

## Weekly Biography / By Rabbi Yishai Sofer

14 Sivan 5707/1947

# Harav Shmuel Abba Twersky, zt"l, of Makarov – Winnipeg

## On His 63rd Yahrtzeit

### In Ukraine

Harav Shmuel Abba Twersky was born in 5632 (1872) to Harav Moshe Mordechai of Makarov, who hailed from a prominent line of Chassidic leaders.

When he came of age, he married Rebbetzin Rickel, who was his first cousin — a daughter of his father's brother, Reb Dovid, the son-in-law of the Trisker Maggid, zt"l. As a young *avreich*, Reb Shmuel Abba gained a reputation as an erudite *talmid chacham*, proficient in all areas of Torah.

Following his father's *petirah* in 5680 (1920), he became the Makarover Rebbe in Berditchev. He later moved to Mezritch, where he led his Chassidic court for a short period.

The bloody Bolshevik pogroms forced him to leave Ukraine, and he fled to Riga, Latvia. His plan was to remain there temporarily before continuing on to Canada, where he would replant his Chassidic court. After a long and complicated bureaucratic process, he finally succeeded in obtaining the necessary documents to immigrate to Canada.

### Reviving a Chassidic Spirit in Winnipeg

Winnipeg's Jewish community jubilantly prepared to greet the *tzaddik*, as apparent from newspaper reports of that time. One report, dated December 16, 1927,

coming.

"Jews of Chassidic origin make up a large percentage of the Jewish community here, and they still have a spark of *Chassidus* in them. Now, following two years of intensive efforts, the Makarover Rebbe, Harav Shmuel Abba, the son of Harav Moshe Mordechai Twersky, will be coming to Winnipeg after enduring a difficult two years with his family in Riga, after having fled there from Bolshevik Russia.

"According to a telegram that arrived from Cherbourg, France, the Rebbe boarded the ship last Thursday and is expected to arrive in Winnipeg at the end of next week.

"This isn't only about Makarover chassidim. This news concerns all chassidim who nostalgically long and hope for a Chassidic leader... Let us give honor to the great guest and to ourselves. Look for further details about the Rebbe's exact arrival in next Tuesday's issue of *Dos Yiddische Vort*."

In Winnipeg, his chassidim purchased a house for the Rebbe on Flora Avenue, where a large number of Jewish immigrants were concentrated. Later on, he moved to Boyd Avenue, where he opened a *beis medrash* that he led until his *petirah*.

It was not until two-and-a-half years after his arrival in Canada that his family — his wife and two children — joined him. Just when it seemed that the Rebbe



The Makarover Rebbe, zt"l

him for his blessings and advice. There are also several *sefarim* that contain approbations by the Makarover Rebbe, and from the praiseworthy descriptions that the authors heaped upon him, it is apparent that the Rebbe enjoyed widespread admiration by contemporary Rabbanim.

In 5700 (1940), he married off his only son, Reb Yaakov Yitzchak, to the daughter of Harav Chaim Tzvi Herson, zt"l, one of the prominent Rabbanim in Winnipeg.

As the older European generation slowly faded away, the younger people drifted further away from traditional *Yiddishkeit*. Although many of them still respected the older generation, sadly, the shuls and *batei medrash* were slowly emptying out, a fact that caused the Makarover Rebbe tremendous



The Makarover Rebbe learning, surrounded by young talmidim

Heaven had decreed otherwise, and on 14 Sivan 5707 (1947) he returned his soul to the Creator. The next day, the Jewish newspapers were full of announcements bemoaning the Rebbe's passing.

The Rebbe was laid to rest in the Shaarei Tzedek cemetery in the center of Winnipeg. As long as members of the older generation in Winnipeg were still alive, the Makarover Rebbe's burial place was a popular site for *mis-pallelim*.

### Old Locals Testify

The remaining elderly Jews of Winnipeg, though most are not observant, still remember the *tzaddik* with nostalgic longing, calling him "*der gutter Yid*" — the good Jew.

Local Jews relate an amazing story that occurred after the

manded him to move out of the house where he had done his holy *avodah*. After the man ignored the *tzaddik's* request yet again, a peculiar hailstorm knocked out all the windows of the house. When he disregarded this "warning" too, the Rebbe appeared to him in a dream, holding a torch in his hand with which he scalded the non-Jew's forehead. At this point, the man surrendered and moved out of the house. This writer met with older Jewish residents in Winnipeg who heard this story from the gentile, who even showed them the burn mark on his forehead.

Residents also tell about the time, after the Rebbe's *petirah*, when his *beis medrash* was sold to a Conservative congregation. When the president of the *kehillah* came to hand over the

A file photo from a Winnipeg Jewish newspaper of the Rebbe with some members of his *kehillah*

read as follows: "The Rebbe arrives Wednesday. According to a telegram from Montreal, the Makarover Rebbe, Harav Shmuel Abba Twersky, *shlita*, is now in Montreal for Shabbos, and afterwards, he will be coming here to Winnipeg on Wednesday evening, *Parashas Mikeitz*, with the C.N.R. [train]."

An article in *Dos Yiddische Vort* read: "An unprecedented *kabalas panim* is being prepared for his arrival in the train station." And yet another one reported: "The Rebbe is coming! Our city, Winnipeg, which a mere three, four decades ago did not have any Jewish presence, now has such a growing community, to the extent that a Chassidic Rebbe is

would finally have some peace and serenity, his Rebbetzin suddenly passed away at the age of fifty-six on 14 Shevat 5690 (1930). The entire community was grief-stricken by the Rebbetzin's untimely passing. The inundation of condolence letters to the Rebbe testified to the fact that the Rebbe had become a central, beloved figure among chassidim in North America at that time.

### A Beloved Leader

During the two decades that the Makarover Rebbe, zt"l, lived in Winnipeg, he became a much-respected figure in the Jewish community there. People from all over North America flocked to



The Rebbe in earlier days

anguish.

For the seventeen years during which he was a widower, there was a pious woman who took care of the Rebbe's household. She prepared everything from scratch, as the Rebbe did not permit any outside food because of his strict standards in *kashrus*. Like most Rebbes of Ukrainian origin, he *davened* alone in his room but often *davened* for the *amud* on *Shabbos mevorchim* and on *Yamim Tovim*. At *shalosh seudos*, he would conduct a *tisch* and distribute *shirayim* to the large crowd.

In 5707 (1947), the Makarover Rebbe fell into a coma, and shuls throughout Winnipeg organized *tefillah* rallies in behalf of the Rebbe's recovery. However,



The Rebbe's ohel in the Shaarei Tzedek cemetery in the center of Winnipeg

Rebbe had passed away. After his *petirah*, his house was sold to a non-Jew who decorated his new home with crosses and other Christian icons.

The Makarover Rebbe appeared in a dream to one of his chassidim and chastised him for allowing non-Jewish symbols into his house. He told the chassid to try to get the non-Jew to move out of the house. When the gentile heard the request, he scoffed at it and refused to move out. Soon thereafter, the *tzaddik* appeared to the man in a dream and asked him to move out of the house. The man laughed yet again and didn't pay much heed to the dream. He had another dream, in which the *tzaddik* com-

shul to the buyers, the door to the *beis medrash* refused to open. The lock had to be pried open with tools but still — the door wouldn't budge. The shul president announced: "It seems that the Rebbe is upset that we sold his shul to a Conservative congregation." On the spot, he tore up the contract. When he tried opening the door again, it opened without difficulty.

Mr. Handler, another old-time resident of Winnipeg, served as the *meshamesh* of the Makarover Rebbe, zt"l, and recalls having witnessed the Rebbe's supernatural powers.

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