

## ***Yud-Tes Kislev, From Father to Son***

Rabbi Moshe, the youngest son of the Alter Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, was born in Liozna, in 5544/1784. He was exceptionally intelligent, and during the lifetime of his father would repeat verbatim all the explanations of Torah that he had heard from his lips.

The Alter Rebbe was especially fond of Rabbi Moshe. He was fond of saying that, through a rare act of divine grace, his mental capacities had been increased tenfold over those of his great-grandfather, Rabbi Moshe, after whom he was named. This apart, his memory was a cemented cistern from which no detail escaped.<sup>1</sup>

The sixth Rebbe, R. Yosef-Yitzchak [Shneursohn], writes:

“My grandmother<sup>2</sup> passed on to me a vast amount of information concerning Rabbi Moshe, the son of the Alter Rebbe, which she in turn had received from [her father-in-law, the third Rebbe, known as] the *Tzemach Tzedek*...concerning events when the Governor of Mogilev presented R. Dov-Ber<sup>3</sup> and Rabbi Moshe to Czar Alexander the First, when the latter visited Babinovitch, in the vicinity of Lubavitch. Then, much to Rabbi Moshe’s chagrin, he did not show them the respect that was their due.

What happened was that the Governor presented various nobles to the Czar first, and only then did he present the sons of the Alter Rebbe. Rabbi Moshe took his grievance directly to the Governor, aided by his fluency in a number of languages.

The Archbishop of Smolensk happened to be present at the time and, considering his behavior to be effrontery, lashed out both at Rabbi Moshe and the Torah. Rabbi Moshe made a stinging retort and there ensued a heated debate on religion, culminating in the decision to arrange a disputation-to be held in *MarCheshvan* 5576/1815.

The disputation took place in the church of Yartsava, near Smolensk, in the presence of the bishops of Smolensk and Niezhin, and lasted an entire month. Rabbi Moshe emerged triumphant. Chagrined at their defeat, the ecclesiastical authorities decided to confine him in one of the churches in Kiev or Vladimir, in the interior of Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pirkei Avot 2:9

<sup>2</sup> Rebbetzin Rivka, wife of the fourth Rebbe, R. Shmuel Shneursohn.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Moshe’s eldest brother, who eventually succeeded his father to become the second Rebbe.

On the fourth day, he was already en route to Vladimir, escorted by two clergymen and a detachment of armed soldiers. As they spent the night in the vicinity of Moscow, a deep sleep fell upon the party. Seeing his chance, Rabbi Moshe took flight.

G-d gave him strength he did not normally possess and, impervious to the cold and the massive snowdrifts, Rabbi Moshe forged on until he came to Aryal. There he took refuge with Rabbi Moshe Leib Jacobson, who hid him in his house for several days. Then he set out for Wolhinia.

Rabbi Moshe's escape took place on the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Kislev*, 5576/1815 [exactly 27 years after his father's miraculous liberation]. Some time later his family left for *Eretz Yisrael* and he went into exile from 5576/1815 to *Sivan* 5638/1878."

Rabbi Moshe passed away [at age 94] in Radomislya, near Kiev, in 5638/1878, and is buried there.

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*Days in Chabad*" (Compiled by Rabbi Yosef Y. Kaminetzky; translated by Yosef Cohen; based on *Sefer Hatoldot Admor Hazaken*, p. 1191).

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Moshe Shneuri** [of blessed memory [5544-5638 (1784-1878)]] was the youngest son of the Alter Rebbe of Chabad. He was known to be exceptionally brilliant with an astounding memory. Also fluent in several languages, at the young age of 16 he was his father's translator for some of the interrogations during his second arrest in 1800. He lived the last decades of life in self-imposed exile, after having his sent his family to live in the Land of Israel. He passed away at age 94 near Kiev.

**Appendix: Divine Providence:**

(1) *Note from the administrative assistant, Sima-Devorah Siev, who graciously typed the text for me:*

Reb Moshe is my alter-Zeide (great-great-plus grandfather). When I read this I wondered if this incident hadn't happened and his family moved to Hebron, if I would be here at all, let alone living in Israel!

(2) *Editor's note:*

When I first moved to Israel and Tsfat in 1978, there were three religious elderly brothers – alas, all never married -- living together. They were direct descendants of Rabbi Moshe.