



THE MAN WHO RECEIVED \$20,000 FROM THE REBBE TO PRINT HIS SEIFER

*An extraordinary talmid chocham, a man of spirit, an accomplished writer, an energetic askan and public figure who loyally and fearlessly fought many battles – this is a description of Rabbi Avrohom Eliyahu Makatovsky, known more familiarly as Eliyahu Kitov. * This exclusive article describes his work on behalf of Yiddishkeit, the stories behind his best-selling works, and his relationship with the Rebbe MH”M. **

Part 2 of 2

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER

(Continued from issue 352.)

A FIRST-RATE WRITER

After leaving public life, R' Eliyahu devoted his full energy to writing books. He was helped from Above, for although he always had *parnasa* problems and his health was not always good, he was able to publish many *s'farim* in a relatively short time.

He divided his time equally between book writing and publishing for Alef, a book-publishing institute he founded. After he stopped writing, he remained occupied with the practical aspects of publishing.

R' Eliyahu's first books were *chassidic* stories, the very first of which was called *B'Meonos Arayos (In the Lion's Den)*, about the original

chassidim, students of the Baal Shem Tov, published in the winter of 5715.

The second book, *K'Chudo Shel Machat (The Point of the Needle)*, relating the teachings of Pshischa and Kotzk, was published shortly thereafter. His third book, *B'Chesed Elyon*, was about the *tzaddik*, R' Moshe Leib of Sassov. In 5716, his fourth book, *HaPoseiach Shaar*, was about R'

Zalman Baharan. This was the last in the series on *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* that he wrote then. Ten years later, another volume in the series, *Kesser Malchus*, was about R' Yisroel of Ruzhin. A number of years later, this series of books was published as *Chassidim V'Anshei Maaseh* in a three-volume set.

What motivated R' Eliyahu to write stories about *chassidim*? In the introduction to the new set he writes: "I began with stories of *chassidim*, and not without reason. I left Poland, where I lived and grew up among true *yesharim* and *T'mimim*, modest in their ways – no one could recognize [their *tzidkus*] if he weren't very close to them. Once I left that quarry and came here and got to know new types and their way of talking and thinking – I knew, and learned how they think of the world I had lived in previously – and they don't know a thing about it. They know less about it than they do about Eskimos.

"A man like my father, z'l, and his Rebbe, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, and this entire rich world – they don't know about it, not even like a blind man in a chimney. And so I said let me tell of this world, of which not even a monument remains."

"I DO KNOW WHAT YOUR BOOK ACCOMPLISHED"

Members of the religious council in Yerushalayim asked R' Eliyahu to write a book on the laws of the Jewish home so that they could give it to Jewish couples. He agreed, and for over a year he devoted himself to writing *Ish U'Beiso* (*The Jew and His Home*). When he was done, he had it reviewed by *g'dolei ha'rabbanim*, who praised it highly.

Despite difficulties, R' Eliyahu published the book in 5717. It was this book that paved the way to place R' Eliyahu in the highest echelon of writers. *Ish U'Beiso* can be found in

tens of thousands of Jewish homes in Eretz Yisroel and abroad. The book was so popular that a number of the religious councils distributed it to couples getting married in their city.

You must remember that at that time – over forty years ago – there was nothing on the market in this category of book. Even today, when Judaica stores are flooded with books on the Jewish home, *Ish U'Beiso* is still popular. Observant Jews gain in their knowledge, and the uneducated come

much closer to Judaism as a result of reading the book.

In the introduction to the new edition of the book (which his son-in-law, R' Chanoch Ben Arza and grandson, R' Yosef Ben Arza, published) it says:

"Note what the Lubavitcher Rebbe emphasized to the author thirty years ago: 'I know quite well what your book *Ish U'Beiso* has accomplished in many Jewish homes...'"

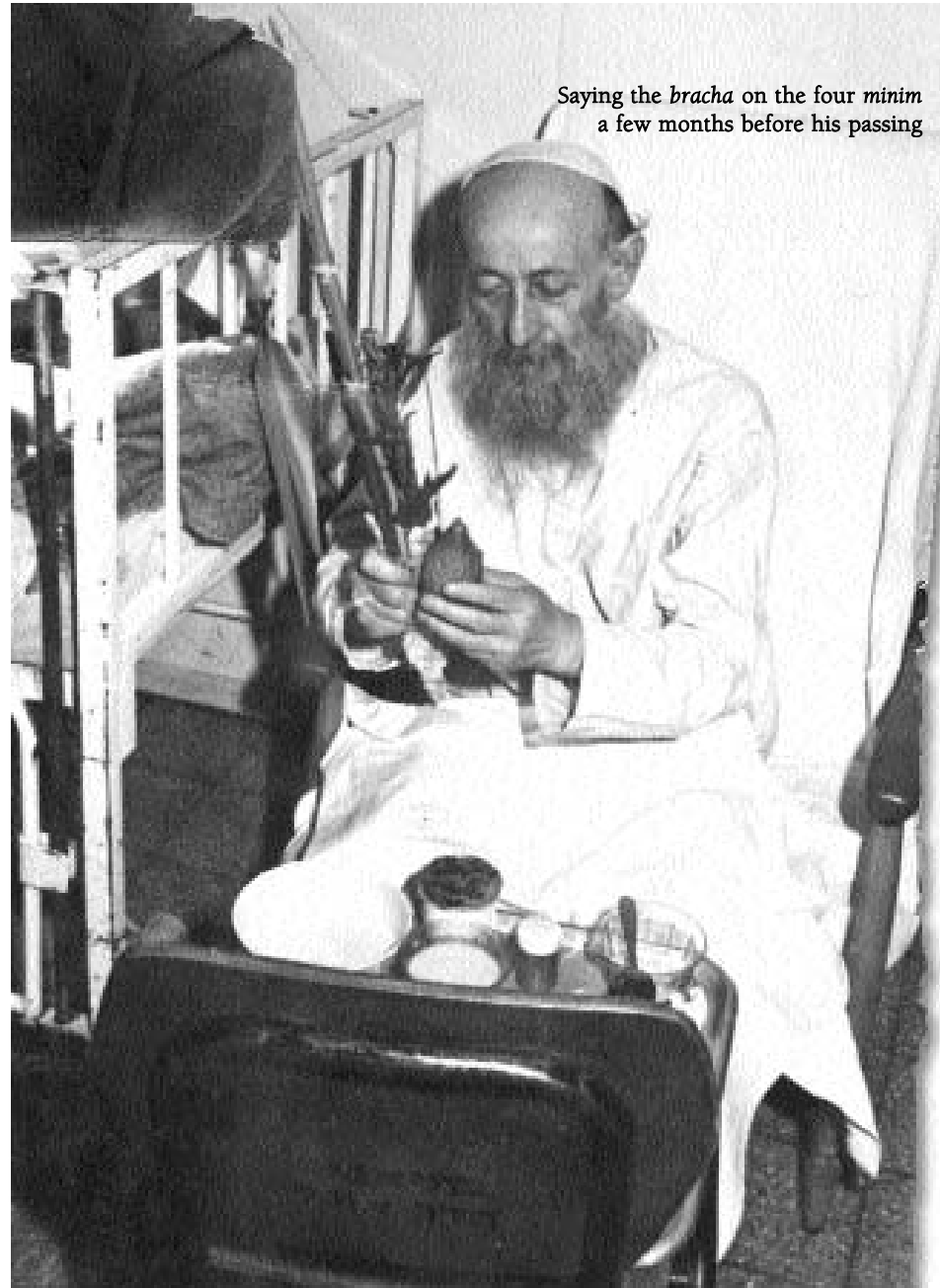


Kitov at his son's wedding (first on the left)



At his son's wedding, Rabbi Kitov, to the right; Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, fourth from the right.

Saying the *bracha* on the four *minim*
a few months before his passing



SEIFER HA'TODAA

At the time that *Seifer HaToda* (*Book of our Heritage*) was written, there was much talk among educators about the need to transmit Jewish awareness to schoolchildren. This topic was discussed a great deal among all sectors of the public. This is why R' Eliyahu chose the name *Seifer HaToda* (literally, Book of Awareness). The book, written in a clear and easy-to-read style, covers each month of the year with the laws, customs, and their reasons for each holiday and for every event in the Jewish calendar. In his work he drew on material from classical *halachic* works and from *s'farim* of Polish *chassidus*.

The book that was going to raise Jewish awareness among the Jewish people was ready to print, but the printing was delayed due to a lack of funds. The funding finally came from a surprising source...

Rabbi Ben-Tziyon Grossman of Migdal HaEmek relates:

Twenty years ago I was in the Old City of Yerushalayim. One day I entered Chanoch Ben Arza, *a'h's*, *s'farim* store. He was responsible for publishing the *s'farim* of R' Eliyahu (his father-in-law). Chanoch and I were good friends because of our joint work in *s'farim*.

When I entered his store, I noticed boxes of *s'farim* ready for the post office, marked with the address of 770. I was surprised, and I asked Chanoch what it was all about. He told me the following story:

"Before my father-in-law died, he was hospitalized. When he felt his condition deteriorating and he realized his end was near, he called me and asked me to repay his debt to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I had no idea what he was talking about, so he explained.

"When I finished writing *Seifer HaToda*,' R' Eliyahu told me, 'I didn't

R' KITOV'S ORIGINAL IDEA FOR ACHDUS

"We must gather the great *Admurim* and *rabbanim* who lead the observant *tzibbur*, and they should decide how to bring utter unity among the Jewish people." This original idea was presented to a number of *gedolei ha'dor*. When he suggested it to the Rebbe, the Rebbe smiled and said: "If all the *gedolei ha'dor* would gather together, then Moshiach would certainly come."

"If all the gedolei ha'dor would gather together, then Moshiach would certainly come."

have money to print it. I had a private audience with the Rebbe at the time and among other things, the Rebbe asked whether new books of mine would be printed soon.

“I said that *Seifer HaTodaa* was ready, but I didn’t have money for printing expenses. The Rebbe wanted to give me \$20,000 so I could publish it, but I refused to accept such a gift. In the end, the Rebbe convinced me to take a check for this amount as an open-ended loan, and with this money I printed *Seifer HaTodaa*. I would like you to repay this debt of mine.’

“After my father-in-law’s death, I tried to return the loan, but the Rebbe refused to accept it. After repeated attempts in which I said I wanted to fulfill the *tzavaa*, the Rebbe said that instead of paying the money, I should send him each new book that came to my store. That explains these boxes of books you see.”

* * *

Seifer HaTodaa was reviewed by three *chachmei Yerushalayim*: the great *posek*, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zt”l*, the famous *gaon* Rabbi Refael Katzenelbogen, *zt”l*, and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, the present Rishon LTziyon. Part One of the book was published in 5718, and the second in 5721.

The book was warmly received by all sectors of the Jewish people, first and foremost by teachers and educators. Shortly after it was published, it was acclaimed around the world, prompting R’ Eliyahu to translate it into English. Both *talmidei chachamim* as well as the unlearned found the book informative and readable. It is a fundamental book for anybody involved in *chinuch*, even for those who are not religious.

It’s said that the Rebbe commented to R’ Eliyahu Kitov about the fact that the book quoted no sources. Rabbi Kitov didn’t do anything about this,



At the Kosel HaMaaravi, shortly after the Six-Day War.

(From right to left) Rabbi Kitov, Dr. Joseph Kaminetzky, Oded Kitov, and Rabbi Karno

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but after he passed away and the new edition was published, the editors – the children of the Ben Arza family – added sources and footnotes.

THE REBBE STOOD UP

R’ Eliyahu’s son-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Noitman, relates:

My father-in-law once had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. This was after he had written a number of books. The Rebbe asked him to go

back to *askanus*, and my father-in-law said: “It seems that the Rebbe is not satisfied with the books I have written.”

The Rebbe immediately rose from his chair and said with great feeling, “There is no one who esteems your *s’farim* more than I do. In any case, you should go back to your public work.”

I think that on another occasion the Rebbe said about *Seifer HaTodaa*: “*V’rabim heishiv mei’avon*” (many were returned from sin).

We learn how greatly the Rebbe MH”M esteemed his *s’farim* from a letter the Rebbe sent Rabbi Kitov in 5729 (1968) (printed in the *Kovetz Heichal Menachem*, Vol. 3):

“... May it be the [Divine] will that that the will of Hashem prevail through you to disseminate traditional Judaism without compromise, etc., in all ways, especially through your writings, and may you do it in health, joy, and gladness of heart. For bringing the word of Hashem to our

brothers, the Jewish people, is the greatest expression of *ahavas Yisroel* ...”

Rabbi Kitov had many private audiences with the Rebbe. His family relates that he spent hours in *yechidus*. His son-in-law, Rabbi Gershon Kitzis, describes one of them:

“My father-in-law told me that the Rebbe spoke to him at length. My father-in-law wasn’t prepared for such a long conversation in the wee hours of the morning, and he did his best to remain alert. During the *yechidus*, the Rebbe presented an interesting question. He suggested that my father-in-law publish a newspaper that would publicize all matters of Judaism and the Rebbe would cover the expenses.”

Rabbi Kitov’s grandson, Rabbi Yosef Ben Arza, adds what he heard from his father, R’ Chanoch: “The Rebbe asked my grandfather to publish a newspaper, but that didn’t happen. Instead, he published volumes on the *parshiyos*, which at first appeared one volume at a time. Each volume contained a compilation from *Chazal*, commentaries of the *Rishonim* and *sifrei chassidus*, all in a

very readable fashion. Many people subscribed, and when a new volume appeared from time to time, many received new material.” Rabbi Shraga Zalmanov heard from Rabbi Chanoch Ben Arza that the Rebbe was also a subscriber.

Rabbi Kitov also attended numerous *farbrengens*. A brief description of his participation in the Rebbe’s *farbrengens* was written in *M’Shivchei HaRebbe* (p. 141). “...He was present throughout the *farbrengen* and greatly enjoyed it. The Rebbe told him to say *l’chaim* and gave him *mezonos*.”

Rabbi Tuvia Blau, who knew Rabbi Kitov well, said that at one of the

“When someone is sick, you don’t relax for a minute. I feel that Galus is a sickness, and every moment it continues I find painful.”

farbrengens, Rabbi Kitov heard a story from the Rebbe. The story was about the Alter Rebbe, who once sang the words, “*taamu u’ru ki tov Hashem*,” with great *d’veikus*. As a result of hearing this *niggun*, all the questions of the learned *misnagdim* of Shklov who were with him at the time were answered. Rabbi Kitov repeated the story on various occasions, and even wrote the story in his book, *M’Meonos Arayos*.

WANTING TO KNOW THE ESSENCE OF CHABAD

Rabbi Kitov had a fundamental interest in *chassidus Chabad*. He would ask his Lubavitcher friends about various topics regarding *Toras chassidus* and *darkei ha’chassidus*. He once asked Rabbi Tuvia Blau to write him about the essence of *chassidus Chabad*. Rabbi Blau was apprehensive about taking the responsibility of distilling the essence of *chassidus Chabad*, so he wrote to the Rebbe. The Rebbe answered:

“...your question about so-and-so asking you to write the essence of Chabad *chassidus*, and your question if you are reliable in this: This person [Rabbi Kitov] is unique; he won’t accept an explanation from just anyone. And since he has turned to you, it is fitting that you fulfill his request according to your knowledge. As far as your fear as to whether you are reliable, you will certainly note all the sources, and the main thing is to tell him about your fears...”

* * *

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov’s life, relatively short though it was, was replete with projects of all kinds and public works; in action – taking the initiative for the sake of the *klal*, and in writing – his books, which took the Jewish world by storm.

Rabbi Kitov passed away on Shabbos, 6 Adar I 5736 (1976), after great suffering, at the early age of 64. May his works serve as *militzei yosher* for him.

A SPECIAL NESHAMA

Rabbi Kitov’s son, Rabbi Shalom Tzvi, *a’h*, was always interested in *chassidus Chabad*. As a *yeshiva bachur* in New York, he attended the Rebbe’s *farbrengens*. He would write to the Rebbe and receive answers and even had private audiences. But in those days, he wasn’t actually a *chassid*.

“One day,” relates Rabbi Tuvia Blau, “R’ Shalom came to my house and said, ‘I decided to become a Chabad *chassid*.’ Before he made this decision there was a time in which he was interested in Chabad, and he discussed things with me. But then time passed, his interest waned, and we weren’t closely in touch. Suddenly he showed up and decided to be a Lubavitcher, to *daven Nusach Ari*, to learn *chassidus*, and to follow Chabad customs. It was surprising.

“Two months after R’ Shalom began conducting himself as a Chabad *chassid*, he brought his four-year-old son to learn in a Chabad *cheider*. The next day, R’ Shalom was stricken with convulsions and died.”

The *chassid* R’ Shalom Tzvi suddenly came to Chabad, and one day after bringing his son to learn in Chabad, he went on to the next world. A special *neshama*!