



## Chapter Thirty-Seven

### Marmarosh and Massif

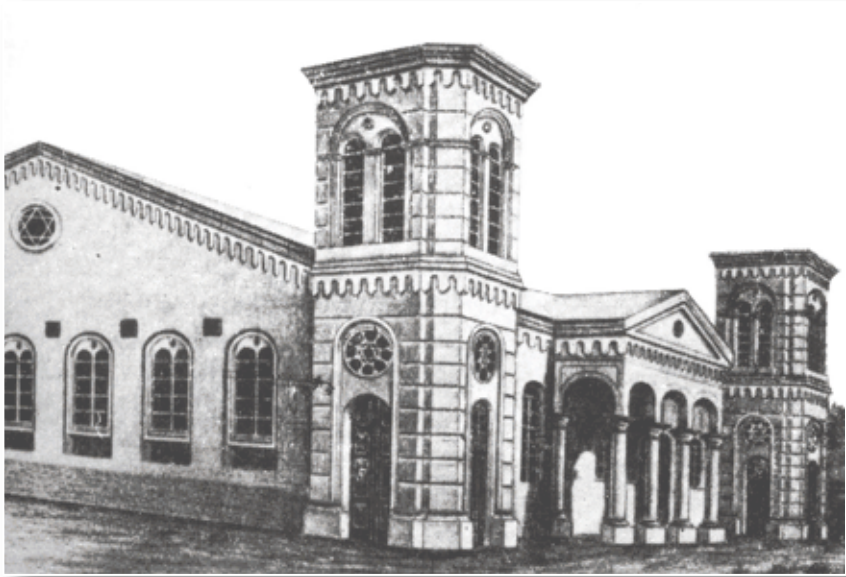
#### Rays of Light from Vizhnitz

The Jewish settlement of the Marmarosh district of Romania is estimated to have begun after Gezeiras Tach V'tat, the infamous pogroms of 1648–49. Jews fled from the marauders and scattered to isolated villages. The primary source of their livelihood was renting taverns from landlords in the villages, in which they brewed and sold alcoholic beverages.

It is related that before the passing of the Baal Shem Tov in 5520/1760, he “distributed” to his closest disciples parcels of land to “cultivate” in a spiritual sense. He gave his disciple Harav Yaakov Koppel Chassid — the father of the Kossov-Vizhnitz dynasty — the Marmarosh district, and told him, “This is a beautiful garden; care for it well!”

After Rav Yaakov Koppel’s passing, his son, Harav Menachem Mendel, author of the *sefer Ahavas Shalom*, continued to take care of the spiritual needs of the region’s inhabitants. From where he lived in Kossov, he presided over Torah life in Marmarosh, and its Jewish population grew steadily. He sent *rebbeim* for the children and appointed *shochtim*. Most of the Jewish residents, who at first were far from *chassidus*, began drawing closer to him, and eventually, people streamed to him from all over Marmarosh.

In 5586/1826, after the passing of the Ahavas Shalom, his son,



The big *beis medrash* in Vizhnitza

Harav Chaim of Kossov, author of the *sefer Toras Chaim*, rose to prominence. During his time, many Yidden of Marmarosh began wearing chassidic garb, and many joined his flock in Kossov, including prominent *rabbanim*.

The residents of Marmarosh became closely connected to the Rebbe and he guided them through life's trials and travails. They poured their hearts out to him in times of trouble, and he would daven for their welfare and bestow upon them *yeshuos* and healing that he was *mashpia* from Above.

From where he lived, the Rebbe kept a close eye on his flock and was involved in the various aspects of daily life in Marmarosh.

During the period that the Kossover Rebbe's son, Harav Menachem Mendel of Vizhnitz, author of *Tzemach Tzaddik*, was Rebbe, the court moved to the city of Vizhnitza in Romania. He had thousands of *chassidim* who lived in the cities and towns of Marmarosh, and they ardently followed his *derech* — the path of Vizhnitzer *chassidus*. These *chassidim* included many *ba'alei madreigah*.

After his passing, the *chassidim* continued to travel to his son,



The home of the Tzemach Tzaddik in Vizhnitz

Harav Baruch of Vizhnitz, author of the *sefer Imrei Baruch*, who led his flock for just eight years before passing away at a young age. His son, Harav Yisrael of Vizhnitz, author of *Ahavas Yisrael*, was crowned as his successor.

It's hard to describe how close the *chassidim* were to their Rebbe, and the great love between the shepherd and his flock. There are countless stories of miracles that he performed; he was an otherworldly figure and awe-inspiring leader, as related by his son, Harav Chaim Meir of Vizhnitz, author of *Imrei Chaim*.

### **A Life of *Ahavas Torah***

The population in Marmarosh was a mix of *rabbanim*, *dayanim*, authors of *sefarim*, and *sofrim* — who lived alongside simple Jews, laborers who were characterized by their purity, *yiras Shamayim*, and *ahavas Torah*. Observing Torah, keeping Shabbos, and adhering to the *mitzvos* was everyone's way of life. The residents all davened together



The Ahavas Yisrael with his son, the Imrei  
Chaim

in the *beis medrash*, and even the laymen rose early to learn and recite *Tehillim* after immersing in the *mikveh*.

Life was blessedly tranquil for the *chasidim*; they had no desire to stand out or attract attention. Everyone respected the Torah scholars, and if a descendant of any of the *rebbe*s arrived for a visit, they would accord him the greatest respect.

Parents aspired only to raise their children to Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, and they shed copious tears as they davened for this. They sent the children to learn in the *cheder* and tried to pay the tuition, even as they struggled for every penny. Learning started early in the morning and finished at nine at night. This schedule was kept even in the winter, when the temperatures plunged to twenty or thirty

degrees below freezing; the children would walk to *cheder* carrying lanterns.

When the boys grew older, they were sent to learn in *yeshivos*. The *bachurim* of Marmarosh were sharp-minded and learned, personifying what *Chazal* said, “Be careful with the children of the poor, because from them Torah will emerge.”

## Shabbos and Yom Tov

Community life in each town was developed and organized. There were community leaders, deputies, and *shivah tuvei ha'ir*, seven city managers (the *va'ad* of the *kehillah*). There were various *chevros* and committees, such as the *chevrah kaddisha*, Chevras Shas, Chevras Mishnayos, Chevras Bikur Cholim, and some others. Residents would always try to help one another in any way possible. They scrupulously adhered to every detail of the myriad *minhagim*, *halachos*, and traditions.

The poverty that most of Mararosh's residents suffered didn't stop them from growing in their *ruchniyus*. On the contrary — their Torah learning and *avodas Hashem* were their consolation amidst the grinding poverty.

On Shabbos, the residents of Marmarosh looked like royalty. When Shabbos descended, it brought with it tranquility and holiness; all worries dissipated. After the *seudah*, the men of the town gathered, and together, basked in the holiness of Shabbos, enjoying each other's company.

When Yamim Tovim approached, there was only one topic of conversation: the *nesiah*, the trip to the Rebbe. Those who could afford it traveled by horse and buggy, others rode for hours and days on horses, and some walked. In the later years, trains became available to transport passengers.

The journey itself was a lofty experience. Sitting side by side, the *chassidim* prepared to spend the Yamim Noraim or Yom Tov in the holy presence of the Rebbe. They readied for the visit with intense spiritual preparations, as the thoughts of the otherworldly experience awaiting them put them in very high spirits.

After spending time with the Rebbe, they returned to their homes, infused with renewed spiritual reserves.

## Massif: A Pearl in the Crown of Marmarosh

Harav Shlomo Yaakov Gross, a relative of the Daskal family, in his 1983 book *Marmarosh*, shares the early history of the Jewish settlement in the Marmarosh region (p. 128–140):

“Massif (Moiseu in Romanian and Majszin in Hungarian) is a village some forty-five kilometers southeast of Sighet in the Marmarosh region. In the three census counts of the Jews of Hungary, in the thirties, forties and fifties of the 18th century, not a single Jew is mentioned in Massif. Only in the census of 1768 do we find two Jewish households in the village; they both came from Galicia. From that point on, Jews from Galicia began to settle in Massif, first leasing plots of land, and later becoming the owners. They engaged in whole-

The main street in the town of Massif



sale trade of fruits, cattle and sheep, and established sawmills, flour mills, and more.

“The community seems to have been established at the end of the 18th century. At about that time, the first *shul* in Massif was built, and it was made of wood. At the end of the 19th century, the Jewish community built a large brick shul. The Chevras Tehillim had its own shul. This was a group of *yirei Shamayim* who were unique in that — aside for learning Torah and leading a life of spirituality — they would say *Tehillim* together *betzibbur*, with great *kavanah*, slowly, each and every day.



Reb Eliyahu Tobel with the mayor of Massif in 1985. The hilltop behind them is the site of Massif's cemetery, which was destroyed during the war.

“The village had a handful of well-to-do Jews, some of whom could even be considered wealthy by local standards, but the large majority of Massif's Jews suffered the ravages of poverty. However, their *emunah*, *bitachon*, and *simchas hachaim* somewhat

dissipated the inevitable sadness and the sense of despair that comes along with privation. The Jews of Marmarosh had a highly developed sense of humor; they loved to find the humorous angle to any situation, and they enjoyed a good joke.”