

החכם הבחור העלוב החסיד
כה"ר יעקב קדוש גלב"ע
כ"ט אב תרל"ב (1872).
מספר מצבות מראש עמ'
.585

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ROSH CHODESH ELUL 5786 • AUGUST 13, 2026

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The Ohr Sameach

The 4th of Elul will be the 100th yahrtzeit of the **Rav Meir Simchah** of Dvinsk, known as the **Ohr Sameach**. To honor this Zera Emes gadol we will quote from the hespeidim delivered in 1919, several years before he actually passed away.

FAKE NEWS

At the end of April 1919, newspapers throughout the Jewish world reported that Rav Meir Simchah had been murdered during the wave of pogroms sweeping Eastern Europe. Although the reports were false, communication was slow, and it took considerable time before reliable retractions reached Jewish communities around the world. By then, public mourning services and *hespeidim* had already been held in numerous cities.

Remarkably, even months later the confusion had not entirely subsided. On 21 Av (August 17, 1919), P. Wernick, writing in New York's Jewish Morning Journal, quoted the *hesped* delivered by R' Shlomo Blazer, son of Rav Yitzchak Blazer, which had recently appeared in the Sivan-Tamuz issue of the Eretz Yisrael journal HaDvir (Sivan-Tamuz issue). Since the published *hesped* unequivocally referred to the Ohr Sameach's murder, Wernick acknowledged that reports denying his death had circulated but suggested they themselves might have been wishful thinking. In

effect, his article unintentionally reignited the original false rumor.

Among the most important *hespeidim* published at the time was a two-page eulogy by **Rav Yisrael Abba Citron**, son-in-law of the Rogatchover Gaon and talmid of the Ohr Sameach, which appeared in the short-lived newspaper HaTzir.

On Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan, memorial gatherings were announced in both Yerushalayim's Churva Synagogue and the Sephardic Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai Shul for "lamentation and a bitter fast" in memory of the holy martyrs, with special mention of Rav Meir Simchah. (*Min HaMakor*, vol. 1, p. 125.)

MANUSCRIPT

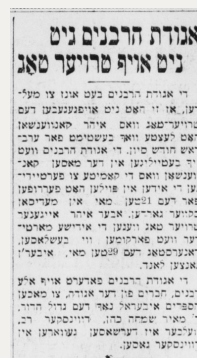
Machon Ahavat Shalom in 2013 published (*Mikabtzil* 39) from manuscript the hesped given by R' Ben Tzion Kohenka or Cuenca (1867-1936). R' Ben Tzion was an Av Bes Din in Yerushalayim, Rosh Yeshiva (Tiferes Yerushalayim) and on the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. He was the publisher of the Torah journal Hamiasaf (1896-1914) which was an important world-wide Torah journal.

POGROMS

R' Ben Tzion's now seven-plus page *hesped*, delivered in the

ר' מאיר שמחה הכהן

R' Meir Simcha Hacoen (1843-4 Elul 1926) was named after R' Meir MiTikvin, who gave his father a brachah that he would have a son who would "light up the world." While living in Bialystock he studied 18 hours each day. In 1888 he became Rav of the non-Chassidic community in Dvinsk (the Rogatchover was the Rav of the Chassidic community in Dvinsk). In 1907, he was offered the position of Rav of Yerushalayim, but the people of Dvinsk begged him to stay. His only child, Osnas, married R Avraham Luftver (1860- 23 Nisan, Isru Chag, 1918) and they both predeceased her parents without children.



Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai Shul, was devoted not only to Rav Meir Simchah but also to the thousands of Jewish victims who had recently perished.

The historical backdrop cannot be overstated. Following World War I, and especially during the first half of 1919, horrific pogroms devastated Jewish communities throughout Ukraine and neighboring regions. Conservative estimates place the number of murdered Jews in Ukraine alone at over 50,000, while broader estimates—including other territories of the former Russian Empire—exceed 100,000. ה"ד.

R' BEN TZION

Rav Ben Tzion cites in his moving *hesped*, Yaakov Avinu's mourning for Yosef.

After Yosef was sold by his brothers, they slaughtered a goat, dipped his coat in blood, and presented it to Yaakov. Believing his son had been killed, Yaakov cried out: "It is my son's coat; a wild beast has devoured him; Yosef is surely torn to pieces."

The Torah then tells us that Yaakov mourned "for many days".

From this episode, Rav Ben Tzion develops stirring *kal va'chomers*.

Yaakov mourned for one son, while they had gathered to mourn "the countless thousands of precious sons."

Yaakov mourned one victim of wild beasts, while they mourned Jews murdered by "terrifying beasts in human form."

Most strikingly, Yaakov's grief was based only upon what appeared to have happened. As R' Ben Tzion notes, "it later turned out not to be true, for Yosef was alive and well." Yet regarding their gathering: "This is not a matter of thought or imagination but of actual fact; the matter is not in doubt but certain—that the Ohr Sameach was

indeed torn from us, together with many like him."

He concludes: "How much more fitting that we mourn over this 'for many days,' including the nights as well."

Rav Ben Tzion then exhorts his audience:

"My masters—if our father Yaakov only tore his garments, we ought to tear our very hearts over the multitude of precious sons and beloved brothers who were torn apart by beasts far more terrifying than any ordinary man — beasts of prey that tore them and cut them into pieces."

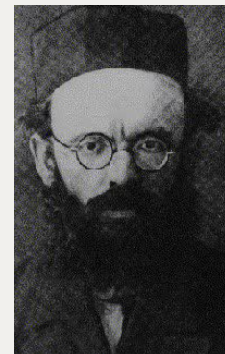
He continues with another moving comparison:

"Chazal taught that one who sees a Sefer Torah burned is obligated to tear his garments. That law applies to a single Torah scroll. ... how many Torah scrolls these enemies have burned! How ... must we tear not only our garments but our very hearts. If this was decreed regarding Torah scrolls... how much more must we mourn the many righteous rabbis and Geonim who were burned and murdered—living Torah scrolls—and especially the mighty Gaon Rabbi Meir Simchah, who himself was an entire Sefer Torah filled with holiness and sanctity."

EPILOGUE

As we begin the month of Elul, we enter a time of introspection, repentance, and spiritual growth. One powerful way to awaken ourselves is to ask a sobering question: What would be said at our *hesped*, chas v'shalom, if it were delivered today?

The Ohr Sameach's "premature *hespeidim*" remind us that those who eulogize us will speak not about what we intended to accomplish, but about what we actually accomplished. Elul challenges us to ensure that our deeds, our Torah, our acts of kindness, and our character are worthy of being remembered. May we use these precious days to write a better story with our lives, so that we merit to be inscribed in the *Sifrei Chaim* and Geulah.



ישראל אבא ציטרון

R' Yisrael Abba Citron (15 Shevat 1881 – 12 Elul 1927) was born in Dvinsk and later married Rachel, a daughter of one of his rebbeim, the Rogatchover Gaon. The "lily of Kritzberg" was multilingual and a grandmaster in chess. In 1911, after declining numerous prestigious rabbinic offers, he accepted the rabbinate of Petach Tikvah, succeeding Rav Aharon Orlansky. He famously explained: "I would rather be a rabbi in a small town in Eretz Yisrael than in a large, populated city elsewhere." He enjoyed a close friendship with Rav Kook and later Hebraized his surname to Kitruni. A street in Petach Tikvah bears his name. Rav Citron passed away suddenly at only forty-six years old. His widow later returned to Dvinsk to assist in publishing her father's Torah writings and was murdered by the Nazis, ה"ד, during the winter of 1941–42.