

Moreinu Horav Raphael Reuvain Grozovsky zt"l
5647/1887 – 5718/1958

With Torah Vodaath from 1944-1958

Rav Reuvain Grozovsky zt"l was born in Minsk on 11 Kislev, 5647 (1887), to Rav Shamshom and Rebbetzin Rachel Leah. His father was a Dayan of the Central Station district of the city. Included in his ancestry was Rav Chaim of Tiriah, who was known to have traveled with the Vilna Gaon in their self-imposed exile, and Rav Shaul Wahl, known as the “King of Poland for a Day”, who in turn was the son of Rav Meir (Maharam) of Padua, and a descendant of Rashi.

During his developing years, Rav Reuvain was considered the leader of the group of elite students who studied in the various Batei Medrash in Minsk. He would travel from *kloiz* to *kloiz*, giving inspiration to those who toiled in Torah, and infusing them with the fortitude they needed to withstand the forces of *Haskalah* that were rampant in the city. As part of his efforts, he extended himself to convince his peers to join him as he went on to study in Slobodka. Some of the promising scholars he influenced were Aharon Sislovitzer (Kotler), Yaakov Dolhinover (Kaminitzky), Yonah Minsker (Karpilov), and Dovid Rappaport (Mikdash Dovid). In Slobodka, the Alter (Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel) appointed him as a mentor to several promising young students, including Yitzchok Yaakov Dolhinover (Ruderman). Although Rav Reuvain was a talmid of Knessess Yisroel, he also attended the shiurim of Rav Baruch Ber Lebowitz, who served as Rosh Yeshiva of Knessess Bais Yitzchok, which was also located in Slobodka.

WWI broke out in 5674 (1914), and the entire vicinity was thrown into turmoil. Rav Reuvain, along with approximately forty other students, returned to Minsk. When the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Mordechai, and the Alter situated themselves in Minsk, Rav Reuvain gathered the Slobodka students in the '*Tatars kloiz*' and the Yeshiva resumed functioning in a limited way. For over a year, the Yeshiva flourished in exile. During this time, Rav Rephael Shapiro of Volozhin and his illustrious son in law, Rav Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk, settled in Minsk, along with Rav Baruch Ber Lebowitz and the remnants of Knessess Bais Yitzchok. Rav Chaim allowed some of these students to speak in learning with him. [It is said that Rav Shlomo Heiman, the premier talmid of Rav Baruch Ber (and later Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath), was a frequent visitor, and Rav Chaim told Rav Baruch Ber, "*Dien Shlome'le Ken Leren* (Your *Shloime'le* can learn)."] Rav Reuvain also merited to spend time with Rav Chaim, and is said to have spoken to him on the topic of "*Ksav al Gabei Ksav*", and agreed with his explanation. When speaking to Rav Baruch Ber afterwards, Rav Chaim is said to have suggested Rav Reuvain as a match for his student's daughter, Sarah Miriam.

In 5616 (1916), Rav Reuvain settled along with fifty students in Kremenchug, in the Ukraine, where Knessess Bais Yitzchok, under the guidance of Reb Baruch Ber, had already been established. Here, in Kremenchug, Rav Baruch Ber experienced first-hand the Torah and Yiras Shamayim of Rav Reuvain, and chose him as a chosson for his daughter. Rav Baruch Ber labeled his new son-in-law the "young *Ohr Sameiach*", and was in awe of his fear of heaven that preceded his wisdom.

Rav Reuvain was appointed as the assistant Rosh Yeshiva of Knessess Bais Yitzchok, and from this point on, a new direction in life took hold as he became the right hand of Rav Baruch Ber. In his shiurim, he strove to find the point of truth, and would not hesitate to concede to a student that he had erred and the student was correct. On one occasion, when a talmid asked a particularly strong question, he abruptly ended his shiur while stating that the question was indeed correct, and that his entire shiur was no longer true. Afterwards, he mentioned that at the time, he thought of a possible answer to the question, but since he was unsure if it was '*LiAmitah Shel Torah*', he decided to terminate the shiur.

By 5628 (1928), the financial situation of the Yeshiva was desperate, and the Yeshiva couldn't even pay for the food the students required. As a last resort, Rav Reuvain arranged that he and Rav Baruch Ber would travel to America to raise funds, and to establish a system of financial backing to sustain the Yeshiva. During the nearly two years that Rav Reuvain and Rav Baruch Ber spent in America, Rav Baruch Ber would speak at various functions, where crowds would gather to hear the words of the foremost student of Rav Chaim Brisker. After Rav Baruch Ber completed his talk about the greatness of Torah, Rav Reuvain would mount the lectern and tell the audience that they were messengers for the Yeshiva in Kaminetz, and ask them for their support. The mission was a success, and Rav Reuvain managed to establish an American committee to raise funds for the Yeshiva on a steady basis.

Upon their return in 5790 (1930), within one hour of their arrival in Kamenitz, Rav Baruch Ber delivered a shiur. After completing the shiur, Rav Baruch Ber addressed the bochurim, "During the time we were in America, Rav Reuvain and I had the opportunity to complete the entire *Seder Kodshim* together, which gave me a sense of fulfillment. Now, I am returning to *Seder Nashim* and *Nezikin* for your sake. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to be ever so diligent in your learning."

By the winter of 5701 (1941), with WWII raging throughout Europe, the noose of the Soviets began to tighten, as they annexed Lithuania. Rav Reuvain received a transit visa through Japan, and with the assistance of Rav Eliezer Silver, Rav Shlomo Heiman and Elimelech (Mike) Tress, they succeeded in procuring an entry visa to the United States. A new chapter began in the life of Rav Reuvain. For the next four years, *Hatzalah* work consumed his every waking moment. He did not accept the duty of saying shiurim, since he dedicated all his time and energy to saving his students and brethren trapped in the valley of despair.

As the war drew to a close in 5745 (1945), Rav Shlomo Heiman, who was the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath, passed away. With the *Hatzolah* work more or less finished, Rav Reuvain agreed to accept upon himself the mantle of leadership of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. On Tuesday of *Parashas VaYigash*, Rav Reuvain delivered his first shiur in the Yeshiva, which was the beginning of his *Harbotzas Torah* on these shores. Several months later, in *Teves*, Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz opened Bais Medrash Elyon in Monsey, NY, as a place to develop elite *Talmidei Chachomim* to replace those lost in the Holocaust. Rav Reuvain was appointed the Rosh

Yeshiva of this new mosad as well, and he split his time delivering shiurim between the two Yeshivos.

Besides for his shiurim in Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and Bais Medrash Elyon, Rav Reuvain also was at the forefront of all issues of *Klal Yisroel*. He served as the Chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Agudas Yisroel. Rav Reuvain would sit Rav Aharon Kotler at the head of the table beside him, and it has been reported that they seemed to comprehend each other's thoughts with but a glance. In addition, he was the Chairman of the Rabbinical Board of Torah Umesorah,

In Elul, 5711 (1951), Rav Reuvain was hit by a car as he was crossing a street, and was seriously injured. Shortly later, he suffered a heart attack, followed by a devastating stroke. His disabilities would no longer allow him to deliver his shiurim to his beloved talmidim, nor to be involved with the needs of Klal Yisroel. On 22 Adar, 5718 (1958), Rav Reuvain passed away. His life was dedicated to sanctifying the name of Hashem and His holy Torah. Upon hearing of his passing, Rav Aharon Kotler remarked, "We were partners in our holy work, and now that I am alone, I feel lost." Although illness precluded him from attending the funeral, Rav Aharon sent a message with Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky that he felt that Rav Reuvain was the *Gadol HaDor*, and greater than all of them. As he returned home from the levaya, the Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitlebaum, sighed, "The world lost a man of truth."