudah side, plus the Gerrer Rebbe, who would preside over the meeting. And from all this he retracted right away, with various excuses. And in particular he said that there would be no time for the rabbis of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah of the Agudah to deal with this. All this I related at the gathering at Chopp on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, and the resolution were printed, whatever was possible and necessary to print. It was reprinted with the signatures of about 50 gedolim and tzaddikim from all the countries. And then, shortly afterwards in Marienbad, the president of Fishtian, Weber, showed me the letter of the Gerrer Rebbe – I recognized it as his handwriting – which he wrote to Dr. Cohen of Ansbach-Vienna, in which he denies all that he promised us regarding the Agudah. This is enough for anyone who is wise and can understand on his own. I saw that it was not even worthwhile to deal with this anymore. For even from his first letter on the subject telling me not to spread the word of this in Galicia at all, and especially not in West Galicia or Slovakia, where many of the righteous rabbis agree with me, and they transgressed this. And the results of the debate with the Gerrer Rebbe were almost all written down by me in a special booklet, and it will be printed with Hashem's help by one of our kehillah members under the title Tikun Olam, with all the letters mentioned above. If they do not retract from their actions and their propaganda. In any case, now after the destruction wrought in the Holy Land and elsewhere, we will print this, and perhaps Hashem Yisborach will have mercy on us in the meantime with the coming of Moshiach.

In any case, let us return to the subject of Eretz Yisroel and Rabbi Meir Baal Haness. We recognized the destruction and the loss right away, when we saw that in all the hotels, non-partisan Jewish hotels, at which guests of all parties stayed, there were

only two charity boxes, that of the Zionists and that of the Agudists, and the box of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness was not present at all.

- 6) They were drunk with happiness over the mandate of Balfour of London, similar to the story of Parshas Ki Sisa, although I had cried out and printed then earlier a notice and a bitter outcry in the name of our rabbis, the greatest of the Rishonim, the Maharam of Rottenburg and the Tashbatz who quotes him, and the great Acharonim, Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz in the book Ahavas Yonasan on the Haftorah of Vaeschanan, who says there is a command and a warning not to go to Eretz Yisroel at the end of exile and work the land, even with the permission and willingness of all the peoples, until Hashem Yisborach redeems us through the son of Dovid as He has promised us. And I printed then also a protest against our friend Rabbi Avraham Frenkel of Pest, for his traveling to Switzerland for the gathering of the Agudists. Their Agudah was not founded in the land of Hungary, and none of our gedolim were sent there. He went on his own. Only in the path of the system of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, which our rabbis the Beis Yosef and the Alshich founded for us, as well as rabbis outside of Eretz Yisroel, will we go. These kollelim we will support, with Hashem's help. But they have done the opposite, as our eyes see and you know.
- 7) And as our Rabbis, may their merit protect us, have taught us, if they go before the coming of Moshiach to Eretz Yisroel to work the soil, as mentioned, there will be anger, may G-d spare us, and exile and terrible travails. Furthermore, this has already come true in our Holy Land (in 1929). My heart goes out because of the slain! At the time of the slaughter I was in Marienbad, and messengers came from the Gerrer Rebbe, who was also there. And also I sent to him great rabbanim and respected members of my kehillah, an entourage of mine who made an impression even on the Zionists there, saying that some of the important people should go to Vienna and Prague, to the consulates of England, to bring an end and a cease-fire via radio to the slaughters in Jerusalem in the Holy Land, by asking our brethren the Zionists, Mizrachists and Agudists to completely forego their rights under the Balfour Declaration, which is in any case words of vanity. And even at that time, the Gerrer Rebbe in his humility said that the Agudists have only a small number there (in Eretz Yisroel). And I answered him: "Even so, Dovid Hamelech said, 'My portion, Hashem, said my soul...' Let us at least forgo our portion on behalf of the Orthodox Jews, and then everyone will see that all the losses and slaughters are only because of the stubbornness and bias of the arrogant irreligious, the Zionists and the Mizrachists. But all this did not help. He did his part at the Knessia in Vienna the following week; through the chazzan's chanting of Malei Rachamim for the souls of those slain (by them) they fulfilled their obligation, doing true kindness with the living and the dead.
- 8) And as my own eyes saw in the Holy Land, who are the Agudists now in Jerusalem? A small child could write their names. There are in Jerusalem, thank G-d, many hundreds of truly zealous, G-d-fearing individuals, who are ready to put their lives on the line. They too stand apart and cry out against the Agudah and its tactics.



- 9) And did we not see the great zeal of the Agudists? Rabbi A. (Gerrer Rebbe?) was in Jerusalem many times and went to visit the Zionist heretic (Kook?), even after he had dedicated the [Hebrew] university of Bible criticism, and had a drink with him – woe to the eyes that see this and the ears that hear this! Shame covered our face when we were there in the Holy City. His love for Dr. Carlebach and Dr. Cohen has known no bounds, since the time that Warsaw came under German influence. (Regarding this, his friends and relatives cried bitterly to me, saying that no salvation will come out of his friendship with these doctors.)
- 10) Surely it is known to you that even the religious community in Budapest has kept a distance from the Agudah. Also the communities of Slovakia have returned to Hungarian Orthodoxy, in the path of our fathers, not the path of the Agudists. They even forced their president, Weber, to give up any part he has in the Agudah newspaper, Yiddishe Press.
- 11) The girls schools, called by the Agudah "Beis Yaakov", have been called by the righteous and pious, true G-d-fearing Jews... and they are not mistaken. Even the neutral rabbis agree on this point. I have received protests from not a few communities, such as Miekhov in the province Kielce, that in the synagogue of the Chassidim they made a Queen Esther play, with women and girls in the mens section with the ark and the sefer Torah. They claim that they were permitted to do this in Russia and Poland under the Agudists. Also, those who live close to the prayer rooms of the girls schools have complained that during their silent prayers they heard the girls singing Lecha Dodi. Who ever heard of such a thing? Why do they have to teach songs to the girls? Did our fathers permit this?
- And believe me, I am only writing a tenth of the problems. In these years, I would not have written these things to anyone but you. Even to great rabbis I have not replied on these questions, for it is not worth it. Furthermore, I have already fulfilled my obligation of protesting on these things. The truth has been revealed in the whole world, and from day to day it is being revealed more and more.
- 12) On the subject of settling Eretz Yisroel itself, whether it is a mitzvah in our time after the Destruction of the Temple or not, I have already written at great length with Hashem's help (see above, Chapter 94).

I conclude with blessings of salvation, and in these days before Tisha B'av may light shine for the upright with the building of the Temple on the highest of mountains, with the coming of the righteous redeemer soon in our days. Please confirm that you received this letter.

Your friend who seeks your peace, waiting for the redemption soon,

Chaim Elazar Shapiro

### **Chapter 96: Another Letter to the Same Rabbi Regarding the Agudah**

- 13) On the subject of the Agudah, I will respond again in this second letter, but briefly. In most of the things you wrote we are in agreement. You wrote that in Germany and similar places it is possible that the Agudah did some good, but not

in Poland, and certainly not in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. This is true, and that was what I meant to convey in my previous long letter. I mentioned there that the Gerrer Rebbe wrote letters to me. In his first letter he wrote, "Every place and time is different; if the rabbis of Galicia or Hungary decide that this will bring no benefit to them, then of course it will be a damaging factor there, and they should not make an Agudah there." However, immediately afterwards his emissaries did just the opposite: they made great propaganda, whipping up enthusiasm for the Agudah in the cities of Galicia such as Sanz and Cracow, and in Slovakia. Why then should I go and speak to him again? Even if he would promise twice or a hundred times, we see that it is not under his control.

- 14) The Agudah leaders and the Mesivta claim that the government will not allow anyone to get a rabbinic position unless he attended the Mesivta's halacha and secular studies programs. But this is not true, as you yourself know. One need only take a test from one of their professors, and they are lenient on their tests.
- 15) You wrote that the Agudah pressured the government in Poland into passing an evil decree, that only three rabbis in all of Poland would have the right to grant government-recognized ordination. They would obviously be Agudah rabbis. This is a terrible sin, to wipe out Torah and to steal the right to ordain rabbis from the greatest and eldest of rabbis in the country. It also causes people to be drawn after the secular studies, in order to be similar to three rabbis who grant them ordination. This is the activity, this is the goal of the Agudah, unfortunately.

I remember when I was young, Hungarian Orthodoxy had a similar body of forty rabbis, and I was among them. Certain people suggested a similar law then, that only these forty be allowed to ordain rabbis. But almost all of the forty rabbis rejected this idea. All the more so in Poland, which is a much bigger country than Hungary. And to give the right to ordain to only three rabbis? The ears tremble to hear this! It is like a decree to violate the Torah, may G-d spare us, for many reasons. Their [the Agudah's] decree is harsher than Pharaoh's (the Polish government). Here too we see their desire to trample underfoot all the great rabbis and scholars of the land, and to step on the heads of the holy nation secretly and openly.

- 16) This was among the matters I debated with the Gerrer Rebbe. I said to him, "Even according to you, the Mesivta with its secular studies may be necessary for you because of your government, but our Sages say: If a man sees that his evil inclination is overpowering him, he should put on black clothing and wrap his head in black clothing and go to a place where no one knows him and do what his heart desires" (Moed Katan 17a). Tosafos' explanation (that the black clothing and strange environment will break his inclination) is well known, but other commentators say that the Gemora is talking about a case where it is absolutely necessary to commit the sin (see Sefer Chasidim). He holds that what he is doing is a sin for a good purpose. Still, he must do it in private; therefore he should go to a place where no one knows him and do it. He must cover himself with black clothing, i.e. keep the matter hidden from other people as much as possible, so that they might not learn from him and permit the thing in all places and all times. So even if the Gerrer Rebbe sees this as necessary in his country and his area, still that does not permit him to call on others to join the Agudah and commit this sin

for a good purpose, that they should do it en masse, in public. Rather it should be done quietly. The Agudah should not be spread to all the countries, permitting sins in the entire world."

- 17) You wrote that the Chasam Sofer writes that there is a mitzvah to settle Eretz Yisroel even in our time. But this is a dispute between the earlier authorities, the Rambam and the Ramban in Sefer Hamitzvos, as we have written (Responsa Minchas Elazar 5:16) in response to the Avnei Nezer's writings on the subject. It seems that what the Chasam Sofer wrote to Rabbi Amram Chassida and to Rabbi M. Lehrn of Amsterdam was only that we should continue to work for the good of the settlement in Eretz Yisroel via the system of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes kollelim. This is especially true in our time, in light of the violence and killings of our Jewish brethren caused by the colonists. The only rabbi who encouraged people and make a great noise about this movement to take action during exile, before the coming of moshiach, was Rabbi Tzvi Kalisher. He went too far in this, and the gedolim of the generation, Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Chasam Sofer, disagreed with him. Besides this, a special and beloved work has been printed now entitled "Avodah Tamah" by Rabbi Chaim Natanson of Altuna, disproving all Rabbi Kalisher's arguments.
- 18) The Agudah also founded the Chavatzeles school for girls, where secular subjects including Latin are taught, just like in a gynasium. Even the neutral rabbis, who had not yet taken a position about the Agudah, felt compelled to cry out against this. But their protest did not help, and the name of Rabbi... is signed on the school. Since then... and we are very upset. Woe to us that such has emerged from the leaders of our generation!

May Hashem Yisborach restore our judges as of old and our advisors as in the beginning, in the midst of the faithful of the chosen nation, and in the midst of salvation and redemption, and may we soon see the fulfillment of the verse, "And let them make one group ("agudah") to do Hashem's will with a full heart. Peace and all good from your friend who honors you with the honor of Torah,

Chaim Elazar Shapiro

Chapter 97: An Excerpt From Divrei Torah Volume 6, Paragraphs 82 and 25

I will copy here what I wrote to my friend, Rabbi... regarding his printing in Jerusalem of my responsa on the subject of the Agudah, under the title Divrei Ha'igeres:<sup>20</sup>

"You have left out many important things from the letters. On some of them, I gave you the benefit of the doubt, that due to government censorship you were afraid to mention the name of the head of the rabbinate (Kook), who is known for his heresy and unclean books, filled with abominations and the deceit of the heretics. Due to the sins of the generation, the government has given him power to rule over the heads of the holy nation. Thus you left out many things that should not have been left out, and

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<sup>20</sup> Chapters 95 and 96 above were made from this printed version.

so I will write them here, for I fear only Hashem Yisborach, and I act only for the sake of the honor of His name, His faith and His Torah.

"In paragraph 3), regarding the fact that the batei medrash of Congress Poland had emptied out of boys who once studied Gemora, Rashi and Tosafos in depth, something that I saw with my own eyes, and that this was caused by the speakers and propaganda of the Agudah, following the ways of the Zionists. Then I had written as follows: The Agudists started the practice of learning every day the Daf Hayomi (a name and idea which they made up), instead of learning carefully Gemora, Rashi and Tosafos. Whoever knows the taste of Torah wisdom and Gemora study understands what a painful foolishness and waste of time this is, for how can one learn every day a page which almost always ends in the middle of a subject, and often in the middle of a sentence. At that point they stop and say, 'Yisgadal Veyiskadash'! And if they learn until the end of the subject, it will mess up their whole schedule for they will no longer be on the Daf Hayomi. So this is all part of their vain ways, cutting up the Gemora into pages and calendars. Through this the taste of Torah and the living spirit of reason in learning Gemora will fade away. See Eglei Tal by the Sochatchover Rebbe, who says that even if one has pleasure from learning Gemora and its commentators, that pleasure is considered learning for the sake of the mitzvah. They are stopping every day in the middle of a subject, without any explanation or connection in the mind of the learners. I also wrote at length against this vanity in a responsum to a certain place. But they have done all this to blind the eyes of the wise and to twist the words of the righteous, who believe naively in the superficial good of the project, and will not penetrate to the core of the matter. When these people join Agudah they will automatically be ensnared in many serious sins, some of the most important things in the world, as I have explained in my letters.

"You have also omitted several things that are very true, due to your fear of politics in this audacious generation. This time your omission was worse, for it was at the beginning of a paragraph, paragraph 1. It should read as follows: 'The Mesivta in Warsaw is really a seminar, or in Polish, a seminaria – so it is written in Polish on the plaque of the building: Rabbinical Seminaria of Poland. And so it is on all the stationery. We do not look at the name alone, but also at the reason...!' And the truth is as I wrote it there, for there is no difference between eating one piece of forbidden fat, for which one incurs the penalty of kareis, or eating twenty pieces or more at once. Similarly, it makes no difference whether they have in the seminary (which, to blind the eyes of the wise, they call a Mesivta, when in truth it is mesoavta – defiled) eight levels of gymnasium, with which a student can graduate, or only four levels. One should not try to differentiate between the seminaries in Pest and Vienna, which taught real heresy and were forbidden by the gedolim, and this seminary in Warsaw, which merely teaches secular subjects. For when Dr. Jung of Brody proposed the Hebrew gymnasium in Cracow, Rabbi Avraham of Sochatchov wrote a letter against it, and from his letter we see that they did not teach any heresy there. Yet Rabbi Avraham and all the gedolim and tzaddikim of his generation forbade it. He writes in this esteemed letter that a mixture of evil and good is always more dangerous than pure evil. All his reasons apply to our case, where under one roof they eat the clean

and the unclean together, as mentioned in my letter, may Hashem spare us, and may He take us out from darkness to great light with the coming of Moshiach soon in our days.

25. I will copy here some of what I wrote as a rebuke to our colleagues the sages in Jerusalem, the holy city, may it be built soon in our days: "I received your letter and saw how much you wanted to hear my humble opinion on this matter. After the loss of the rights (or misfortunes) under the Balfour Declaration regarding settling the land, I quoted recently at a gathering the Gemora in Eiruvim 19a, 'The wicked, even at the door of Gehinom, do not repent.' (See what we have written about this above, Chapter 16.) And now I call upon you, my brothers and beloved friends, the zealots, Torah scholars and G-d-fearing Jews who are left. Behold, this third test (door of Gehinom in Jerusalem) is the most severe, and their sin has become too heavy to bear. This is the one thing that is important about this. Did you not see the page printed by Agudath Israel recently, after the downfall of Balfour and all his plans from the beginning until now? These wicked men (i.e. Agudists) do not repent; they want to continue serving the idol, and between the [unclean] lines, all the Zionism and their unholy service is hidden in it. Woe to them and woe to their souls! And now they want to further mislead the hearts of the good Jewish people and to spend money for their labor movement. Until when will you be silent? Aren't you able to protest? Aren't you considered 'one who is able to protest and does not protest'? May Hashem save us from the severe punishment that comes on such a person. And we have already explained that the word 'limchos' means only to protest, just as we find the word 'mecha'ah' used in the chapter Chezkas Habatim, that within three years the original owner must protest, and then he will eventually get his field back, even if it is still in the hands of robbers. But in this case, from the fact that the rabbis were silent, it seems as if they were happy with what is happening, G-d forbid.

"And believe me, I love Eretz Yisroel, may it be built soon in our days, and especially you, our friends, Jews zealous for Hashem, His Torah and His faith. And the thirteen days when I was in the Holy Land (corresponding to the thirteen years Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar spend in the cave - Shabbos 33b – one year for every day, through Hashem's kindness, may He be blessed) are inscribed in my memory up till and including the coming of Moshiach, with Hashem's help. When I was there, even at night my heart could not rest from trembling of holiness, as if I were lying in the beis medrash, inside in holy ark. Therefore I suggest a few things for you to keep in mind and be careful of.

1. The words of the Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 561:1) are well known, and I have already quoted them in my book Olas Tamid. He quotes what Rabbi Gershon Kitover, brother-in-law of our great teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, said about the prayer we say in Selichos, "When I see every city built up, and the city of G-d lowered to the lowermost pits." When Rabbi Gershon came to Jerusalem and saw the entire physical city standing, he said that "every city built up" refers to the physical Jerusalem, and "the city of G-d" refers to the Jerusalem in heaven.

2. Our grandfathers told us in the name of the Shifitivker Rebbe that when he came to Eretz Yisroel, he said, "On the way to Eretz Yisroel, before boarding the ship in Istanbul, I said to the Satan, 'A ticket for the ship costs a lot of money, and I cannot afford two of them. Choose one of the following: either you go to Eretz Yisroel and I will stay here and be free from you, or else you will remain here and I myself will go to Eretz Yisroel.' So he decided to stay in Istanbul and I alone went to Eretz Yisroel. As I traveled on the ship, I rejoiced at the prospect of living without the Satan. But when I arrived at the port in Eretz Yisroel, I saw the Satan standing there. I cried out in pain, 'What are you doing here? I left you in Istanbul and you said you would stay there.' He looked at me as if I were crazy and said, 'What am I doing here? This is my real home! And if you spoke with someone who looked like me in Istanbul, that must have been my emissary.'"
3. How deep are the words of our Sages and the words of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov! For this idea is explicit in the Asarah Maamaros by Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano (Chikur Hadin 2:7), on the verse, "Hashem will rebuke you, O Satan, and Hashem will rebuke you, he who chooses Jerusalem" (Zechariah 3:2). According to the commentaries, the subject of the words "he who chooses" is Hashem, as if it had said, "Hashem, Who chooses Jerusalem, will rebuke you." But this is a unlikely explanation, because besides the fact that we have to reverse the order of the words, it is also difficult to understand the words "he who chooses Jerusalem" in this context. Why is Hashem given this title only here? Therefore Rabbi Menachem Azariah explains simply that the subject is the Satan, and it reads as follows: "Hashem will rebuke you (i.e. spur you on), Satan, to be strong against the righteous Jews of Jerusalem." This explanation of Rabbi Menachem Azariah is quoted by the Yad Yehuda, and I wrote on my margin that this the true explanation, and this is the same as what the Shifitivker Rebbe said, that the Satan chose Jerusalem as his home, may Hashem save us and redeem us.
4. I will turn my attention a little to the holy Kabbalists of the Sephardim. In the book Emes Lyaakov (100:35), in the middle of a paragraph, he says as follows: Scripture states, "For this city existed on My anger and My wrath from the time it was built until this day" (Yirmiyah 32:31). For the Shell [of the Satan] exists on the anger and wrath of the Holy One, blessed is He. And this is what the prophet Yechezkel says, "This Jerusalem in the midst of the nations I have placed" (5:5), that the Temple was placed in the midst of Jerusalem [to counterbalance the Satan]... And therefore now that the Temple has been destroyed and the Shell has become powerful, we see with our eyes this strengthening of the Shell in Eretz Yisroel, and especially in Jerusalem, the Holy City. And I was looked very carefully and saw... and the reason is that since this is the place where they hold on, they have the most strength there, and they do not want to let people nullify them with their acts and their Torah learning. May it be Hashem's will that He take away the power of the wicked from the earth, and then Hashem will be King over the whole earth.

And now pay attention to all these four main subjects, sages who know secrets, men of understanding, angels. For Hashem has made good and evil correspond to each other, and a Jew in Jerusalem must be very strong, and strengthen oneself with all the

strength of the Torah. Through this we will come soon from the darkness into the light, you from there and we from here. May Hashem be with us and may He make us strong and give us courage at all times and peace and all good. And whatever is in my power to do I will do, with Hashem's help. Be strong and remember what makes us sad: the decline of the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness system due to all these parties, Agudists among them. In their hypocrisy they have done worse to us than all these other wicked people, in view of how they have caused others to stumble and be destroyed in Eretz Yisroel and elsewhere. Stand in the breach at all corners. May Hashem have mercy on His people and on His land, and may He act with zeal for His name and for the faith of His Torah, and redeem us soon with an eternal redemption, with the coming of Moshiach.

Chapter 98: Rabbi Yechezkel Halberstam of Shinova on Settling the Land

(A copy of this letter was sent to us by his grandson, the Kalishitzer Rebbe.)

Sunday of Parshas Tetzaveh, 5657 (1897)

To the honored Reb Yosef Feigenbaum,

I received your letter and I have already written to my friend, the wealthy and respected Reb Zechariah Mendel, to tell you in my name that no one should come to me regarding this matter. For the rabbi of Brotstein wrote me a letter at length, and he wrote that he was sent by this group (Chovevei Zion), and I responded to him also at length, that this thing is not right in my eyes. And the main thing is that the foundation of this group is that people should settle in Eretz Yisroel and work the soil and live on their own means. Even if through this group people will stop sending money to the poor people who study Torah in Eretz Yisroel, it is still worth it to them. The author [of Shivas Zion] says that one who lives in Eretz Yisroel, even if he throws off from himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvos, the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisroel is so great that it pushes aside the entire Torah. He writes that he takes this from a great person, Rabbi Pinchos Halevi Horowitz, author of the Haflaah.

**However, we say that it is better for one who desecrates the Torah to live in the rest of the world, because Eretz Yisroel cannot tolerate wicked people, as it says, "That the earth not vomit you out when you defile it" (Vayikra 18:28).** And as far as the words of the righteous author of the Haflaah, I apply the words of our Sages in Avos: "Sages, be careful with your words, lest students come and drink water in a bad place and make a chillul Hashem," just as this author has done. He has opened his mouth and said that in Eretz Yisroel it is allowed to throw off the yoke of the Torah, may his breath burst. And with Hashem's help, I have explained the words of the Haflaah in the proper way.<sup>21</sup> **However, sinners will stumble in these words. And**

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<sup>21</sup> The Gemora (Kesubos 110b) says, "One who lives in Eretz Yisroel is similar to one who has a G-d, and one who lives outside Eretz Yisroel is similar to one who has no G-d." The Haflaah asks: the word "similar" implies that really the one living in Eretz Yisroel has no G-d, and the one outside Eretz Yisroel has a G-d. If so, it is really better to live outside Eretz Yisroel. But this cannot be – the Gemora there is coming to explain why one should live in Eretz Yisroel! The answer is, he says, that in Eretz Yisroel

**our main hope is to support the Yishuv in Eretz Yisroel financially until Hashem Yisborach saves us and gathers us to do His will. And then we will see the fulfillment of the Scriptural verse, "And then the gentiles will stand up and watch your flocks" (Yishaya 61:5), and they will work the ground for us. But now there is no good in them traveling there to work the land.** And if you have the ability, write to those who are in charge of Galician kollelim in Jerusalem, Tzefas and Tiberias, and then you will see that I am correct. And therefore let them not come to me to speak about this matter, for I cannot give my approval to this group.

The words of your friend who seeks your peace,

Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam

Chapter 99:

The following is the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua Shapiro, the Ribatitcher Rebbe, and his father, Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh of Bluzhov, author of Tzvi Latzaddik, against Agudah, from the letter of his son the Istriker Rebbe, shlita.

Rabbi Israel Shapiro, rabbi of Prachnik, presently in Istrik

The evening of Friday, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Counting the Omer, Istrik

To my esteemed friend, Torah scholar, the pious and G-d-fearing Rabbi Moses Goldstein, gabbai of the Munkatcher Rebbe shlita.

I received your letter on Erev Pesach at noon, and at that point I did not have the ability to answer you, for I wanted to write the letter myself and not through my agent. Therefore I waited until today, and this is my answer. Regarding what you asked if it is true that the Agudists, who pride themselves that my grandfather and my father, of blessed memory, were part of the Agudah – in truth I cannot understand how anyone could make up such an outright lie. Isn't it known in our entire country and among all our communities that they did not belong to any group in the world. And although a famous fact does not need any proof, still I will write for your honor

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Hashem gives everything directly, whereas in the rest of the world it is through angels (see Ramban on Vayikra 18:25). Moreover, the blessings flow to the rest of the world through Eretz Yisroel. This is why Shlomo Hamelech said, "And they shall pray to you by way of their land..." (Melachim I 8:48). So one who lives in another part of the world, even if he keeps the Torah and thus has a G-d, is similar to one who has no G-d, because his blessings come through intermediaries. But one who lives in Eretz Yisroel, even if he does not keep the Torah and thus has no G-d, gets his blessings directly from G-d and thus appears to have a G-d. At the same time, it is worse to violate the Torah in Eretz Yisroel than in the rest of the world; the Haflaah's words never contradicted this fact.

This, explained the Shinnover Rebbe, was true only in the time of the Temple, when most of the Jewish people kept the Torah and they flourished in the land, living on Hashem's blessings (see Rashi on Shmuel I 26:19). Then even an individual who strayed from the path would appear to have a G-d. But nowadays, there is no blessing in the land, and the few Jews living in Eretz Yisroel need to be supported by the Jews of the rest of the world.



what I heard with my own ears from my father, of blessed memory, at the beginning of the night of Pesach, when he said the words, "Next year in Jerusalem." He said, "Not as all these groups want, to travel to Jerusalem, and not even like the Agudah, but rather next year in Jerusalem as we want to go, with the two moshiachs at our head. And the proof to this is that the numerical value of those three words, 'Leshanah haba'ah birushalayim,' is 'moshiach ben yosef umoshiach ben david.' For we ask for Eretz Yisroel and Jerusalem only with those two moshiachs, and not as they want." And from these words you can see how much these people were inclined to the Agudah, and this is sufficient.

I remain seeking your peace with heart and soul, waiting for the redemption of Hashem in the midst of all the Jewish people soon,

Yisroel, son of my father of blessed memory.

Chapter 100: The Komarno Rebbe

Shalom Saffrin, son of the holy rebbe of Komarno

I hereby join myself to the scholarly and righteous rabbis who fight the war of Hashem according to the platform of my brother-in-law, the Munkatcher Rebbe shlita. And especially since my father, may his merit protect us, has already signed on this ban against the Agudah, which is a new idea which our fathers never imagined. And anyone who seeks the truth knows that the Agudah is like the other parties whose way it is to go and harm the Torah, and he who guards his soul should keep far from them. Who can be unafraid the severe warnings and powerful voices of the rabbis and righteous men of our generation? Whoever listens, may it be good for him, and may the blessings of good come upon him. And may Hashem Yisborach give us the privelege of seeing the uplifting of the pride of Israel and the holy Torah, and may He lift up the pride of His moshiach, soon in our days, amein.

Shalom Saffrin

Chapter 101:

The Agudah party has revealed its inner intentions recently by joining openly with the Zionists, as the stones of their own walls testify on them, and they call out of their mouthpiece in Eretz Yisroel, the newspaper Kol Yisroel, issue 8, Parshas Toldos 5696 (1935):

### **Agudath Israel and the Jewish Agency**

On Wednesday of last week a joint meeting took place between the Jewish Agency for Eretz Yisroel and Agudath Israel, concerning the matter of the important political question which now presents itself. From the side of the Agency, Mr. Shertok and Mr. Ben-Gurion participated. From the side of the Vaad Leumi, Mr. Ben-Tzvi. From the

side of Agudath Israel, Rabbi Horowitz, Rabbi Blau, Rabbi Senkowitz and Mr. Sirkes. Those gathered came to an agreement on most points, and a contract was drawn up regarding the political questions inside and outside.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore we consider it our obligation to print here the warning and ban against the Zionists and their Hebrew gymnasium. The ban against the Zionists has already spread throughout the world, and this combination (Zionism and secular studies) is especially sinful. The following protest was printed in Mukachevo at the urging of the town board (akrut?) and the Torah-observant Jews here, under the leadership of our master the Rav shlita, who has taken a leading role in the fight against the current spirit of heresy, may G-d spare us:

**Protest, Warning and Ban of the Torah**  
By the rabbis of Podolia, Carpathia and Ruthenia

Regarding the schools of the Zionist party, called Hebrew schools, which they have established in many places in our country, and especially the Hebrew gymnasiums in Mukachevo and Uzhgorod: it has come to our attention that they are an evil and very dangerous trap for the souls of Jewish boys and girls, for they teach them there heresy and denial of the Torah of Moses our teacher, which was given to us from heaven, the

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<sup>22</sup> Not for nothing did the Zionists and the Agudists rejoice and confer with each other. Earlier that year, the Zionists had boasted in their newspaper Doar Hayom (11 Elul 5695 (1935)):

Agudah Youth Are Also Among the Builders

The great gathering held this week in Jerusalem by Poalei Agudath Israel to discuss the question of Hebrew labor is worthy of the attention of the entire community. One may say that through this gathering the Agudah came not a small step closer to the other groups in the Yishuv. The very question which the gathering was called to discuss – the urgent call to employers to hire only Hebrew workers - the warm eulogy on Rabbi Kook, of righteous memory, standing in his honor, and the final resolutions adopted – the planners of the gathering deserve credit for all these things.

We must pay special attention to paragraph 2 of the resolutions: "The gathering protests in all force against those who do not employ in all their business and labor Jewish workers, and especially religious workers who keep the Torah. It sees in the employment of non-Jewish workers in Hebrew industry a public chillul Hashem, a danger to the building of the land and its development, and a setback to immigration and the absorption capacity of the land." When was the last time we heard such words coming from the members of Agudath Israel? When was the last time we saw them taking such a clear position on questions of labor pertaining to immigration and the building of the land? Even on the superficial level of nationalistic principles they have come closer to the community of immigrants and builders. And not only young people participated in establishing this new stance; the gathering was headed by the leaders and activists of Agudah, and all the resolutions were accepted unanimously.

Truly we have entered a new era. This great gathering in the Ruchama neighborhood of Jerusalem was not an isolated phenomenon, a chance happening. Poalei Agudath Israel now has 14 branches throughout the land. Agudah's Yishuv Fund gives educational aid to the Poalei's kibbutzim...

We can react only positively to this group, which is opening a new era of labor and building in the midst of those who have until now stood apart and sometimes even opposed the national building project."

written and oral Torah.<sup>23</sup> And there they will teach the boys and girls things that make it likely for them to transgress all the mitzvos of Hashem, the Torah mitzvos and the Rabbinic. They ridicule with their mouths and gestures all that is holy to the Jewish people. The future of the coming generation will be very bitter, G-d forbid, as well as the young generation of today, if we are silent now. The Torah will melt away, and the faith in Hashem and His moshiach will be lost, for this is an upside-down generation, destructive children who cannot be trusted, who have no faith. They also have many wild parties and mixed dancing, with no fence against immoral relationships, may G-d spare us.

Especially in the above-mentioned city and all its surrounding country, where for a very long time most Jews have been, thank G-d, holy believers, children of believers, acting in the ways of the Torah and the faith which was passed down from our fathers and teachers from generation to generation at the risk of their lives. By establishing these irreligious schools they will cause evil and many breaches in the life of the Jewish people, in every family, inside and outside.

And therefore, since all these are against the Torah, the Shulchan Aruch and the foundations of Hungarian Orthodoxy, we protest with all strength against the heretical studies in these schools, against the entire existence of their schools and their gymnasiums in this state; and against all the organizations of Hebrew schools in Carpathian Ruthenia, and their system of education for Jewish children which is not according to Torah and tradition. They shall have no right whatsoever to be involved in Orthodox public life, so that they not exercise adverse influence over any holy matter.

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<sup>23</sup> The "Annual Report" of the Hebrew gymnasium of Mukachevo states that in second grade the children are taught from a textbook called "Hebrew History" (published by Central, Warsaw 1926). Let us bring a few excerpts from this unclean book.

On page 19, the Ten Commandments are quoted, but the commandments against adultery and coveting one's neighbor's wife are omitted, for they do not consider this forbidden.

On page 25, in the story of Korach, it says: "The rebellion grew stronger, but at that time there was an earthquake and most of the rebels perished, together with their tents and property." This denies what it written in the Torah, that the opening of the earth to swallow up Korach was a heavenly miracle.

On page 68, it says that Shir Hashirim is "a collection of his youthful songs about love and about natural desires", may G-d spare us from such a heresy against Shlomo Hamelech and his songs which are holiest of holy, in which his soul longed for the love between Hashem and the Jewish people.

On page 100, it says about Yirmiyahu that "he was a man of strife and fighting against his people" – such is their heretical view of a prophet sent by Hashem to rebuke His people Israel with prophecies of truth and justice.

On page 121, it says about our holy matriarch Rachel: "Rachel, the wife of Jacob, permitted herself to steal her father's idols, believing that they would protect her on her journey." Every heart trembles at such heresy, to speak evil of the matriarch of the Jewish people, that she, G-d forbid, believed in idols, when in reality she was risking her life to destroy them.

On page 121, it tells of the beliefs of the Chaldeans: "The gods separated heaven from earth and created the world in seven days." May dust fill the mouth of this writer, who is literally denying the existence of the single Creator, writing as if there were many creators. He also intends to deny the sanctity of Shabbos, on which G-d rested from all His work. This is more than enough.

Anyone who sends his children to the Hebrew schools is poisoning them with deadly poison and erasing them from the book of Jewish life. This is the Torah that Moses placed before the children of Israel, and these are the commandment which Hashem commanded us at Mt. Sinai. The words of our Sages in the Talmud and its commentaries shall not be pass out of the Jewish people, and their memory shall not perish from their descendants forever. We register this protest in the strongest possible way with the power of the Torah and in accordance with the laws of the land. We will call in the name of Hashem our G-d forever, and may we merit the coming of moshiach, soon in our days, amein.

Chaim Elazar Shapiro

David Schlüssel, Meyer Zev Saltzer, Menachem Weiss, and Chaim Sofer of the Mukachevo Beis Din

Joseph Elimelech Cahana, rabbi of Uzhgorod  
Moses Brody, judge of Uzhgorod  
Meyer Blei, judge of Uzhgorod  
Israel Zvi Rosenberg, rabbi of Kasan  
Hanoch Meyer, rabbi of Keretzky  
Aaron Teitelbaum, rabbi of Volove  
Chaim Meyer, son of the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, rabbi of Vilchovitz  
Naftali Hertzal Weiss, judge of Vilchovitz  
Solomon Israel Klein, rabbi of Selish  
Chaim Isaac Halberstam, rabbi of Slotpini  
Joseph Halevi, rabbi of Kiralhoz  
Joshua Greenwald, rabbi of Chust  
Shalom Noach Landau, rabbi of Veretzky  
Chaim Judah Greenberg, rabbi of Svaliva  
Jacob Hakohein Friedman judge of Chust  
Elazar Reinman, rabbi of Bichkiff  
Solomon Isaac Schonfeld, rabbi of T. Oilak  
Asher Zelig Greenzweig, rabbi of Dalha  
Naftali Tzvi, rabbi of Bilke  
Aaron Tzvi Kirshenbaum, judge of T. Oilak  
Chaim Zucker, rabbi of Bergsos  
Solomon Friedman, rabbi of Rachov  
Joel Velitchker, rabbi of Tresif  
Zvi Hirsch Sofer, rabbi of Brezna  
Isaac Adler, rabbi of Serednia  
Joseph Moses Goldberger, rabbi of Poliana  
Elazar Shapiro, rabbi of Kviashad  
David Weinberger, rabbi of Yulniza  
Moses Segal Wertzberger, judge of Orshiva  
David Isaac Rosenwasser, rabbi of Oberapsha  
Samuel Jechiel Moskowitz, rabbi of Welky Palad

Samuel Zvi Weiss, rabbi of Benedikowitz  
Baruch Wiesner, rabbi of Batyu  
Solomon Spitzer, rabbi of Bogdan  
Moses Greenzweig, rabbi of Lifshe  
Moses Jacob Beck, rabbi of Interapsha  
Mordechai Deutsch, rabbi of Veliatin  
Isaac Frisch, judge of Rokowitz  
Isaac Gross, rabbi of Torin  
Zev Sheftel Edelhauch, judge of Iska  
Joshua Sofer, judge of Greater Brezna  
Jacob Brimzel Itzkowitz, judge of Zadnia

The above letter of protest is an answer to those who say that the Agudah was necessary as a weapon against the Zionists. Where then is their war? Was it they who publicized a strong prohibition, openly and explicitly, at least in this form, against the Zionist schools? Why did they not summon all their organizational power and publish strong bans against the study of heresy and Zionism? Let them separate from them and their groups, and let the staff of the wicked not rest on the lot of the righteous. And at least let them not do the opposite, joining the Zionists!

But it is clear now that only those who are truly far from the views of the parties, whatever name they have, those the ones who are strong, who do the will of Hashem and His Torah, to fight the war of Torah, to stand strong as a wall in the face of the evil winds that blow from the world of heresy. May Hashem increase their power!

### **Chapter 102: Rabbi Israel Zvi Rosenberg of Kasan Equates Agudah with Zionism**

Friday of Parshas Acharei Mos, 5696 (1936)

To my dear friend, the pious and scholarly Rabbi Moshe Goldstein,

Greetings to you. When I returned home I found your letter, and immediately I went to the house of our rav shlita (Rabbi Israel Zvi Rosenberg of Kasan), showed it to him and asked his opinion. He replied that he does not want his name omitted from the severe ban on the Zionist organization, against which he has already signed several years ago. On the question of the Agudah as well, he made known his opinion a few weeks ago that he is against all the organizations, and makes no distinction between different groups. For our job is only to pray to the Master of All that He send us His help and raised the pride of the promised moshiach, to gather the dispersed of Israel, and not to rely on their actions, G-d forbid; see Sefer Charedim page 60b.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Here is the quote from Sefer Charedim: "But those who come to Eretz Yisroel and ignore the fact that they are in the palace of the King, and they rebel... regarding them Scripture says, 'And you came and defiled My land, and My portion you made abominable.' And it says, 'When you come to see My face, who asked this of you, to trample My courtyards?' It does not occur to them that after their deaths they will not remain in Eretz Yisroel but will be expelled from it like dogs... Therefore every man must tremble when

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coming to Eretz Yisroel, to be many times more G-d-fearing than he was outside the Holy Land. He must know that he dwells in the King's palace." These words are quoted by the Shelah in Shaar Osyos, 100.

See also Ohr Hachaim on Vayikra 19:23: "'When you come into the land' that your intent should not be for physical pleasure; see also his comment on Devarim 11:12, "A land that Hashem your G-d seeks out," that the Torah adds the words "your G-d" to teach that the greatness of the land is only when Hashem calls Himself the G-d of Israel, but in the time of Israel's exile when the Divine Presence is not in their midst, the land does not have so much greatness.

See also the book Igeres Kodesh Likutei Amarim (letter 39) by the holy Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, who writes as follows: "The recent newcomers to the Holy City are students who did not study under their teachers enough, who fancy themselves sages who know every secret, pretending to be holy. I apply to them the verse, 'And you came and defiled My land.'"

See also Kedushas Levi on Bamidbar 13:16: "It seems that the true intention of the Creator was to send religious and wholesome men, whose entire goal was the service of the Creator, blessed is He, not to spy out Eretz Yisroel physically, G-d forbid. Rather, as soon as they arrived there they would occupy themselves with Torah learning and service of G-d. This is the meaning of "veyasuru" from the same root as Torah. The point would have been that when Israel occupies itself with Torah and mitzvos, they have a portion in Eretz Yisroel... but this was not the counsel of the fools. They thought that Moshe Rabbeinu sent them to spy out Eretz Yisroel physically. This is why Moshe prayed for Yehoshua, "May Hashem save you from the counsel of the spies..."

Now that we are on the subject of Eretz Yisroel and its holiness, let us quote from the Baalei Hatosafos on Beshalach (Shemos 13:18): "Said the Holy One, blessed is He: If I take them on the straight path [to Eretz Yisroel], each man will take possession of his field or his vineyard and they will neglect the study of Torah. But I will lead them through the desert for forty years, they will eat the manna, they will drink from the rock, and [the Torah] will settle in their bodies."

See also Tosafos on Bava Basra 21b regarding the enactment that there should be teachers of children in Jerusalem, based on the verse, "For out of Zion comes the Torah." Tosafos explains that in Jerusalem the children would see great holiness, everyone doing the work of Heaven and the service of Hashem, and thus that place would be more conducive to fear of Heaven. This gives us an idea of what settling Jerusalem should mean.

See also Nachal Kedumim on Beshalach (Shemos 13:18): "For G-d said, if they enter the land right away, they will be busy with their fields and vineyards and not with the Torah. Better to turn them aside through the desert – these are the words of Rabbi A. of Garmiza." So we see that Hashem Yisborach Himself held back Israel so that they should not make of Eretz Yisroel a physical settlement, but rather a Torah settlement.

This settlement that is being built now in Eretz Yisroel, while the Temple is still in a state of destruction, is not called a settlement at all, as we see in the Talmud (Berachos 58b): "One who sees Jewish houses in a built state recites the blessing, 'Blessed is He Who sets a boundary for the widow.' Rashi says this is talking about during the Second Temple period, and the Maharsha explains that nowadays, whatever Jewish houses there are are not considered to be "in a built state", since the Temple has been destroyed; the blessing "Who makes a boundary for the widow" is not applicable. The Shulchan Aruch (224:10) rules according to this comment of Rashi that one may only recite this blessing in Temple times when Jewish houses were in their strong, completely built state. See Taz and Magen Avraham. (One may ask: according to those who hold that settling Eretz Yisroel is a mitzvah today just as in Temple times, why should we not recite the blessing on the houses of those Jews who fulfill this mitzvah? And this is not the place to write at length on this question.)

The fact that the current settlement in Eretz Yisroel is not a real settlement was sadly demonstrated six years ago when the Arabs rioted and killed many Jews, and the rioting is still going on. All the promises of

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the Balfour mandate and the British government, on which the Zionists and the Agudists have relied so much, have done nothing to help. Regarding this the Ohr Hachaim writes at the beginning of Parshas Re'eh: "If you listen, the land will be given to you for a blessing. But if you do not listen, it will not be a blessing, for because of it the nations will be jealous of you and drive you out of it with great vengeance. Also, the pleasure you derive from the land will be to your detriment."

See also the Chasam Sofer, Toras Moshe, on the haftorah of Parshas Shoftim: "How pleasant are the footsteps of the announcer on the mountaintops..." The Chasam Sofer writes, "It is possible that they could have been redeemed through an incomplete redemption or that peace could have been made between us and the nations among whom we live, or – better yet – there could have been a real redemption as in the time of the second Beis Hamikdash...but that is not desirable. Even if we ourselves would settle for such a redemption – just to be saved – our holy forefathers would not consent now to anything less than a complete redemption. It is better for Jewry to suffer for the duration of the exile in order to ultimately experience a redemption that is complete in every way."

And what is greater or holier than the words of our Sages in the Zohar (Pinchas, p. 221), "Hashem builds Jerusalem' – He and no other. It is this building we are waiting for and not the building of a human being... even the city of Jerusalem will not be the work of humans, for it states, 'And I will be to it, said Hashem, a wall of fire all around...' If this is said regarding the city, all the more so regarding the Temple, which is His habitation." Who can open his mouth and tongue against the true Torah?

Today we see many Jews calling for aliyah to Eretz Yisroel, to work the orchards and vineyards and to open businesses. They are unaware that they stumble in transgressing the words of the rabbis of all ages who warned about the holiness of the land and the obligation to keep it pure. The original settlement there was founded for people who would shun all other activities and sit in the tents of Torah, supported by the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes charities. But if one goes there for business, he is walking on the blade of a sword, risking violating the holiness of the land. See Pesachim 8b: "Why are there no fruits of Ginosar in Jerusalem? So that those who come to Jerusalem for the festival should not say, 'Had we come only to eat the fruits of Ginosar it would have been worth it,' and thus their coming would not be for the sake of the mitzvah." A similar statement is made there regarding the hot springs of Tiberias. See Tosafos on Pesachim 7b who explains that the reason why one may not enter the Temple Mount with his staff, his bag and his money is because it would appear that he is going there for business, and this would be an insult to the Temple. The Gemora in Yevamos 6b says that this prohibition applies even nowadays when the Temple is not standing.

See the Responsa Tashbatz Gadol 2:132 who quotes the Gemora in Pesachim 50b in which Rabbi Yochanan forbade the Jews of Baishan from deviating from the custom of their fathers not to travel for Tyre to Sidon on Friday, although they were poor and needed to travel to make a living. Rabbi Yochanan cited the verse, "Hear, my son, the rebuke of your father, and do not reject the teaching of your mother" (Mishlei 1:8). The Tashbatz proves from here that even if the fathers did not formally accept this stringency, but merely were accustomed to keep it, the children are forbidden to deviate from the custom of their fathers. It is known that the custom of our forefathers was not to encourage large-scale immigration to Eretz Yisroel. Those who did go did not do business and certainly not field labor or construction, but learned Torah for their entire lives. The Gemora in Pesachim (ibid.) says that one who does work at a time when there is any hint of a sin will never see any blessing from it. Of course, we cannot criticize those Jews already living in Eretz Yisroel who sometimes do some business on the side, not as their main activity. There are no absolute rules in this matter; Hashem is the judge, for a hair's breadth separates right from wrong.

In our time the Zionists have made immigration to Eretz Yisroel the center of their ideology, for conquering the land is their goal, and the more Jewish pioneers who come, the better it is for them. In this context we have to be on guard not to do as they do. We find in Tractate Parah 3:7 that they would purposely defile the kohein who was to burn the red heifer, and then he would immerse himself and burn it, in order to counter the Sadducees who held that the kohein must wait till evening after his immersion. We also find that the kohein gadol would not don his garments on the Sunday after Shavuos, to counter the

I apologize for my brevity, which is due to the rush to prepare for Shabbos. Your friend,

Judah Zvi Eichenstein, rabbi of Dobrani, son-in-law of the rabbi of Kasan.

### **Chapter 103: The Debrecener Rav Denies Any Connection With Bais Yaakov**

Monday of Parshas Ki Sisa, 5695 (1935)

Peace and all good to my friend, holy scholar of Israel, candle and glory of Israel, pious one who lights up the world with his Torah, who mends fences and stands in breaches to strengthen the institutions of the faith, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro, rabbi of Mukachevo.

I received your letter and I hasten to reply: The Bais Yaakov school was not made by me nor by the board of my community, G-d forbid, nor by anyone who listens to me.<sup>25</sup> But I cannot not put a stop to it. As far as I know, they do not educate the girls here with the platform of the Zionists, to arouse in them a longing for Palestine. They say that their purpose is to save the girls from this poison and from the immodesty that is on the rise, may Hashem Yisborach have mercy. Let me repeat that I stand apart from this, only I cannot put a stop to it. It seems that it will come to an end on

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Sadducees who held that Shavuot is always deferred to Sunday (Chagigah 17a). In Choshen Mishpat 2:1, it states that in a time when the wall of Torah has been breached, the court is justified in implementing severe restrictions and punishments. All this is the opposite of the approach of the Agudists, who say that to rectify the breach they will also enter the breach. "Stay far from illicit activity or anything similar to it!" (Chullin 44b) "In their practices you shall not follow." (Vayikra 18:3) Therefore we must not look for loopholes that are far from the truth, and may Hashem save us.

<sup>25</sup> Agudah claims Bais Yaakov as its most hallowed institution; how then is it possible that they established a Bais Yaakov school in Debrecen without permission from the rabbi of the city or the community board? So we see that the Bais Yaakov is not really founded on the holy Torah but on a need to compete with the Zionists, who have their Bnos Zion schools. In past generations our forefathers and teachers never dealt so much with women and girls. But the Agudah newspapers are full of the activities of women and girls, and all their speeches are printed. How then will a boy resist sin? If he is an Agudah activist, he is constantly reading the words of girls, and the girls are reading his words.

The entire idea of teaching Torah to girls is contrary to halacha, as the Rambam says (Talmud Torah 1:13): "The Sages commanded a man not to teach his daughter Torah because most women's minds are not focused on learning and they will take the words of Torah as words of vanity, due to the poverty of their minds. The Sages said, whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as if he taught her immorality." See also Megillah 18b where it implies that women do not understand the Holy Tongue.

Furthermore, where do the Bais Yaakov teachers get their education that enables them to speak eloquently in public and educate children? Only by attending seminaries in big cities in which the poison of heresy lurks. In past generation, girls were simply taught to read Hebrew so that they could pray from the prayerbook and say blessings, nothing more. And so it states in the prayerbook of the Arizal, laws of Derech Eretz, paragraph 96: "A man is obligated to teach the women of his house the laws of niddah, challah, and kashrus laws that apply to the home." This is the requirement, and whoever adds to it is really detracting from it. Every man is obligated to make sure that the women of his house go in the proper way.



its own, since the truly religious have no need for it, and the rest of the populace is mostly caught in the net of Mizrachi, may G-d spare us. May Hashem Yisborach send His salvation to strengthen our faith. Abundant blessing to you, and may you merit to do good for our people to strengthen the faith and raise the pride of Torah, and may the Name of Heaven be uplifted and sanctified by all.

Bowing in honor,

Solomon Zvi Hakohein Strasser

### **Chapter 104: The Atzei Chaim Against Agudah**

Monday of Parshas Ki Seitzei 5683 (1923), Sighet

For some time I have been asked from many places to express my opinion about the Agudah organization. My opinion remains the same as always: I am standing guard, for in our country and neighboring countries it is more likely to bring loss than gain, and anyone who wishes to guard his soul will stay far from them and their people. We in our country need no new organization, no matter what the name. We need only the boundaries set by our holy fathers and teachers, who established rules for our kehillas, called the Orthodox League, based on the Torah and Shulchan Aruch. We will hold true to this platform and not mention the name of others. We will follow only in our fathers' footsteps, and then we can be sure that our path will be safe until the redemption, when our judges will return as in days of old.

Your friend who seeks your peace,

Chaim Zvi Teitelbaum

This letter was sent to us just now by the Atzei Chaim's son and successor, new vessel full of old wine, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Teitelbaum shlita, rabbi of Sighet. Here is his letter which accompanied his father's letter:

I was asked to express my opinion on these new organizations. I was never happy about them, and I am critical of all the parties, including the Agudah. Whenever I stand up to speak, I do not withhold myself from calling out in a great voice with manifold warnings, that anyone who has the fear of Hashem in his heart should guard himself from joining any of these parties. However, as far as making my opinion known to the entire world, I know my lowly status, and I have not yet reached this level, to be worthy of spreading my opinion afar. Still, I think it would be appropriate to copy here the letter that I found among the writings of my father the Atzei Chaim, of righteous and holy memory, which he wrote in response to one of those who asked him this question. Here it is, word for word: [There follows the above letter.]

The reader can judge for himself that this warning of my father is enough. If he wrote this thirteen years ago, what can we say today, when the generations are declining,

unfortunately, and it has become clear to all that no good will come to the Jewish people from any of these parties. So it would be superfluous for me to express my opinion. May Hashem Yisborach raise the pride of the Jewish people and hasten our redemption, and may we merit the coming of the announcer of good and the proclaimer of salvation.

Yekusiel Yehuda Teitelbaum

### **Chapter 105: Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer Alfandri Opposed Agudah**

Last but not least, let us testify what we heard in Jerusalem in Iyar 5690 (1930) from the holy scholar of scholars, great and awesome, famed Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer Chacham Alfandri, may his merit protect us: that he was strongly opposed to the Agudah and its actions, and he said that there is no difference at all between the Zionists and the Agudists. His opinion has already been published in the book Masos Yerushalayim, Chayos Esh, paragraph 47.

### **Chapter 106: Conclusion**

And now Israel, listen to these statutes and laws that are written in this book. Open your heart and ears, lift up your eyes to the high mountains, our great teachers, the gaonim of Torah, righteous men, foundations of the world, from all places, whose letters are gathered in this book. Do not turn aside from all that they tell you right or left. Who can see these coming out and not come out and join their cause, the cause of truth and justice?

Who will not react with fear and trepidation to the powerful voices of these lions and holy angels, upon whom the Heavenly footstool and throne rest, the holy ones of the earth, those who live now in Gan Eden and those who live among us, who shine their light with the power of the Torah and warn us to stay as far as possible from the Agudah movement. Some speak generally, some speak specifically, but all hit on the same theme. We learn from them not to join any party or new movement that our forefathers and teachers of previous generations did not think of.

And the reader must know that besides the writings of the rabbis brought in this book, there are many other gedolei hador who are extremely opposed to the Agudah, but whom we had no opportunity to contact. The letters in this book are from rabbis who sent them on their own, or letters that Hashem allowed us to come upon, but we did not go searching, nor did we ask for letters or statements, even from some of the most famous rabbis and rebbes of our time. There are many reasons for this; we ask for their forgiveness. In some cases, we did not knock on their doors because we already had a letter from a previous leader of their dynasty. In other cases, we realized that the gadol was tied between the teeth of lions and was unable to express his full opinion with complete publicity. Although the Torah says, "Do not fear any man", still there are times when there is real danger to life. Why should we write to such people and give them this test? Perhaps it is not even necessary, for why must we list

everyone? So this book is very incomplete. In any case, those gedolim who are known to oppose the Agudah but whose letters are not included here should definitely be added to the list.

Also absent from this book are the letters and statements of the rabbanim who are Munkatcher chassidim. The Minchas Elazar gave us a rule: not to include the writings of any chassid who is younger than forty years of age. This was in order to follow the counsel of the elders, and so that those opposed should not say that the Minchas Elazar did all this for his own honor, gathering together the writings of his own chassidim, or that this is a political issue, G-d forbid. But it has been made clear, with Hashem's help, that this is the daas Torah, to stay far from a stumbling block, until we merit the redemption.

### **Chapter 107: Be on the Safe Side**

There will still be some stubborn people who say, "At the very least this is a dispute between the rabbis, and many are in favor of Agudah." For these people, let us copy from Responsa Beis Hillel, chapter 14: "If there were even a doubt as to whether this thing is right in the eyes of Hashem and His Torah, it would be obligatory for all who fear the truth to reject it completely. Let us learn from our elders, from the responsa of the Ran, brought by the Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim 690: 'Even in worldly matters, every wise man chooses the safest path, where there is the least likelihood of stumbling, even if it is a small chance. All the more so must we do this in Torah and mitzvos, the secrets of the world. How can we leave the path tread by our holy teachers and bring ourselves into a tight and dangerous place?'"

So we must not enter a tight passageway on the authority of lenient opinions, G-d forbid, in a matter that has to do with the very foundations of the faith, as well as danger to the soul and body. Even when the Torah permitted the beautiful woman for the sake of the evil inclination, it commanded that one see her in her ugly state and pass by her constantly in order that she become disgusting in his eyes, and it promised that if he marries her he will eventually have a rebellious son, may G-d spare us. Woe to one who follows such a "permission"!

Therefore any man who fears Hashem should keep on the safe path, not joining and not imitating the various parties, the Zionists, the Mizrachists, Agudists and the like, only continuing in our faith in Hashem Yisborach, who will redeem us, soon in our days, amein.

