



THE MASHPIA

Reb Volf Greenglass

THE LIFE, LESSONS, AND *FARBRENGENS*
OF THE REBBE'S *MEKUBAL*

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Here is a beautiful big book to get your hands on—a spellbinding tribute to a magnificent person, Reb Volf Greenglass, *z”l*, who had a profound influence on the lives of thousands of students. As great as he was, he was so unassuming and utterly approachable that he implored people not to call him “Rabbi” but just by his first name, Volf. The material was meticulously compiled by his son-in-law, Rabbi David Cohen.

Reb Volf Greenglass was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1917 to a family of Aleksander *chassidim*. As a teen, he left

Above: Reb Volf Greenglass welcoming people to his *siyum sefer Torah*, which took place in the hospital. (The head nurse of the ICU said that she found his face to be glowing and that there was a holy aura around him.)

the Aleksander Yeshivah and went to work in a textile factory to help support his family. At that time, Reb Volf met a Chabad *chossid* whose compelling *avodas Hashem* spurred him to start frequenting the Lubavitcher yeshivah in Lodz, directed by Rabbi Zalman Schneersohn, a relative of the Rebbeim. Before long, Reb Volf enrolled in the Lodz Tomchei Temimim. The rest is history. From there he moved on to the Otvoitzk yeshivah where he met the Frieddiker Rebbe. With fellow *bachurim* he fled through Warsaw, Lithuania, and Shanghai, with the life-saving aid of Chiune Sugihara, before arriving to his final destination, Montreal.

His immediate family members had all passed away at the hands of the Nazis.

Reb Volf married Esther Silber

from Williamsburg and together they raised their family. First as a student and later as a teacher and *mashpia*, Reb Volf remained in Tomchei Temimim for close to eight decades.

A man with a multi-faceted personality, Reb Volf had a jovial nature and was prone to making jokes to the point of *kalus rosh*. As a *bachur* he wrote to the Frieddiker Rebbe and asked for advice on how to break this habit, and he was *zocheh* to receive an answer (see excerpt below entitled “Think Twice”). That being said, Reb Volf was able to put to good use the lighthearted aspect of his personality, endearing himself to—and gently, effectively disciplining—the *bachurim* under his guidance.

Although his personal life was not easy due to his experiences in Europe, the upheaval of moving to North



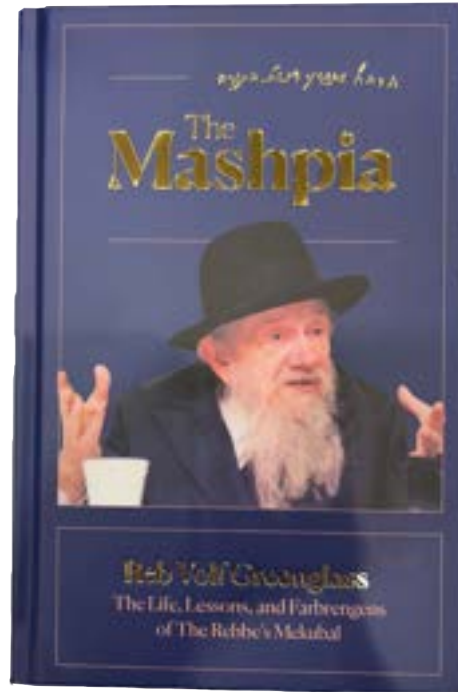
Wedding of Shterna Sarah Greenglass and Rabbi David Cohen, Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5767 (1967) in Montreal. L-R: Mrs. Esther Greenglass, Reb Volf Greenglass, their son-in-law Rabbi Dovid Cohen, his mother Mrs. Suzanne Cohen, and their daughter the *kallah* Shterna Sarah.



Mrs. Esther Greenglass in her twenties.



Reb Volf and Mrs. Esther Greenglass in their sixties.



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America, and a special-needs child, he invariably displayed a cheerful mood.

Delightful, sometimes uproarious anecdotes about how the *mashpia* utilized his wit to influence students are sprinkled over parts of the book, making the reading experience very pleasant. However, this is not a book of humor. Reb Volf's good nature did not detract one iota from his phenomenal self-discipline and devotion to Torah, his *avodas Hashem*, and his dedication to helping his students grow by whatever means necessary. Quite a few stories grab the reader by the lapels and give a little wake-up call.

Our Rebbe called Reb Volf "*mein mekubal*" since he had a considerable knowledge of Kabbalah. The book is entitled *The Mashpia* precisely because it focuses on his life, teachings, and wisdom, all of which created a lasting legacy which continues to inspire. It is divided into several sections: his personal biography; stories of *tzaddikim* and *chassidim* that Reb Volf would tell at *farbrengens*; lessons, including Shabbos table insights on the *parshah*, and Chassidic perspectives on the life cycle and festivals; an essay on *ahavas Yisroel*; and an anthology of essential laws with Chassidic insights from the works of the leaders of Chabad. This is a great book — literally, over 1,000 pages long — to pick up again and again for Shabbos-table stories, *divrei Torah*, and life-changing lessons — and a taste of life in yeshivah with a phenomenal *mashpia*.

Excerpts from THE MASHPIA:

THINK TWICE

As a *bachur* in yeshivah, Reb Volf was on his way to being the class clown and he knew it was wrong. He wrote to the Frieddiker Rebbe about this, asking for advice on how to break the habit of making too many jokes.

The Frieddiker Rebbe replied in a detailed letter, dated 23 Sivan 5698 (June 22, 1938):

“In response to your question of what to do about your natural tendency to say witty remarks (*gleich vertlach*). You say you can’t stop yourself, and you feel sorry about it afterward, but whenever you resolve to abandon the habit of making jokes, it only lasts a few days.

“...The salvation for your soul is only through *kabalas ol*, by not speaking at all without first thinking whether it’s better to speak or remain silent.

“*Kabalas ol* in general, and especially to break a natural habit, is very difficult. But to save one’s soul, one must invest tremendous effort. The first days will be difficult, but Hashem will help that it will get easier each day.”

HOLY SUKKAH

It is known that Reb Zushe of Anipoli would often travel and wander from place to place. He once arrived at a settlement and looked for a place to *daven*. Finally, he found a broken *sukkah* and decided to *daven* there. The

townspeople asked why he didn’t *daven* in a home, and he replied that even though this *sukkah* was built by a well-meaning farmer in a nonkosher manner according to one opinion, according to another opinion it was kosher when there was no other choice. Because the Jew truly and sincerely wanted to fulfill the *mitzvah* and didn’t know it wasn’t kosher, there was still a residue of holiness in the *sukkah*. Because of the *kedushah* in it, he wished specifically to *daven* there.

AWED GOATS

One Friday afternoon, when the Baal Shem Tov went out in the fields to greet the onset of Shabbos, a flock of goats was grazing nearby. When they saw the Baal Shem Tov’s holy visage, they were overawed, and they stood on their hind legs for the duration of his *davening*. Likewise,

the goats in the Rebbe’s courtyard in Lubavitch were visibly awed by the Rebbe Rashab.

TEARS FOR STONES

Reb Pinchas Reizes was one of the community leaders of Shklov. Many communal meetings were held at his house, so he needed to build a fancier house than the average person had — which meant it was built of stone instead of wood and had a finished floor instead of a dirt floor. This was told to the Alter Rebbe in a way that was degrading to Reb Pinchas, but the Rebbe said, “I can testify that for every stone he put in his house, he cried that number of tears.”

TWO BODIES, ONE SOUL

The Mitteler Rebbe said that marriage is an additional stage in the soul’s descent into the body.



Reb Volf Greenglass receiving *kos shel brachah* from the Rebbe.

From a certain perspective, it is an even greater descent than the first time around, since then the soul had to deal with just one body, and now it has to deal with two.

A REBBETZIN'S SPIRITUAL ABILITIES

The Mittler Rebbe supported his son-in-law, the Tzemach Tzedek, for an extended period after his wedding. After a while, he decided to limit his financial support. The Mittler Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Shterna, the Alter Rebbe's wife, was not pleased with her son's decision and came to scold him. During the conversation that ensued, she said, "How are you greater than me?

Ruach hakodesh? I observed your father for 50 years. I know about *ruach hakodesh*. I know what it means to accept a *pidyon nefesh* and I can do it even better than you can."

SEALED LIPS

Reb Chaim Ber the *gabbai* said: "I once saw a soldier enter the Tzemach Tzedek's study, and I did not see him leave." Reb Chaim Ber was a devoted *gabbai* and *chossid* to the Tzemach Tzedek. *Chassidim* would say that he was like a sealed metal chest, since throughout the Tzemach Tzedek's lifetime, he did not disclose anything that transpired in the Tzemach Tzedek's study. Only after the Tzemach

Tzedek's passing did he start to share a little.

A ROV'S SIYATA D'SHMAYA

A woman once brought a chicken with questionable kosher status to the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe would generally advise people to go to the *rov* for halachic questions; the Rebbe would take requests for blessings and give advice in serving Hashem. He therefore instructed her to bring the chicken to the *rov* and report back to him afterward. When she returned, she said the *rov's* ruling was that the chicken was kosher. When the Tzemach Tzedek met the *rov* later in *shul*, he asked the *rov* how he could *pasken* that the chicken was kosher if in such-and-such a *sefer* there is quoted a halachic view rendering the chicken *treif!* The *rov* gathered his courage and replied, "I am a simple *rov*, and I don't possess all the *sefarim* that the Rebbe has. Based on the limited *sefarim* I have, and with my knowledge and expertise, I ruled that the chicken is kosher." That night, the Tzemach Tzedek researched the subject again, and he found other *sefarim* that quote the stringent view but argue with it and overrule it. It turned out that the *rov*, with heavenly assistance, had ruled accurately.

Reb Volf would say that it is always good to ask a *rov*, since that way, you benefit from the *siyata d'Shmaya* that the *rov* has from Hashem.

THE EXTENT OF MERCY

The *Gemara* says, "It is forbidden to have mercy on one who lacks understanding." The Rebbe Rashab once said about this passage of the *Talmud*, "See how much pity we



Reb Volf Greenglass dancing with his grandson Yisroel Cohen.

must have on this Jew, who came to such a low state that we are even told not to pity him.”

AGAINST HASHEM'S WILL

Some 56 years before the Rebbe Rashab passed away, his brother, the Raza, moved from Lubavitch to Vitebsk, where he dealt in logs. Vitebsk was a big, modern city, and his daughter began to dress in a more modern fashion. Word of this reached her grandmother, Rebbetzin Rivkah, and it brought her to tears. When the Rebbe Rashab asked her what had happened, and she told him, he was surprised: “Even when Father [the Rebbe Maharash] passed away, you didn’t cry like this!” To which she replied, “That was Hashem’s Will, but this is against His will!”

EXTRAVAGANT PHOTOS

When *shluchim* began doing *shlichus* work in Morocco, the Rebbe said, “It would be possible to support the entire yeshivah in Morocco for half a year with the money spent here [in the U.S.] on wedding pictures.”

IT'S NOT ONLY YOU

The Rebbe once said to the *mazkir* and *chossid* Reb Leibel Groner with regard to difficulties some *shluchim* were experiencing: “Was it Moshe lifting up his hand that caused the sea to split?! Hashem instructed him to stretch out his arm — that was his role, but all the rest was accomplished by Hashem. The same is true with

the work of *shlichus* — the person must ‘stretch out his hand’ and do as much as he can, but the actual accomplishment will come through the help from Above.”

DIFFERENCE OF TUNE

When Reb Meir Schapiro of Lublin built a modern facility for his yeshivah, with a kitchen, a dining room, and more, he was asked how this fits with the instruction of the *mishnah*, “This is the way of Torah; you shall eat bread with water, etc.”

“How do you know which tune to use for reading this *mishnah*?” was his reply. “Perhaps it should be read not in direct form but as a wonder. The *tanna* wishes to say, ‘Is this the way of Torah?! To live off only bread and water?!’”

Reb Meir continued that in the time of the Alter Rebbe, when the majority of Yidden were *misnagdim*, there was a *minyán* of *chassidim* who *davened* in a shul together with their non-Chassidic brethren. The *chassidim* wanted to say *Hallel* on Pesach night, as the Alter Rebbe instructs, but were afraid of the reaction of their fellow congregants. So, they arranged their *minyán* to take place after everyone else had already left shul. In the end, the *rov* of the shul found out about it, and he came with complaints.

“How could you do this?! True, the Beis Yosef says to say *Hallel*, but the Rema argues with him and says that ‘our custom is not to do so.’”

One of the *chassidim* replied, “How do you know which tune

should be used to read these words of the Rema? It can be that the Rema’s intention was for it to be read as a question: ‘And our custom is not to do so?! It is a pity that we do not have this good custom!’”

IF ONLY A BEINONI

Prior to seeing the *Tanya*, Reb Hillel viewed himself as a *tzadik*. However, once Reb Zalman Zezmer showed him the *Tanya*, he said, “Never mind a *tzadik* — if only I could reach the level of *beinoni*!”

He explained that the word *Tanya* begins with a *tav*, the last letter of the *alef-beis*, implying that before a person starts to learn *Tanya*, he feels that he has accomplished everything and is complete. The word *Tanya* ends with an *alef*, the first letter of the *alef-beis*, to teach us that even when we finish learning the *Tanya*, we should understand that we have not yet even begun to do what is incumbent upon us. We are only holding at the letter *alef*, the beginning of our service to Hashem.

COMPLEMENTARY EMOTIONS

It is told about Reb Pesach Malastovker that the concept of “joy is entrenched on one side of my heart and sadness on the other side” was seen in him. It was witnessed, when he *davened*, that while one eye smiled and radiated joy, the other had tears falling from it. ❁