

A Turkey in the Chicken Coop

A Tribute to R' Meir Shapiro **BY DON JARASHOW**

As seen in *The Lakewood Shopper*

This week marked the yahrtzeit of Rav Meir Shapiro *zt"l*, a man whose vision and passion reshaped the Torah world forever. Born in 1887 in Shotz, Galicia, Rav Meir was a brilliant *talmid chacham* and visionary leader who transformed the face of Torah learning.

As Rav of Lublin, he founded Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin — a yeshivah that elevated the *kavod haTorah* through its grandeur and high standards. In 1923, at the first Knessiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisroel, he introduced the revolutionary idea of Daf Yomi — uniting Jews across the globe through the daily study of the same *daf* of Gemara. Nearly a century later, that vision continues to pulsate in the heart of *klal Yisrael*: Every single day, from the vibrant, crowded *batei midrash* of New York to the serene, candlelit shuls of Yerushalayim; from the bustling streets of Mumbai to the remote yeshivas of Johannesburg; from airport lounges in London to intimate Zoom chavrusas spanning Tokyo and Buenos Aires; hundreds of thousands of Yidden immerse themselves in the same *daf*, weaving a tapestry of Torah that unites Jews across the globe, one *blatt* Gemara at a time.

These accomplishments did not come easily. Rav Meir faced resistance, struggle, and opposition at every turn, even from people within his own community. Yet his strength, resilience, and unwavering conviction carried him through. He lived with a burning clarity of purpose — a sense of *tafkid*, a divine mission — to restore the dignity and beauty of Torah to its rightful place.

YESHIVAS CHACHMEI LUBLIN

Many rejoiced at the news of Rav Meir Shapiro's ambitious project — a grand yeshivah that would become the pride of Polish Jewry and a living symbol of *kavod haTorah*. Yet alongside the excitement came the inevitable opposition.

Local radicals and anti-Semitic groups mocked and opposed Rav Meir's grand project — deriding it as outdated, halting construction

through protests and petitions, and even planting a cross on the site — until Agudas Yisroel's political pressure finally secured the permits to continue building.

Surprisingly, one particular challenge came from within the Torah world itself. Lithuanian *roshei yeshivah* and certain Polish Chassidic leaders worried about the large sums Rav Meir was collecting, arguing that instead of building a singular, grand yeshivah, the money could instead build dozens of smaller yeshivos in simpler fashion.

Rav Meir felt differently and was ready with an answer — a parable that revealed both his wisdom and his deep understanding of the Jewish heart. It not only pacified the *roshei yeshivos*, but also serves as a parable for life — for our collective *tafkidim* in this world.

And he responded as follows:

"Rav Meir was a brilliant talmid chacham and visionary leader who transformed the face of Torah learning."

A TURKEY AMONG CHICKENS

"One day, in a large chicken coop, everyone was surprised to find a turkey among the chickens. The chickens complained that the feed the master provided was barely enough for them, let alone their new 'housemate.' The turkey reassured them, saying, 'True, I have a bigger appetite. But because I make such a racket, the master will have to come feed us more often — and in the end, you will all benefit as well.'"

Rav Meir smiled and explained: "I am that turkey. My noise, my large and ambitious undertaking, will draw attention and generosity from Jews everywhere. When people see a yeshivah like this, one that stands proudly in the center of a great city, they will understand that Torah is something honorable, something grand — and they will give more,

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not less. My goal is not to take from others, but to expand the entire pool of support for Torah learning.”

And indeed, that is exactly what happened. When Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin opened in 1930, it was not merely a building — it was a revolution. It boasted dormitories, a library of over 20,000 *sefarim*, and a *beis midrash* of remarkable beauty and stature. The yeshivah reflected Rav Meir’s conviction that Torah deserved to be honored and celebrated — that Torah is the force that sustains the world.

This wasn’t just a *maschal* — it was the essence of the Lubliner Rav’s vision: to see things through to the end, to keep one’s eye on the goal, to recognize that we were placed in this world to work, to strive, to toil — not to live on spiritual handouts. As the Zohar calls it, *nahama d’kisufa* — “bread of embarrassment.” To toil, as toil is the reason man was created. Toil elevates and brings *shleimus* to the *neshamah*. It fulfills one’s *tafkid* in this transient world.

LECH LECHA

In this week’s parshah, Avraham Avinu is told:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמְּלֹכֶתְךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ.

Hashem said to Avram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

Rashi adds:

לְהִנָּאתָ וּלְטוֹבָתָךְ — *For your own benefit, for your own good.*

Asks the *heilige* Me’or Einayim:

Avraham Avinu served Hashem out of pure love, without any ulterior motive. His entire existence was devoted to Hashem with excitement and selflessness. If so, why did Hashem need to encourage him by promising that it would be “for his good” — as if Avraham needed reassurance or personal incentive? A Yid in 2025 could use the extra *chizzuk*. But Avraham Avinu, who overcame the *nisayon* of slaughtering his own son, is there a thought that he wouldn’t have left his homeland with happiness and joy, with a spring in his step to fulfill the will of the Creator?

The Me’or Einayim answers based on quoting the נעלם, who says that Avraham represents the *neshamah*, and Lot represents the *guf* (the body).

Indeed, Avraham Avinu didn’t need the extra *chizzuk*. Rather, the *chizzuk* is for דורות, future generations to come. It was a mandate to every Avraham, every *neshamah* to come to this world.

A MESSAGE TO THE NESHAMAH

Before a soul descends to this world, it basks in the radiance of the Shechinah above. The soul does not want to leave that closeness to Hashem; it does not want to descend into the confusion and struggle of this world. It wants to remain in the upper realms, content in Hashem’s presence.

But Hashem says:

לֵךְ לָךְ — *go forth*

Descend from your heavenly home to the physical world. Even though it feels painful to leave that spiritual comfort, it is ultimately *for your benefit and for your true good*. Because only through the toil, the effort, and the challenges of this world can the *neshamah* rise to even greater heights than before.

מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמְּלֹכֶתְךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ — *Go out from your land, from your birthplace, from your familiar surroundings*

Leave the heavenly realms, the place you know, and come down to this unfamiliar world.

אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ — *to the world that I will show you*

To this world below, where the soul fulfills its mission.

Through its journey here — through struggle, growth, and serving Hashem amidst concealment — the *neshamah* brings even greater joy and *nachas ruach* to Hashem than it could in the upper worlds.

Amidst adversity, opposition, and hostility, Rav Meir knew why he was placed on this earth — to change the world. And so he did. He built the great empire of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, and perhaps achieved one of the greatest accomplishments in Jewish history — Daf Yomi.

As for us, our *neshamos* once struggled to remain above — in a realm saturated with light, holiness, and *kedushah*. But Hashem said to our souls as well, “לֵךְ לָךְ” — go down. “You have work to do. You must bring *tikkun* to My world. Make it brighter, purer, more filled with My presence.” We are here on a mission — in a fleeting, transient world — to fulfill the unique purpose for which our *neshamos* descended.

We may not become *roshei yeshivah* or ignite revolutions like Daf Yomi. But Hashem placed each of us here for a reason — and our *avodah* is to discover it and to live it.

Like in Rav Meir’s *maschal*, to be that turkey in a coop of chickens — to rise above the noise, to draw spiritual bounty not just for ourselves but for Yidden everywhere. To make the world a better place — a world filled with *מלא כל הארץ כבודו*.

Because while the details and nuances for each individual vary, our collective mission as *klal Yisrael* remains the same: To bring His presence into every corner of the world. And we must do all we can to stay focused on that purpose — to toil, to persevere, to illuminate — until the *tikkun* is complete and the *geulah* arrives. May that be very soon. •

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— Much of this information is adapted from an article originally published in Mishpacha Magazine.

