

THE MAN WHO RECEIVED \$20,000 FROM THE REBBE TO PRINT HIS SEIFER

*An extraordinary talmid chocham, a man of spirit, an accomplished writer, an energetic askan and public figure who loyally and fearlessly fought many battles – this is a description of Rabbi Avrohom Eliyahu Makatovsky, known more familiarly as Eliyahu Kitov. * This exclusive article describes his work on behalf of Yiddishkeit, the stories behind his best-selling works, and his relationship with the Rebbe MH”M.*

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER

Rabbi Avrohom Eliyahu Makatovsky (Kitov) was an unusual person. Even his relationship with the Rebbe MH”M was unique, and of this, more is a mystery than is known. We *do* know that the Rebbe suggested that R’ Kitov publish a newspaper and serve as its editor, which the Rebbe would finance... that R’ Kitov requested to learn all of Toras Chabad on one foot, and that the Rebbe approved and even wrote “He is

unique...”

ASKANUS L’SHEIM SHAMAYIM

Rabbi Makatovsky was born in 5672 (1912) in Warsaw, Poland to his father, R’ Michoel, who was *mekurav* to *chassidus* Amshinov and Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen, *zt”l*, who attracted thousands of followers.

In his youth, R’ Eliyahu was a

member of Agudas Yisroel, and in that capacity gave classes to his colleagues and to those educated in the movement in Warsaw. In 5696 (1936) he moved to Eretz Yisroel and settled in Yerushalayim.

In 5699 R’ Eliyahu founded the religious labor party called Pagi (for Poalei Agudas Yisroel) along with Rabbi Avrohom Trager, *a”h*, and Rabbi Shlomo



Iyar 5727. Rabbi Kitov speaking the night before the outbreak of the Six-Day War

Eisenberg, *a'h*. When R' Eisenberg died, Rabbi Avrohom Parshan, *a'h*, replaced him as head of the movement. From that point on, the three heads of Pagi were called "the three Avrohoms." Of the three, R' Makatovsky was considered a man of spirit and a man of vision.

At a certain point, the heads of the movement wanted to work on behalf of the observant laborers so they wouldn't have to depend on the mercies of the general Histadrut (Labor union) which ruled with an iron hand over all levels of Israeli industry. It sounded fanciful, but they weren't

daunted by the task, and they created jobs for religious Jews by establishing new factories. They built neighborhoods for religious people, which until today are known as Pagi neighborhoods. R' Makatovsky would travel abroad to fundraise for the projects that Pagi was developing.

The three men had the support of great scholars such as Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky, *zt'l*, the *rav* of Yerushalayim, and the *gaon* from Tchebin, Rabbi Dov Berish Weidenfeld, *zt'l*, and others.

In the first elections for the Knesset (after the State was established), when Pagi presented its lists of *chareidim* who ran for the Knesset, R' Makatovsky headed the list, a fact that especially angered the Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, who openly said he was afraid of Makatovsky entering the Knesset: "He is known not to fear anyone, and he announces the opinion of the *dati* and *chareidi* population from every platform, even if it hurts the leaders of the country."

Many *chareidim* appreciated the work that Pagi did for religion in general and *chareidim* in particular, and on Election Day this showed. R' Makatovsky lacked only 39 votes to become a member of the Knesset.

In his public work in Pagi, R' Makatovsky fought along with his colleagues for all that was holy. In contrast, the members of Mafdal and Agudas Yisroel enjoyed the benefits of cozying up to the Coalition in power and didn't want to make waves. The benefits and budgets are what kept them from crying out about the desecration of all that's holy to the Jewish people, something which was routine in the early years of the State. Apparently not much has changed since then...

One of the important means that Pagi employed in those days was the publishing of a newspaper that shared the views of the religious sector with the rest of the country. R' Makatovsky headed the editorial board. The first publication he edited appeared from time to time as a collection of articles

under the name *Komemiyus*. At a later point, *HaYoman* was founded, a daily paper that was Pagi's mouthpiece.

R' Makatovsky was appointed as editor-in-chief of the paper, but the paper was soon closed down by order of the *sar ha'pnim* (interior minister), thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Itche Meir Levin of Agudas Yisroel, in reaction to the fact that Pagi ran separately in the elections.

Pagi members quickly responded by opening a new paper called *HaKol*, again with R' Makatovsky as editor-in-chief, and Rabbi Uriel Tzimmer, *a'h*, as night editor.

R' Makatovsky wrote hundreds of pointed articles on relevant religious matters. These articles were extremely popular among the religious crowd because he wasn't afraid to criticize the many people responsible for making life difficult for religious people, and there was no shortage of such people in those days.

Although R' Makatovsky was a first-rate *askan*, in the early years of Pagi he continued to work at his previous job as a simple construction worker, doing all work on behalf of Pagi as a volunteer.

R' Eliyahu was really an *ish chinuch* at heart. In 5711 (1951), he started a



Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov in his youth. Winter 5690 (1930)

chareidi talmud Torah in Shilo, which he ran for eight years. This *talmud Torah* was unique in that it aimed at children from religious families, but the learning was done in *Ivrit*, as opposed to the prevalent Yiddish. Children from Mizrahi families went to *mamlachti dati* schools (religious public schools). R' Makatovsky was the first *chareidi talmud Torah* in which *Ivrit* was spoken. Among the *talmidim* who studied there was the present Gerrer Rebbe, R' Yaakov Alter *shlita*.

A REAL WRITER

In 5714, R' Makatovsky left public work and article writing, and decided to dedicate his life to writing books. His first step in this direction was to change his name. After he left politics, he called himself Eliyahu Ki Tov, explaining that the family's original name came from the city in which they had lived – Kitov.

In one of his letters (printed in the preface to his *Chassidim V'Anshei Maaseh*) we read about this period in his life:

"After leaving Pagi, I was left without food for even one meal, literally. What could I do? Since I was already an experienced writer, for I had been a newspaper editor for some years and not a day went by without my writing an article or two, and sometimes four or five articles in the areas of public opinion, analysis, and stories, I decided that I'd be a real writer from then on..."

R' Eliyahu's relationship with the Rebbe began when he was an *askan*. In those days he often visited the United States; he would join the Rebbe's *farbrengens* and even had private audiences with the Rebbe.

When the Rebbe heard about his resignation, the Rebbe wrote R' Eliyahu a very sharp response in the margins of a letter of greeting for Pesach (11 Nissan 5717, part of which is printed in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 24, p. 544. The complete letter is found in *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 15). (Free translation.)

B"H 11 Nissan 5717 Brooklyn, N.Y.
Reb Avrohom Sh'yichyeh

Shalom U'V'rachal

For *Chag HaPesach*, the time of our freedom, which comes to us and all Israel for good, I express my blessing for a *chag kosher v'sameiach* and for true freedom, freedom from material and spiritual worry, from anything that interferes with *avodas Hashem*, with *simcha* and gladness of heart.

And to continue with this freedom and *simcha* throughout the year, especially since *avodas Hashem* – as we are commanded in our Torah, the Torah of life – is in all man's matters and throughout the entire day and night, as it says, "Know Him in all your ways."

"Those who continue to live a secular life will do so without any ideological motivation. [Their lifestyle] will only be from what feels comfortable and from the desire to pursue material things."

With holiday blessings

[signature]

P.S. According to the news I hear, it seems there's been some time since you left *askanus* and *tzarchei tzibbur* as you used to do (aside from publishing books). You can understand the sorrowful and painful surprise – do you think that now is the proper time to run from battle, or do you think the generation is now meritorious? If you think that positive *askanus* is not successful now, nor is publicity on behalf of *yiras Shamayim*, Torah and *mitzvos* – that is completely wrong, as [can be seen] in reality.

Especially when who can fathom the hearts of *Bnei Yisroel*, who *chas v'shalom* won't hear a chastising word according to Torah, even if you speak to them day and night, as *Chazal* say, "Reprove, shall you reprove, even 100 times," with words that emanate from the heart.

What is clear is that a lack of *askanus* will certainly not add to the improvement of the condition of *Yiddishkeit*, Torah and *mitzvos*. It was such a terrible time, *r'l*, in the days of *Yechezkel* (8, 9), that since the days of the Men of the Great Assembly there was none comparable to then (*Yuma* 69B), yet we know the story of *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 55A), that even a casual glance would stand a Jew's hair on end.

Perhaps the style isn't diplomatic or polite enough, but certainly the sharpness isn't nearly enough, considering the terrible plight of *Yiddishkeit* in many places.

The Rebbe mentioned the era of *Yechezkel*, the era of the Destruction of the first *Beis HaMikdash*, an era when both *tzaddikim* and *reshaim* were killed alike. This general destruction happened despite a prophecy that *tzaddikim* would not be killed. The terrible punishment in which *tzaddikim* were killed along with *reshaim* resulted from the fact that the *tzaddikim* did not stop the *reshaim*. If they had done so, the whole situation would have been different (from *Shabbos* 55A).

The Rebbe, making reference to this era in his statement to R' Eliyahu Kitov, was a chastisement, clearly saying that the *mitzva* of rebuke is still a *mitzva*, even if you don't see the results.

On 6 Nissan 5720, the Rebbe brought up this topic again (though it's interesting to note that the Rebbe referred to R' Eliyahu's public work only in the margins of the letters, and there are more words in the margins than in the body of the letter).

"...although it's obvious that printing holy books, especially those that disseminate Torah, is of tremendous value – it is comparable to

THE REBBE TO RAV KITOV: “THE SECULAR ENTHUSIASM TO INFURIATE WILL NOT LAST.”

In an article on the *t'shuva* movement in our generation, Rabbi Tuvia Blau quoted the Rebbe as he heard it from Rabbi Kitov, who was told in *yechidus* in 5713:

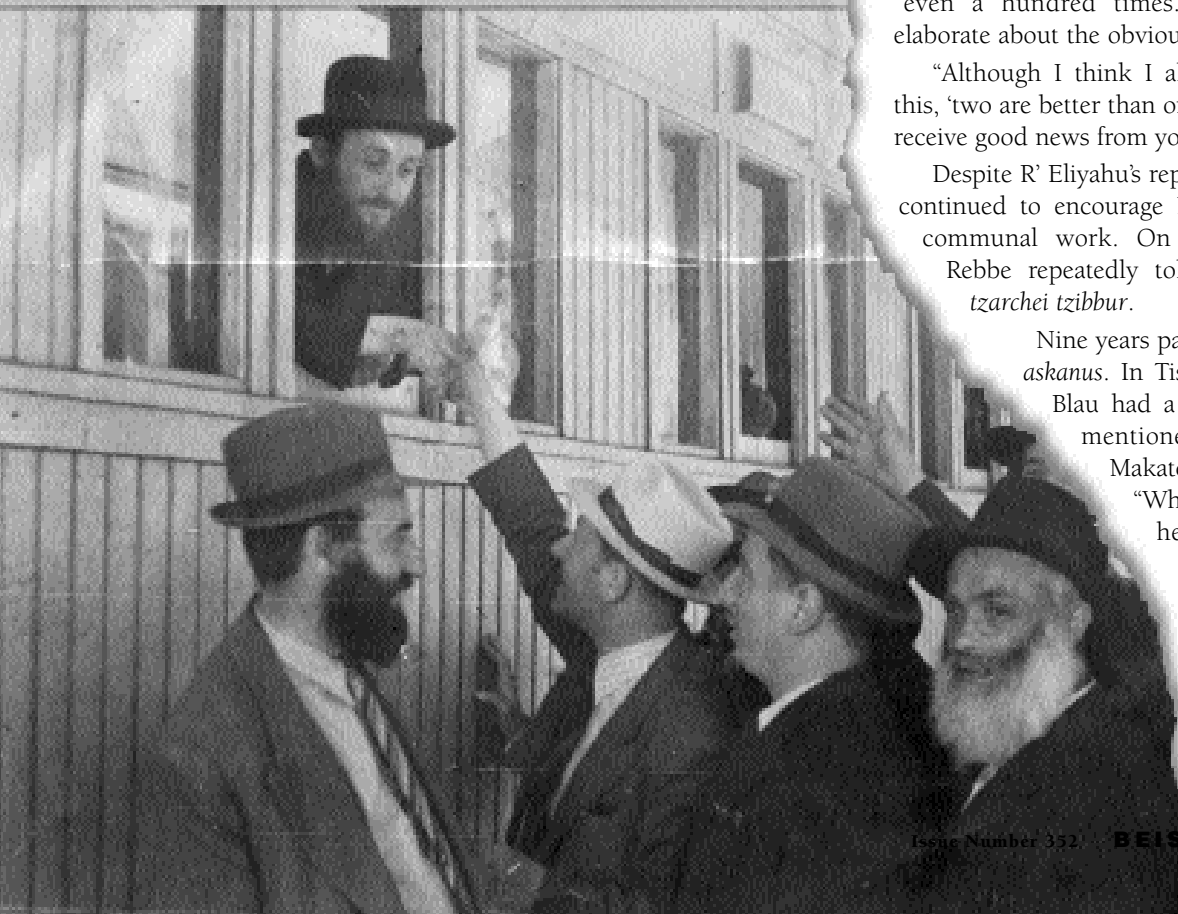
“The secular enthusiasm to infuriate will not last. Not even ten years will pass and the ideological rebelliousness will completely disappear, since it will have nothing to sustain it. How? The new generation of the secular public will feel an utter emptiness of ideas, having no sustaining ideology. Those who continue to live a secular life will do so without any ideological motivation. [Their lifestyle] will only be from what feels comfortable and from the desire to pursue material things. Then, not only will the Torah camp stand on its feet and expand in quantity and quality, but even among the secular public, and especially among their youth, many will return in *t'shuva*, seeking spiritual content in their lives.”

Rabbi Blau said, “Rabbi Kitov was convinced of the truth of these words. From that point on, he began acting accordingly, but the *chareidi* Torah world was very skeptical, to put it mildly. Today we see how the Rebbe's words came true for all to see.”

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov by the window of the train, embarking on a mission on behalf of the Pagi party.

Parting with members of his party as he leaves for the airport in Lud on his way to London.

(From the right) R' Shlomo Eisenberger, z'l, R' Avrohom Parshan, z'l. On the left: R' Avrohom Trager, z'l.



tz'daka, which must be done “the way it should be,” using all of a person's abilities. The same is true of spiritual *tz'daka*. Can it possibly be believed, even according to your view, that you are utilizing all your powers by simply printing books, etc., without anything being heard about your participation in speaking and publicity regarding the problems of the Jewish world in general, and in Eretz Yisroel and the holy city of Yerushalayim in particular – and not even the burning issues.

“You could say that you are dissatisfied with how others take action in a certain way, or with what others are not doing at all. But this is not an excuse to do something else improper in addition to what others are doing improperly.

“I've also it heard it said, ‘What am I that I should do, and what use is it, and who am I, etc.’ – but regarding this they say that ‘the humility of R' Zecharia, etc.’

“When each of us hopes to deserve the name *Tzivos Hashem*, which is one of the *inyanim* of Pesach. An army exists based not on rational thought but on hearing and obeying orders. The command of our holy Torah, the Torah of life, is to reprove others, with “Do not hate your brother in your heart” as a prerequisite, and with the conclusion of “Do not take revenge, etc., and you shall love your fellow as yourself, I am Hashem.” The *mitzva* extends – as per the *psak* of Torah – “even a hundred times.” There's no need to elaborate about the obvious.

“Although I think I already wrote you about this, ‘two are better than one.’ I would be happy to receive good news from you regarding this matter.”

Despite R' Eliyahu's repeated refusal, the Rebbe continued to encourage R' Eliyahu to return to communal work. On various occasions the Rebbe repeatedly told him to go back to *tzarchei tzibbur*.

Nine years passed after R' Eliyahu left *askanus*. In Tishrei 5723, Rabbi Tuvia

Blau had a *yechidus*, and when he mentioned R' Avrohom Makatovsky, the Rebbe said:

“What's doing with him? Has he already passed the *birur*, and isn't it possible to work on him to go back to public life?”

(To be continued.)