



# R' Kalonymus Kalman Shapira The Piaceszna Rebbe

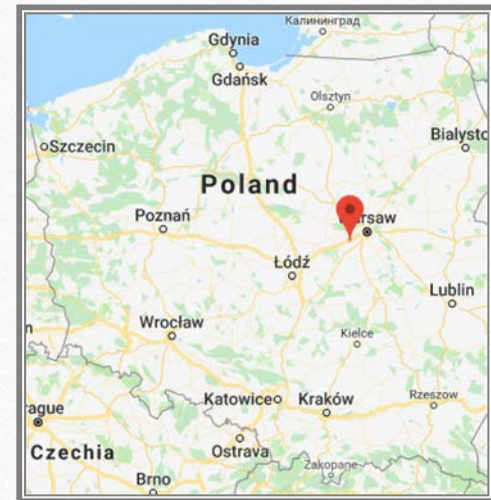
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Rabbi Efrem Goldberg



# Birth and Background

- Born in Grodzisk, Poland 1889.
- His father, Reb Elimelech of Grodzisk was a leader of Polish Chassidim and author of the Imrei Elimelech and Divrei Elimelech. He married R' Kalonymus's mother after his first wife passed away.
- Named for his father's grandfather, R' Kalonymus Kalman of Krakow, a close disciple of R' Elimelech of Lizensk and author of Maor V'Shemesh
- He descended from great Chassidic masters including the Maggid of Kozhnitz in addition to the Shach, the Bach, the Megaleh Amukos and others tracing themselves all the way back to Dovid Ha'Melech.



# Infancy

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- From a young age, his father trained him towards kedusha including ensuring his head was always covered and someone would wash his hands every time he slept.
- When he was an infant, he contracted scarlet fever and the situation was dire. His father, Reb Elimelech took off his special hat for a Rebbe and announced he would no longer serve as a rebbe or teach until his son recovered.
- The entire town gathered to daven on his behalf. The Maggid of Trisk sent a silver seder plate that had been used by R' Yitzchok of Nezchisch, of the great rebbes of an earlier generation with instructions to feed the baby warm soup from it.
- They did and he was cured. He would use that seder plate for the rest of his life during his Shabbos meals.

# Father Passed Away

- His father passed away before he turned 3.
- Perhaps he saw Hashem as his greatest Father figure and connected so much as a result.
- He was an exceptionally sensitive person and he later recalled how he had felt his mother's grief during those days.
- Kalonymus became well known for his diligence and brilliance. He was very mature and had a very developed neshama for a young man.
- He spent a lot of time with his mother's father, R' Chaim Shmuel Ha'Levi Hurwitz Sternfeld, the Rebbe of Chentzin who was a grandson of the Chozeh of Lublin.
- His main teacher was his nephew, R' Yerachmiel Moshe, the Kozhnutzer Rebbe, who was the son of Reb Elimelech's daughter from another marriage and was much older than him.



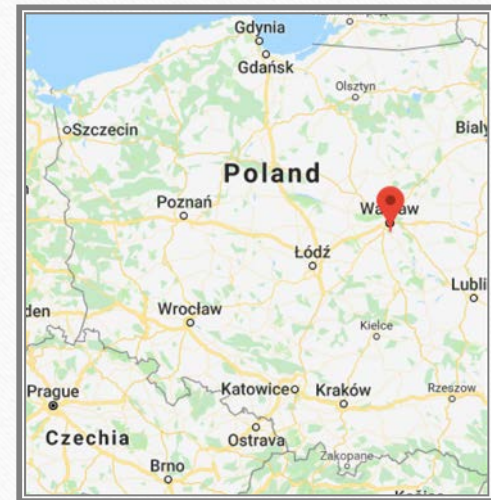
# Marriage

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- After his bar mitzvah, R' Kalonymus became engaged to Reb Yerachmiel Moshe's daughter, Rachel Chaya Miriam and they married two years later, when he was fifteen.
- They moved to Kozhnitz and R' Kalonymus Kalman spent most of his time with his father in law who taught him, guided him and mentored him.
- Four years later, on Shavuos of 1909, R' Yerachmiel Moshe refused to lead the Akdamus and insisted his son in law have the honor Chassidim saw it as a sign that the mantle was being passed
- A few months later, on 13 Elul 1909, R' Yerachmiel Moshe passed away at 49 years old. His chassidim split with half following his son, R' Aharon Yechiel and the other half following his son in law, R' Kalonymus Kalman who became Rebbe in the town of Piaseczno.

# Piaseczno Rebbe

- Though he was only 20 when he became Rebbe, he attracted many followers in Piaseczno due to his charisma, his personality, his deep spirituality and great scholarship.
- Many of his father and father in law's chassidim followed him to Piaseczno and turned to him for advice and guidance. The small shtetl became a large center of Chassidim.
- He spoke to both the elite of the chassidim and challenged them to go higher but also appealed to the hurting masses who found comfort and support in him.



# Piaseszno Rebbe

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- His divrei Torah were mesmerizing, his zemiros and spinging elevating. He had a magnetic personality.
- He had a fire and passion that were contagious and exhilarating. On Shabbos Piaseczno was full of chassidim who came especially to attend his tisch.
- The Rebbe was a talented violinist. He composed niggunim that were sung by his chassidim.



## Piaseczno Rebbe

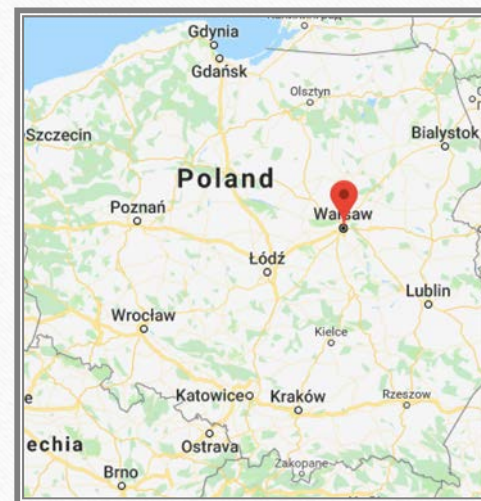
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- He had a gift for creating and maintaining personal connections with his chassidim.
- When the Rebbe heard of some wondrous miracle that had been performed by a certain Admor, he said, “The greatest miracle is to make simple Jews into *chassidim*.”
- Indeed, that is what he would do. Within a short time, Jews who had been alienated from their Jewish identity would become *chassidim*.
- He placed an emphasis on relationships with children, ensuring each has a rebbe who loves them and cares for them.
- The Rabbi of Piaseczno, Reb Noach Bialer passed away in 1913 and the people insisted R' Kalonymus Kalman become the Chief Rabbi. He agreed on condition the salary would be paid to R' Noach's widow and that his son, R' Henoah would be appointed Dayan.

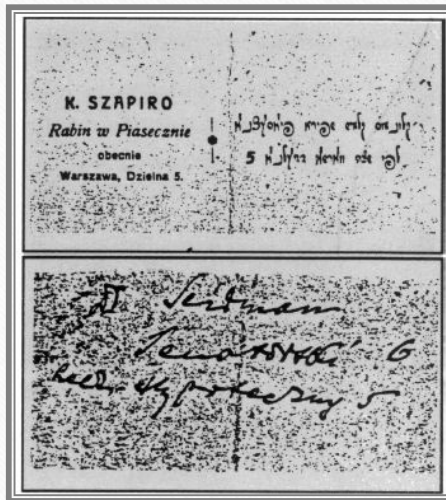


# Move to Warsaw

- After WWI, R' Kalonymus Kalman moved to Warsaw where he served as a member of the Rabbinical Association. However, he continued to visit Piaseczno often and was still considered the town's Rabbi.
- In Warsaw, he became President of the Shomrei Shabbos organization. He prevented extensive Shabbos desecration by winning over his opponents with love and persuasion rather than rebuke. He collected funds and printed booklets in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish explaining the sanctity of Shabbos.
- He was also a leader in the Tiferes Bachurim organization which engaged outreach among young workers through shiurim and Torah study.



# Leader in Warsaw



Rebbe's business card with a referral to a doctor

- He also was a leader in the campaign against the decree forbidding Shechita in Poland in 1935.
- The Rebbe was also involved in lobbying members of the Polish Senate on issues relating to the Jewish community.
- He took a special interest in medical problems and learned as much as possible about the science of medicine. His prescriptions for medications which he wrote in Latin characters, were accepted by pharmacies.
- He became well known for offering medical counsel and blessings. R' Shimon Shkop came from Lithuania to Warsaw for medical treatment and wouldn't undergo anything without first consulting with the Rebbe.



## Love of Israel

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- He had a great love for Eretz Yisroel and wanted to move there many times but was unable to due to responsibilities and obligations to his followers.
- His younger brother, Reb Yeshayahu (1891-1945) moved to Israel as a young man and became one of the leaders of religious Zionism. He became known as the Ha'Admor Ha'Chalutz, the pioneering Rebbe.
- R' Yeshayahu bought tracts of land for his brother and the Rebbe sold some of his property in Poland to finance it.

# Ha'Admor Ha'Chalutz

- In 1914, he immigrated to the Land of Israel by himself. He met Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Ha'Cohen Kook and was greatly influenced by him. After a short while he was exiled to Poland by the Turks.
- He was one of the founders of 'Ha'Mizrachi' of Poland and encouraged the Hassidic community to immigrate to the Land of Israel. With his encouragement, three Hassidic groups were established in Poland, which intended to settle in the Land of Israel. Two of these groups later established the settlement of "Kefar Hassidim" and the third, of "Kefar Atta".
- Rabbi Shapira immigrated again to the Land of Israel in 1920. There he was one of the founders of the "Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi" Movement and even served as its leader for several years.
- In 1924, he travelled to Europe and America on behalf of the Jewish National Fund. He was chosen as a member of the presidency of the JNF and was appointed the director of the Zrubavel Bank. When he reached the age of 51, he decided to fulfill his dream of becoming a farmer. He sold his possessions, left the bank and his other public positions and in 1942, settled in the religious Moshav "Kefar Piness".
- His house there became place of pilgrimage for his many admirers. Many of the members of "Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi" would come to him for Sabbos, like Chassidim come to their Rebbe. Ha'Admor Ha'Chalutz would lay a table like a Rebbe and excite his listeners with Chassidic tunes, some of which he composed.



His machzor for auction at [lot-art.com](http://lot-art.com)

# Piaseczno Rebbe

- “At the Rebbe of Piaseczno,” by Yitzchak Gerstenkorn, a Zionist *chasid* from Poland who was one of the founders of Bnei Brak and the city’s first mayor:

In the summer of 5683 (1923), I became extremely close to the Rebbe of Piaseczno. He was a luminous personality, a pure-hearted *tzaddik* of noble spirit, the scion of supremely holy ancestors who paved the way to the teachings of *chassidut*. He, for his own part, also had original insights into Chassidic teachings. The lessons he taught to his congregation of *chassidim* and admirers on *Shabbatot* were full of ideas of great profundity. Some of his teachings have been disseminated... in the form of the booklet, *Benei Machshava Tova*.

This booklet contains not only lofty ideas, but also practical guidance in serving God, perfecting one’s character, and purifying the psyche. The book *Chovat Ha-Talmidim*, which has appeared in print, contains similar material, as well as the principles of *chassidut* and an introduction to kabbalah. The book is intended for yeshiva students.

[R. Kalonymus’s] love for the Land of Israel was profound and fundamental. He had assets in Poland, but he sold them and sent the money to Jerusalem, to his brother R. Yeshaya Shapiro, for the purposes of buying an inheritance in *Eretz Yisrael*.

I was once invited to a meeting with the Rebbe, together with the Rebbe of Strikov, R. Mendel Landau זצ”ל. In his words, he expressed the lofty, eternal longing of the Jewish soul for Zion and for its rebuilding. His words made a tremendous impression and exerted their influence for a considerable time...

# Da'as Moshe Yeshiva

- In 1923, R' Kalonymus Kalman founded a yeshiva that he called Da'as Moshe after his father in law, R' Yerachmiel Moshe. Until the war, the yeshiva was the center of his life and his ambitions.
- The yeshiva started out small, but its reputation quickly spread and it grew quickly. Before long, it admitted 300 students a year and was one of the largest yeshivas in Poland.
- During the 20 years of its existence, the yeshiva trained thousands of students and graduated men who would serve as Chassidic leaders all over Poland.
- In 1927, the first semicha class graduated.
- He took personal interest in all of the students and taught, guided and mentored them.
- He single handedly supported the yeshiva financially at great personal expense.



# Chinuch Approach

- Specialist in spiritual education
- Pioneer in his approach
- Personalized education speaking to the child's unique soul and helping them realize their potential.
- Chovas Ha'Talmidim – only book published in his lifetime in 1932. It made an enormous impression and was introduced into the curriculum in many Chassidic yeshivos.
- Also wrote several articles called Bnei Machshava Tova, organized groups to work on their thoughts and drawing close to Hashem through intense spiritual work and effort.



# Holocaust



- Reb Kalonymus was in Piaseczno when the Nazi's invaded Poland. He immediately returned to Warsaw which was being bombarded by the German air force. His chassidim urged him to go to Israel which he could have done, but he refused.
- He led yamim nor'aim davening during that time with great fervor and intensity.
- One chassid later remembered those times as follows:
  - "the night of Yim Kippur, bombs were falling everywhere, explosions punctuated every passing moment with their exclamations. I was with a small group of friends that night and we decided not to move from the Rebbe's doorstep the whole night. We just wanted to be near him. As the first light of morning streamed over the horizon we heard the Rebbe recite the morning blessings. When he got to the words, "Train us in you Torah, and make us cleave to Your Mitzvos," the Rebbe stopped and began to repeat those words over and over again for about twenty minutes, with a voice filled with such incredible attachment to Hashem and such longing that it was seemed as if his soul might expire from passion. The sound of his voice filled us with a feeling of wetness that melted and flowed into all our limb.



# Rebbe's Loss

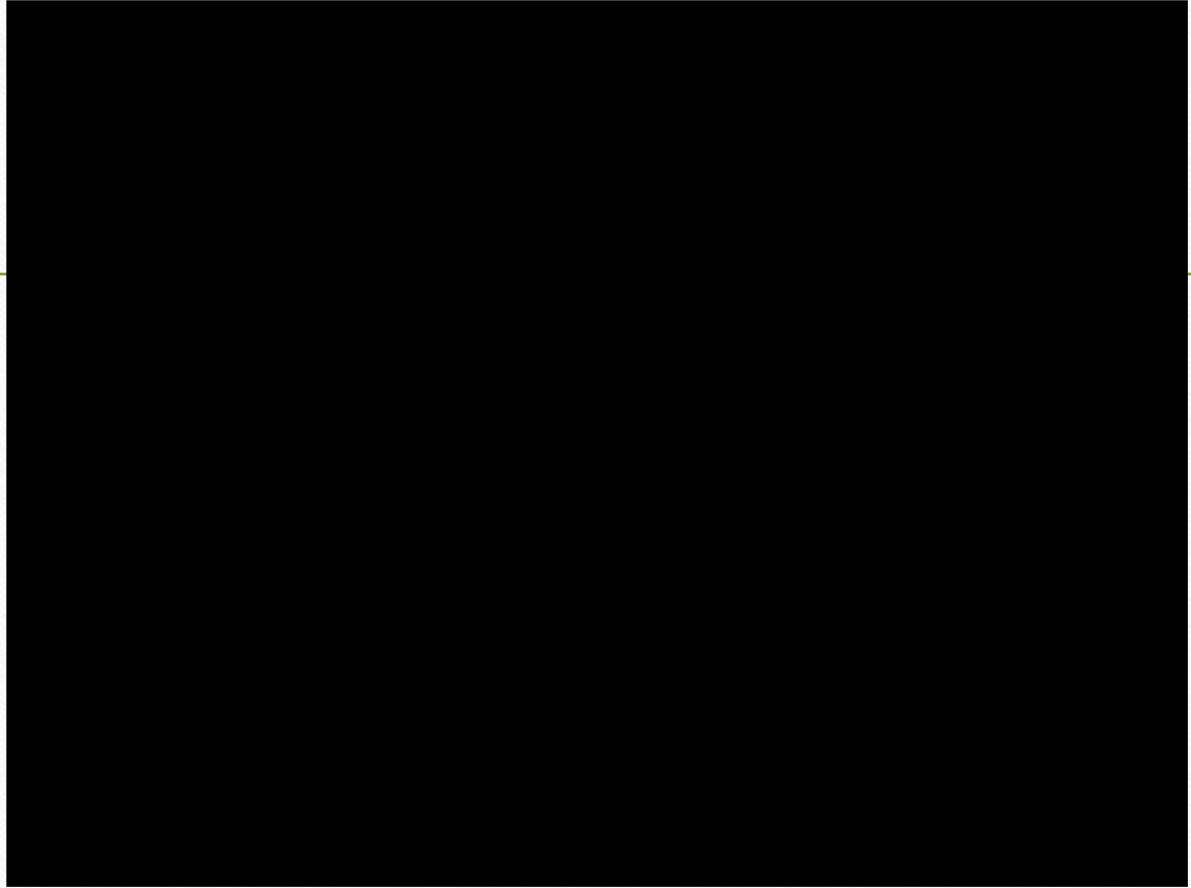
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That year, Yom Kippur was on Shabbos. The following Monday, 12 Tishrei 1939, the Nazi's attacked Warsaw with renewed force. Within a few days, 30,000 Jews had been killed.

On Tuesday a bomb fell close to the Rebbe's house. His son, Elimelech Benzion was hit with shrapnel and severely injured and taken to the hospital.

A few hours later, a bomb exploded outside the hospital and his daughter in law who was waiting for news about her husband was killed instantly along with her aunt, the Rebbe's sister in law.



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## Rebbe's Loss



- After his daughter in law was killed, their bodies lay by the hospital. In that time, women would travel with all their jewelry in case they needed it to bribe officials. A young Piaseczno chasid took the jewelry off their bodies in order to save these precious heirlooms from the house of Kozhnitz.
- He was arrested by the Nazis and accused of robbing the dead. When the Rebbe heard about hit, he dropped everything including his son's worsening condition and burying his dead to free this boy.
- He went to Gestapo headquarters on the first day of Sukkos and somehow managed to come back with the boy.

# Rebbe's Loss

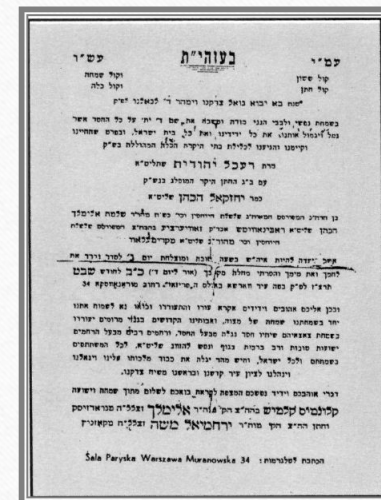
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- The first night of Sukkos, the rebbe ate in a small sukka hidden in a courtyard. The next day, he davened at length and with usual fervor as if nothing was happening outside.
- As the second day of Sukkos, transitioned into Shabbos, R' Elimelech Benzion asked for a cup of wine, made Kiddush and then passed away with his father by his side.
- A chassid described hakafos that year:

The *hakafos* were held hurriedly, everyone anxious to get home, the mortal danger outside matched by the terror indoors. All of a sudden, the Rebbe stood on the *bima* and launched into the well-known melody for *Eshes Chayil*, with burning fervor. We forgot everything. The Rebbe was altogether removed from the world, and we were drawn along in his fervor, forgetting all about the Nazi demon dominating the scene; we forgot about the bombardments and those who had been killed, and it seemed to us that we were all ascending together with the flame that burst forth from the Rebbe's heart. I will never forget those moments of joy.

# Rebbe's Loss

- Less than a month later, on 7 Cheshvan 1939, the Rebbe's mother, the Rebbetzin of Grodzisk passed away.
- In 1942, his daughter was taken by the Nazis and deported. The Rebbe is quoted as saying "I have already been defeated in this war. May Hashem help the people of Israel to emerge victorious."



# Warsaw Ghetto

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- Even as they were in the Ghetto, the Rebbe continued to say divrei Torah, run a tisch, coordinate brises, and be a leader in the community.
- The Rebbe established a soup kitchen at his home that fed 1,500 people.
- During his final months in Warsaw, he worked on the manuscript that would later be the Aish Kodesh.

# Rebbe in the Ghetto

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The Rebbe worked at the Schultz German Shoe Factory headed by Avraham Handel, a factory known as "the workshop of the Admorim," for all the rebbes and roshei yeshivos it employed to save them.

"In the Warsaw Ghetto" (Description of the "Workshop of the Admorim" in the ghetto):

I am here in Schultz's workshop. I've come at a time when the company is hammering away and reciting *Hoshanot*... Here sits... the Rabbi of Koziglov... the former Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Chakhmei Lublin... From time to time, he addresses the Admor of Piaseczno, author of *Chovat Ha-Talmidim*, who sits opposite him. A quiet Torah dialogue develops between them. The teachings of the Talmudic Sages and the *poskim* hover in the air.

Within a short time, the shoemakers' workshop is joined by... Raavad and the Rambam. Who cares about hunger and siege and oppressors? Their location is not the workshop at 46 Nowolipia Street, but rather the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sit among the Sanhedrin.

# Rebbe's Death



- After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was crushed in 1943, the Rebbe was taken to the Trawniki work camp near Lublin. Although offered the opportunity to escape from the concentration camp, he apparently refused. Following the Jewish uprising in Treblinka (August 2, 1943) and in Sobibor (October 14, 1943), there was increasing concern among the Nazi authorities that there would be further outbreaks of violence at other concentration camps. For this reason, Aktion Erntefest (Operation Harvest Festival) was launched. During this operation, carried out on November 3, 1943, all the remaining Jews in Trawniki, including the Rebbe, were shot to death.

- The following was written by an acquaintance, Leibl Bein:

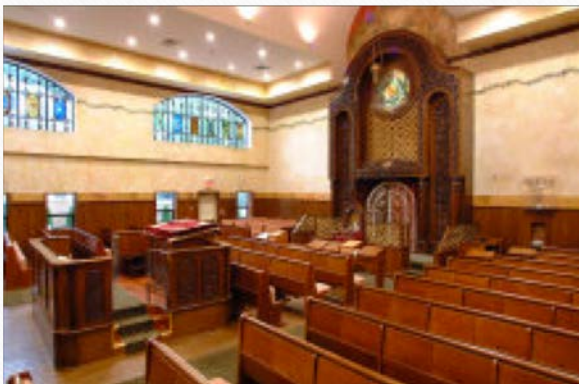
I knew the Rebbe from his earliest youth as a perfect individual divinely blessed with precious qualities. Later, I accompanied him over the course of thirty-two years, from his appointment up until the end of 1939, when he ordered me to leave Poland with my family and to flee to Russia. I could write entire books about his multi-faceted greatness, without covering it all. I knew more than three hundred Admorim in Poland, Galicia, Hungary, and Bukovina; I studied them and gathered valuable biographical material about them. I witnessed each of them in his greatness and unique qualities, but all of their virtues were to be found together in this spiritual giant, the Rebbe of Piaseczno, may his memory be blessed. The Rebbe of Piaseczno, R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro, ר'קלמן, was a man of perfection. [



# Aish Kodesh – Woodmere

## R' Moshe Weinberger

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# Chovas Ha'Talmidim – A Student's Obligation



- This was the only book that was published during his lifetime. The book addresses boys studying at yeshiva and instructs them in the chassidic approach to work on their Divine service.
- In this book, R. Kalonymus discusses the difficulties facing an adolescent boy and offers practical advice on how to deal with his weaknesses and failures, his laziness and his desires, and how he might arouse and strengthen his inner powers.
- It consists of three essays. The first deals with the proper way to study books of *chassidus*; the second discusses Torah and prayer; and the third focuses on Shabbos.
- The introduction to the book is meant for educators and parents. It sets forth R. Kalonymus's educational approach

## Benei Machshava Tova (Tel Aviv, 5733)

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- Designed for exceptional students
- The Rebbe gives a guide to lead a Va'ad or chabura.
- This book offers practical guidance on using thought and imagination to achieve closeness to Hashem.
- R. Kalonymus sent the book to his brother, R. Yeshayahu Shapiro, in Yerushalayim, with the intention that he would have it printed.
- It was distributed only to individual students who accepted upon themselves the commitments set down in the book.

## Hachsharas Ha-Avrechim (Tel Aviv, 5722)



- This book is a continuation of *Chovas Ha-Talmidim*.
- It deals with practical guidance in Divine service, such as the way to acquire inspiration and fervor, methods of contemplation and thought, the *chabura*, the *tzaddik*, and more.
- The Rebbe deposited his book with the Oneg Shabbat underground archive in the Warsaw Ghetto, headed by historian Dr. Emmanuel Ringelbaum, who documented the lives of Jews in Warsaw and in Poland under Nazi occupation.
- R. Kalonymus's works were hidden, along with many other documents belonging to this archive, in milk cans that were buried in the ground of the ghetto. After the war, in December 1950, they were discovered by Polish construction workers who were digging the foundations for a building.
- The works reached the history committee of the Central Council of Polish Jewry, which in later years became the Jewish Historical Institute.
- R. Kalonymus's other works – *Esh Kodesh*, *Hachsharat Ha-Avrechim*, *Mevo Ha-She'arim*, and *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, were discovered in the same manner.

## Mevo She'arim (Tel Aviv, 5722)

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- This book is the third part of the trilogy that includes *Chovas Ha-Talmidim* and *Hachsharas Ha-Avrechim*, and also serves as the first section of *Chovas Ha-Avrechim*, which the author never completed.
- It deals mainly with the manner and meaning of Divine service through prophecy, as well as its connection to kabbalah and to *chassidus*. An extensive introduction discusses the *chassidus* of the Ba'al Shem Tov and its innovations in Kabbalah.

# Tzav Ve-Ziruz (Tel Aviv, 5722)

- This is a collection of brief thoughts about the feelings and practices associated with Divine service, especially as relating to prayer and supplication. The Rebbe periodically shares the discourse of his inner world, exposing his own spiritual character.
- The book also offers guidance on various topics: improvement of one's character, time management, achieving closeness to God, meditation, personal accounting, and more.
- Although it includes some personal elements, the volume was written for others and not only for the Rebbe's personal use, as evidenced by the fact that he referred his students to it.



# Eish Kodesh



- This is a book of the sermons that the Rebbe delivered on Shabbos and yom tov in the Warsaw Ghetto in the years 1940-1942.
- It has been researched extensively owing to its unique value as an authentic document reflecting the Rebbe's grappling with the religious challenge presented by the Holocaust.
- An accurate edition, based on the author's manuscript, was recently published by Daniel Reiser, entitled *Derashot Mi-Shenot Ha-Za'am*.

## Derech Ha-Melech (Tel Aviv, 5736)

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- A collection of sermons and Torah insights delivered on *Shabbos and yom tov*.
- Every week, the Rebbe would personally record his insights under the title *Derech Ha-Melekh*. He would then give the material to one of his students for copying, since it was his hope that it would be printed at some point. Some of this material was copied by students who moved to Palestine prior to the Holocaust.
- The second edition of the book (Tel Aviv, 5758) features some important additions, including Torah insights from R. Kalonymus's father, R. Elimelekh, which had not appeared in his other works; the introduction to R. Kalonymus's book on the *Zohar*, which is no longer extant except for one short essay (p. 434); the *Shabbos Shuva* sermon of 5696 in Piaseczno (printed in Warsaw); an educational essay; a method for quieting the mind (which we will discuss further); some letters; and more. The lengthy sermons treat fundamental subjects in Divine service, most of which are also discussed in R. Kalonymus's methodological works. Thus, even in his sermons on Shabbat and festivals, the Rebbe touched on the same subjects that occupied him constantly: prayer, emotion, enthusiasm, use of the imagination, Torah study, Shabbat, perfection of one's character, and so on.



# Style of Writing

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In his introduction to *Chovat Ha-Talmidim*, R. Kolonymus writes:

We must adapt ourselves and speak their language, practically turning ourselves into children in order to speak to them according to the way they think and the level that they are on.

For example, in *Mevo Ha-She'arim*, he writes:

The main thrust of Chassidic discourse and Chassidic works should be in the direction of broadening *chassidus*, rather than in-depth study of it... For what do we gain by teaching people profound Chassidic concepts if they do not understand – or, if they do understand, then their understanding remains on the level of the intellect alone, but they do not exert themselves to become sanctified and to become Chassidim with all their being?... We must bring the holy down to the level of those who seek holiness.

## For Further Reading

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- <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/piaseczner-rebbe>
- Torah From the Years of Wrath, The Historical Context of the Aish Kodesh, Dr. Henry Abramson