



We Shall
Not Look
Upon His
Like Again



Reb Meir Yida Wosner
His Life and Teachings

It was in the spring of 1944 that serious and relentless Nazi deportations of Hungarian Jewry began. By the war's end over half a million had been killed. Those that survived were a scattered and battered remnant. Over a short period, most would depart for Israel, England, or, the largest segment, to America.

It was in America that many of them would become part of an extraordinary miracle. They resurrected the pious Judaism of their ancestors on the decidedly alien soil of America. Many of those who created this spiritual marvel, in fact, often surpassed the religious standards of their predecessors.

This is the story of one such Jew, whose very existence, invariably inspired all those who encountered him. It is an impossibility to paint his total picture in the limited pages to follow. I knew him for fifty-seven years, yet, wherever, I read or hear anything about him I continue to be amazed. His example still shines bright and it is our hope in the following pages to give you, the reader, a small inkling of this humble man who was, in truth, a spiritual giant.

Reb Meir Yide Wozner was born in Vienna, Austria in 1923. He spent a few crucial and mostative years learning in the Galanta Yeshiva under the legendary *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rav Yehoshua Buxbaum. This giant was, as was standard in the Hungarian *yeshivas* of that time, functioning as *posek*, *rosh yeshiva*, and *rebbe* for all. As R. Meir Yide was found of relating, the *talmidim* both loved and feared their *rebbe*. He would sometimes criticize contemporary *Hasidim* who try to get physically close to their *rebbe*s. "In Galanta we were so awe-struck that we'd peel back in order to stay far away from the Rov." The Galanta Rov hailed from Hungarian Ashkenaz stock and in his younger years was not known as a Talmudic sage. But by dint of desire and ceaseless effort, he became an enormous scholar with ties to *Chasidishe* *rebbe*s, primarily under the influence of the Shinever Rov, R. Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam (1813-1898).

R. Meir Yide often related, "When the Galanta Rov taught us any *masechta* it was with such extraordinary passion and freshness that it looked like it was the

first time in his life that he was learning it."

There was little in the way of food or other comforts in the Galanta Yeshiva but for R. Meir Yide his years there formed the spiritual basis of his entire life.

In 1938 the Nazis took over Austria and the bitter years of suffering began. The Wozner family fled to Serderhel in Hungary, never dreaming that the Germans would eventually arrive there as well. In June of 1944, most of the Jews in the city were either killed or deported. R. Meir Yide himself was on military duty and escaped the fate of his parents and so many others. In later years he would thank *Hashem* for his never missing a day of *tefillin* or ever having eaten non-kosher food.

In the immediate post-war years, Divine Providence was leading our protagonist to his life's ultimate destiny. He returned to Serderhel after the war and married there. But, before too long, the Hungarian government, then part of the Communist bloc, sought to draft him into their army. The time had come to leave and, so, in 1948 he arrived in America.

Two weeks after R. Meir Yide's arrival in Boro Park, the Skvera Rebbe of blessed memory (R. Yaakov Yoseph Twersky 1900 - 1968) also arrived there from Europe. One day on the way home from work R. Meir Yide was asked to join the Rebbe's *minyán* as the tenth participant. He assumed it was a *maariv minyan*. Actually, given the Skvera-reliance on the *Rabbeinu Tam's* opinion on time-based *halachos*, it was for *mincha*. The Rebbe gave him *shalom* but that was the extent of it. A few days later the process was repeated. This time, though, R. Meir Yide had badly cut his finger in the furniture factory he worked at. The wound was fresh and heavily bandaged. The Rebbe approached and inquired in great detail as to the nature of the cut and whether he was in any pain. The manner in which the questions were asked, as



Galanta Rov seen here descending from train

Reb Meir Yide later described it, "with such a fatherly love," convinced him that this was the place he was going to call his permanent home.

In the winter of 1957, the Wosners became one of the first families to settle in New Square, in a modest home he would live in for over half a century. The home was to remain largely unchanged, as R. Meir Yide shunned any form of this worldly excess.

He devoted himself instead to hours spent in Torah study, finishing *Shass* many times over. In fact, during the years in which he traveled to the city via the New Square bus, he gave a shiur in *Gemorah* with *Tosofos* on the way home, finishing many *masechtos* over the years. In the morning, when arriving in Manhattan about an hour before he'd open his furniture store, he would spend that time immersed in *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*.

His devotion to Torah study knew no bounds. Shabbos morning after having been up late Friday night at the *Rebbe's Tish*, he'd get up hours before davening in the morning to finish sefer *Tehillim* and then learn *Hilchos Shabbos* with his children.

Yet it was precisely his love for Torah which led him into his lifelong task of collecting monies for the village *chinuch mosdos*. This very point was made by the Rebbe at the shiva when he said that "R. Meir Yide's love of Torah study was so great that he wanted to provide others with the means to learn as well."



R. Meir Yida engrossed in his daily *Gemorah* shiur

The Rebbe further pointed out that *yungerliet* (young people) can learn a great deal from R. Meir Yide, in that "at age ninety-nine he still traveled around the clock to collect funds for Torah." And despite this, he was able to stay up at night to continue his own Torah studies.

It was in the simplicity of his life that so many were inspired. Despite his extensive travels to raise funds for the mosdos he never ate in a restaurant nor did he ever seek to buy any food other than that which his wife sent along with him. His dining room table served as his office. In the words of his son, R. Yochanan, *Skvera Rov* in Montreal, "he required for himself nothing. Everything was given away for others to the *Klal*. The house is now exactly as it was sixty-five years ago!"



The Wosner's humble home in Skver

His energies were expended elsewhere. As his son R. Moshe put it, "For sixty-five years he was the *gabbai tzedakah* for the *Talmud Torah* and covered the wages for the *melamdin* from the first day."

In addition to all these massive labors in fundraising and learning, he also wrote his own *chidushei Torah* which are now being published.

The central point of R. Meir's service of *Hashem* were the inspiration and the teachings he received from the previous Rebbe and the current Skvera Rebbe. He often referred to the prayer "And your holy spirit do not take from me," that his personal holy spirit was the Rebbe.

He frequently cited the *Lechovitzer* that "one's Rebbe should be like the *Shulchan Aruch*. We study it constantly and when need be we study one section in depth."



R. Meir Yida in earlier years in Skver

During a talk R. Meir Yida gave in the *shul* one Sukkos he concluded, "*Der Oybeshter* (the Almighty) gave us in every generation his *Tzadikim*, that have the power to help us. It does not matter. They can help us in every area of life. The only condition is faith. We must maintain our faith (*Emunah*) in the righteous."