

Gerrer Chassidus



Rabbi Efrem Goldberg
People of the Book

Ger is Yiddish of Gora Kalwaria



Rebbes of Ger



1. R' Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg-Alter (1799–1866)
 - 1a. R' Chanoch Henocho of Aleksander (1798–1870)
2. R' Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847–1905)
3. R' Avraham Mordechai Alter (1866–1948)
4. R' Yisrael Alter (1895–1977)
5. R' Simcha Bunim Alter (1898–1992)
6. R' Pinchas Menachem Alter (1926–1996)
7. R' Yaakov Aryeh Alter (b. 1939)

Chidushei Ha'Rim



- ❧ R' Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg-Alter (1799-1866)
- ❧ Also known as *the Chiddushei HaRim* for the books he wrote.
- ❧ He was a descendant of Rashi and of the Maharam Rutenburg, R' Meir of Rothenburg.
- ❧ He was a child prodigy and a genius in Talmud from a young age. The great Polish Chasidic leaders sought him as a disciple.
- ❧ When he was just 17 years old he published his first Chidushim and became known as the Illuy of Warsaw"
- ❧ He married Feigele Lipszyc, daughter of Moshe 'Halfon' Lipszyc, in 1811, and settled in Warsaw. They had fourteen children, most of whom died in infancy.

First Gerrer Rebbe



- ❧ His mother Chaya Sarah, was an orphan who was raised by the Koznitzer Maggid. The Maggid therefore was a great influence on the Rebbe's early development.
- ❧ Later, he was drawn to R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa, one of the prominent leaders of Chasidim in Poland. His students included the Kotzker Rebbe, Vurker Rebbe, Izhbitzer Rebbe, Alexander Rebbe and the Gerrer Rebbe.
- ❧ He famously taught:
Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need. When feeling lowly and depressed, discouraged or disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words: "For my sake was the world created."
But when feeling high and mighty one should reach into the left pocket, and find the words: "I am but dust and ashes."

First Gerrer Rebbe



- ❧ After R' Simcha Bunim passed away, the Rebbe became a close adherent of R' Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk, the Kotzker Rebbe.
- ❧ The Kotzker was known for his sharp wit and Talmudic brilliance.
- ❧ He famously said:
 - ❧ "Not all that is thought need be said, not all that is said need be written, not all that is written need be published, and not all that is published need be read"
 - ❧ "Where is Hashem to be found? Wherever you let Him in."
 - ❧ "You don't love fish. If you loved the fish, you would not have killed it and cooked it on a fire."
- ❧ The Gerrer Rebbe and the Kotzer Rebbe eventually became brothers-in-law, when the latter married Chaya Lipszyc, the sister of Feigele.
- ❧ In 1830, due to his support of the Poles during the November Uprising (Polish-Russian War), R' Yitzchak Meir was forced to change his last name from Rothenberg to *Alter*.

First Gerrer Rebbe



- ❧ At the insistence of the Chassidim, the Chiddushei Ha'Rim became leader after the death of the Kotzker. He moved to Ger, outside of Warsaw.
- ❧ At the first Chassidic gathering over which he presided, he declared, "Reb Simchah Bunim led with love and R' Menachem Mendel with fear. I will lead with Torah!"
- ❧ Psischa and Kotzk were elitist and designed for the best.

First Gerrer Rebbe



- ❧ R' Yitzhak Meir extracted their principles and applied them in a way that could attract Jews of all levels.
- ❧ Nevertheless, Ger inherited from Kotzk a sense of skepticism of people's motivation and suspicion of the ego.
- ❧ Ger emphasized the centrality of Torah and personal growth while minimizing the role of the externals of Chasidus.

Chidushei Ha'Rim



- ❧ R' Yitzchak Meir was a great leader who was deeply involved in everything that affected his followers.
- ❧ He wrote Chiddushei Ha'Rim on:

Torah
Pirkei Avos
Choshen Mishpat
Yoreh Dei'ah
Even Ha'Ezer

Bava Kama
Bava Metzia
Bava Basra
Shavuos
Kesubos
Gittin
Kiddushin

First Gerrer Rebbe



- ❧ He had 13 children. One of his sons and three daughters survived to adulthood and married, however, by the time he passed away, they were all gone. He outlived all his children, a tremendous personal tragedy. Yet, he accepted it all with great faith.
- ❧ After leading Ger for 7 years, he died on 23 Adar, 5626 (1866).
- ❧ Having not left a son, and with his grandson too young, R' Yitzchak Meir, the Chiddushei Ha'Rim was succeeded by his colleague and disciple, Rabbi Chanoch Henochof Alexander. Only when the Alexander Rebbe passed, did that grandson, R' Yehuda Leib Alter, the Sfas Emes take over.

Alexander Rebbe



- ❧ R' Chanoch Henoch Ha'Kohen Levin, Alexander Rebbe (1798-1870)
- ❧ Served as bridge between founder of Ger and his grandson.
- ❧ Was a leading student of R' Simcha Bunim and the Kotzker.
- ❧ Published his teachings in Chashava L'Tova.



Sfas Emes



- ❧ R' Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905)
- ❧ Also known by his main work, the Sfas Emes.
- ❧ His father, R" Avraham Mordechai died when he was 8 years old and his mother had already passed away by then.
- ❧ He too was a child prodigy and it is said in his youth he would learn Torah 18 hours at a time.
- ❧ He married Yocheved Rivka who was the daughter of Yehudah Leib. Aryeh was added to his name in order to have a different name than his father in law.
- ❧ His grandfather died when he was 18 years old and though chassidim wanted him to become the Rebbe, he thought he was too young.
- ❧ However, after the passing of the Alexander Rebbe in 1870, he became the Gerrer Rebbe.

Sfas Emes



- Under his guidance and leadership Ger became the largest Chassidic group in Poland.
- He was one of the greatest Torah scholars of his generation and wrote on everything.
- During the Russian-Japanese War, many of his chassidim were drafted into the Russian Army. His worry over them caused health challenges.
- He died at the age of 57 on 5 Shevat, 5665 (1905).



Imrei Emes



- ❧ The Sfas Emes was succeeded by his son, R' Avraham Mordechai Alter also known as the Imrei Emes. (1866-1948)
- ❧ He married Chaya Ruda Czarna, daughter of a prominent Gerrer Chasid. They had 8 children. His eldest son was killed in Treblinka with his children and grandchildren.
- ❧ In 1922 his wife died. He then married his niece Feyge Biderman and had another son, Pinchas Menachem in 1926.



Imrei Emes



- ❧ Though Ger had barely 3,000 Jews, it was home of the greatest Chasidic dynasty in Eastern Europe.
- ❧ At its peak, he had over 200,000 followers.
- ❧ He was one of the founders of Agudas Yisroel of Poland and was instrumental in establishing a network of schools.
- ❧ In 1926, in a departure from Polish Chasidus, he opened a yeshiva in Yerushalayim named for his father, Sfas Emes.



Imrei Emes



- ❧ During the Holocaust he was targeted by the Nazis but managed to escape to Israel in 1940 with several of his sons.
- ❧ In Israel, he began to rebuild his chassidus
- ❧ In 1948, during the war of independence he was trapped in Yerushalayim.
- ❧ He died on Shavuos of that year. He couldn't be buried on Har Ha'zeisim because of the war so was buried in the Yeshiva courtyard.



Beis Yisroel



- ❧ The Imrei Emes was succeeded by his son R' Yisrael Alter, also known as the Beis Yisroel. (1895-1977)
- ❧ He escaped Poland with his father and immigrated to Israel in 1940.
- ❧ In 1945 he learned that his wife, daughter, son and grandchildren were murdered by the Nazis.



Beis Yisroel



- ❧ He remarried but had no more children.
- ❧ He had brilliant insight and people sought his advice.
- ❧ Under his leadership, Ichud Mosdos Gur was established and today is responsible for over 100 Ger institutions.
- ❧ He was largely responsible for regrowing Ger Chasidus after the war.
- ❧ He placed great emphasis on purity and holiness in conduct.
- ❧ The Beis Yisroel was a driving force in Agudas Yisrael political party in Israel and guided its work in the Knesset.
- ❧ Leaving no heir, he was succeeded by his brother, R' Simcha Bunim Alter who performed chalitza with his wife.



Lev Simcha



- ❧ R' Simcha Bunim Alter also known as the Lev Simcha (1898-1992)
- ❧ He was married to his first cousin Ita and had one son and one daughter.
- ❧ He visited Palestine with his father in law in 1923 and stayed for many years. He then returned to Poland and lived in Lodz and then in Warsaw. He returned to Israel with his father.
- ❧ Before succeeding as the Rebbe, he was a businessman in real estate.
- ❧ Under his leadership, Ger grew tremendously in Israel. He took over leadership of Agudas Yisrael.
- ❧ In 1980 he instituted Yerushalmi Yomi, the daily study of a page of Talmud Yerushalmi.
- ❧ He passed away on 7 Tamuz 5753, (1992)



Pnei Menachem



- ❧ R' Pinchas Menachem Alter, also known as the Pnei Menachem (1926-1996)
- ❧ He was born in Poland and was the only child of his father's second marriage.
- ❧ After the war he married his cousin, Tzipora Alter and had 7 children.
- ❧ He succeeded his half brother in 1992.
- ❧ He passed in 1996, less than four years after becoming Rebbe. He is buried next to his father in the courtyard of the yeshiva.
- ❧ He was succeeded by his nephew, R' Yaakov Aryeh Alter, son of R' Simcha Bunim.



Current Rebbe



- ❧ R' Yaakov Aryeh Alter (born 1939)
- ❧ Son of the Lev Simcha, R' Simcha Bunim.
- ❧ He and his wife have five sons and four daughters.



Ger



- ✧ Today, there are more than 13,000 Ger families.
- ✧ Ger is the largest Chasidus in Israel.
- ✧ Also have communities in Brooklyn, London, Toronto, LA, Lakewood, Antwerp, Switzerland and more.
- ✧ Ger places great emphasis on Torah study and on piety.
- ✧ Gerrer Rebbe joined with Chafetz Chaim in supporting Sarah Shenirer to start Beis Yaakov.

Dress



- ❧ Gerrer chassidim tuck their pants into their socks (hoyzn-zokn)
- ❧ They wear a round felt hat during the week.
- ❧ They wrap their long payos and tuck them neatly under the yarmulka.
- ❧ On Shabbos and yom tov married men wear a Spodik.



Kedusha



- ❧ Ger believes in separation beyond that which the law requires.
- ❧ "Gur Hasidim did adopt the practice of studying the Torah for many years, but they have an alternate ethos, that of sanctity as an organizing principle and the axis around which life revolves - exactly like the ethos of Torah learning in Lithuanian society. This is a society that has taken upon itself with utter devotion the principle of reducing sexuality, as a way to challenge general society." Dr. Nava Wasserman

Kedusha



- ❧ Kotzker tradition is that to connect with love to Hashem, one must transcend physical love with humans.
- ❧ Therefore, sanctity achieved in withdrawing and being careful between man and God, man and man, man and himself and even man and his wife.
- ❧ Was always reserved for the elite, but the Beis Yisroel made it more popular and promoted it.

Kedusha



- ❧ Guard their eyes and thoughts at all times. Remove glasses when walking on the street or going on bus.
- ❧ Gur men do not embrace each other.
- ❧ Great modesty is practiced at the mikvah
- ❧ Young men don't attend weddings lest the event cause them to contemplate intimacy.
- ❧ Even at family meals there is separate seating and grown young men won't talk to female cousins.
- ❧ Even in marriage – “distant closeness”