

## CHAPTER 1

# A Hike to Remember

**T**he year was 1982 and the place was Camp Torah Vodaath, a boys' summer camp in upstate New York. The time was shortly after sunrise. A bunk of 13-year-olds was preparing for a hike — a very long one.

A day earlier, their counselor had surprised them with an idea. "Around 25 miles from here is Camp Staten Island, the summer home of Yeshivah of Staten Island, whose Rosh Yeshivah is Reb Moshe. You may know that Reb Moshe has been ill and rarely leaves his home. He is spending the summer at the camp. If we hike there, we can actually meet him and even ask him for a *berachah*!"

The campers, every one of them, were excited at the idea.

"Reb Moshe" was Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem and Yeshivah of Staten Island, and the acknowledged *gadol hador*, leader of the generation, and *posek hador*, greatest expert on *Halachah* in his generation.

How does one become the *gadol hador*? Certainly not by running for office! *Gedolim* do not run for office. Quite the opposite; they *run away* from any sort of honor or recognition. That is because *gedolim* are very humble people. They seek to serve Hashem faithfully and help their fellow Jew quietly, without publicity or fanfare.

A *gadol hador* is a *talmid chacham* whose knowledge of Torah is breathtaking, who seems to know every bit of Torah one can possibly know. He is an exceptional *baal middos*, whose every action is a lesson in how a Jew should act. He is wise and caring and advises

people on all sorts of problems and questions that they have.

The Jewish people have a "sixth sense" for knowing who their *gedolim* are. Almost from the time Reb Moshe arrived in America in 1936, he was recognized as a great Torah leader. With the passage of time, he became known as the greatest of his generation.

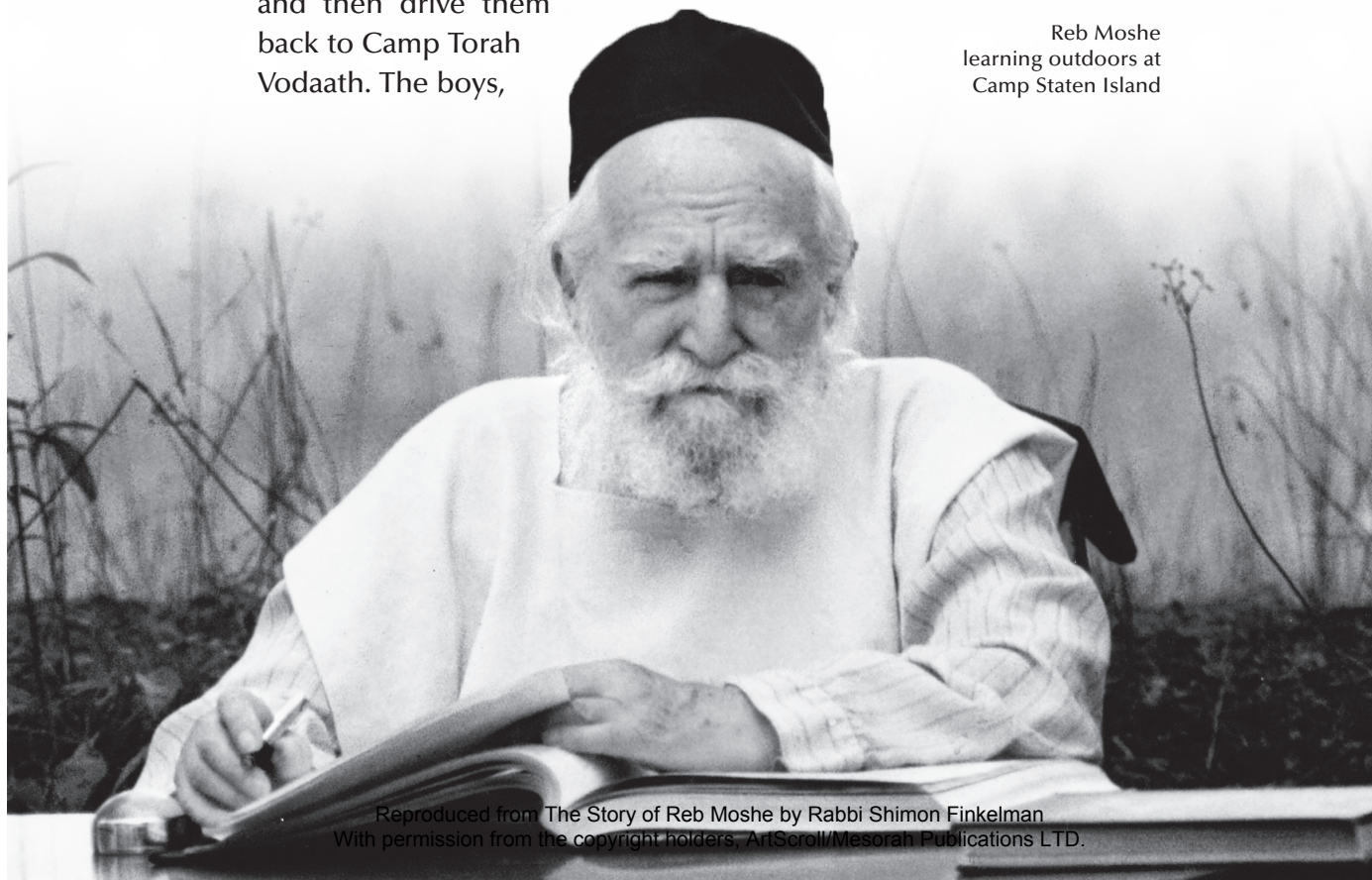
It's no wonder that those campers were eager to meet Reb Moshe, even if it meant hiking 25 miles! For most of them it would be the first time in their lives that they would be meeting him.

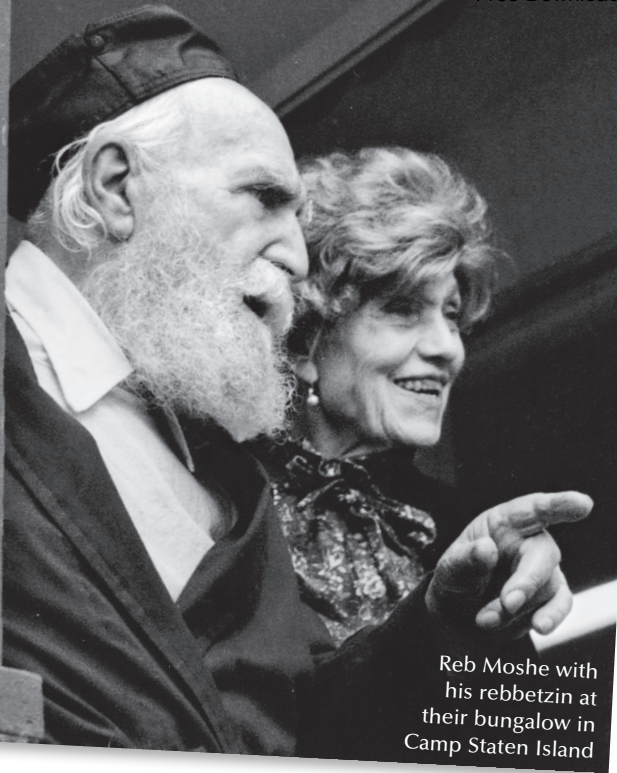
When they started out on their hike, the sun had just risen and the air was still cool. The more they walked, the hotter it got and the more weary they became. By mid-afternoon, they had hiked around 12 miles. Some of the boys felt that they could not walk much further.

### **The Plans Change**

The counselor called his camp director, who felt bad for the boys. He said that he would send taxis to take the boys the rest of the way to Camp Staten Island and then drive them back to Camp Torah Vodaath. The boys,

Reb Moshe  
learning outdoors at  
Camp Staten Island





Reb Moshe with  
his rebbetzin at  
their bungalow in  
Camp Staten Island

and their counselor, were grateful and excited.

But when they arrived at Camp Staten Island, their excitement gave way to disappointment. They were told that Reb Moshe was feeling particularly unwell that day and no one was being allowed in to see him. Reb Moshe's grandson, who was assisting his grandfather that day, had an idea. He would ask his grandfather to sit at a table on the enclosed porch of his bungalow. That way, at least the boys could see Reb Moshe from a distance.

The boys made their way to the bungalow, disappointed but grateful that at least they would be getting a glimpse of Reb Moshe.

When Reb Moshe's grandson informed him of what these boys had done, he exclaimed, "*Such mesiras nefesh!*" Reb Moshe was amazed that these boys had attempted to walk *twenty-five miles* just to see him! And he felt bad to disappoint them.

### **Surprise**

As they were talking, Rebbetzin Sima (pronounced "Shima") Feinstein, Reb Moshe's devoted wife, entered the room. When she heard about the boys' trek, she suggested that they come to the bungalow's back door (where they would not be noticed by others who might be tempted to join them) and greet Reb Moshe individually. Reb Moshe loved the idea.

For the campers and their counselor, it was a dream come true. Reb Moshe shook each boy's hand, asked him his name, and blessed

him. Then he asked his grandson to get food for the boys and also asked that arrangements be made for them to go swimming in the camp's pool before leaving. And he told the campers that they should never again attempt such a long and difficult hike.

More than 30 years have passed since then. For those campers, who today are grown men, one of their most special memories is the day they were privileged to meet one of the greatest and most humble men of recent times, whose generation referred to him with love, admiration, and respect as "Reb Moshe."

This book tells the story of his incredible life.



## CHAPTER 2

# Good Examples to Follow

Jewish first names are very meaningful. It is said that when parents choose a Hebrew name for their child, Hashem grants them special wisdom so that they select a name that fits that child's *neshamah*. A father and mother may name their son after his grandfather, or their daughter after an aunt, but in reality Hashem has arranged for them to choose the perfect name for that newborn's *neshamah*.

On the seventh of Adar 5655 (1895), Rabbi Dovid and Rebbetzin Faya Gittel Feinstein became the proud parents of a baby boy. However, they did not name him after a grandfather or other relative. Instead, they named him after Moshe Rabbeinu, whose birthday and *yahrtzeit* are on that date.

It certainly appears that a spark of *ruach hakodesh* inspired this couple to give their child this name. For, like Moshe Rabbeinu, their son would sit from early morning until late into the night studying, teaching, and



Rebbetzin  
Faya Gittel Feinstein

answering important questions that people would come to ask. And like Moshe Rabbeinu, their son would be so devoted to his people that he would always be ready to help them no matter how difficult it might be.

But no one is born a *tzaddik*. Little Moshe may have had the *potential* to become a leader and teacher of his people, but he would have to work hard to grow in Torah, *yiras Shamayim*, and good *mid-dos*. It certainly helped that he had good examples to follow.

His father was a great *talmid chacham* and *tzaddik*, his mother a great *tzadekes*. And when little Moshe's parents wanted to inspire him to trust in Hashem and serve Him with absolute devotion, a story they told about his great-grandfather made a powerful impression.

Reb Moshe's father was named after his own grandfather, Reb Dovid Feinstein, a G-d-fearing man who worked as a common laborer.

**The Shot That Missed** When Reb Dovid (Reb Moshe's great-grandfather) was hired to work for a non-Jew, he made one condition: Every day he must be allowed time off to *daven Minchah*. Reb Dovid's employer was not very happy about this condition. He was angry that precious time that could have been used for work would be "wasted" because the Jew had to say his prayers. But Reb Dovid was a good worker and the man needed him, so he agreed.

The employer became even angrier when he saw that Reb Dovid's *Shemoneh Esrei* was recited carefully and with intense concentration — and lasted a very long time. "Who does he think he is?" the man fumed. "This is no synagogue where you can pray as long as you like. I only intended to allow him a couple of minutes off, and nothing more!"

Instead of speaking to Reb Dovid directly, the man decided to send the Jew a message to show how upset he was. He wanted it to be a message that Reb Dovid would remember for a very long time.

One day, as Reb Dovid stood with his eyes closed, praying *Shemoneh Esrei*, his employer moved behind him, a shotgun in

his hands. As Reb Dovid bowed at one point, a shot rang out and a bullet whizzed above his head. The gentile watched gleefully, expecting to see the Jew collapse from fright or make a mad dash for the door.

He was greatly disappointed. Reb Dovid continued to pray as if nothing at all had occurred. It is possible that he did not even hear the gunshot, so intense was his concentration. Later, the employer told Reb Dovid that he had been angry enough to kill him if he had run or even turned around when the shot was fired. But when he saw how intensely Reb Dovid was concentrating on his prayer, he realized that Reb Dovid was truly a G-d-fearing man. From then on, the man would refer to Reb Dovid as “my Jew,” and never again complained about the length of his *davening*.

Reb Moshe's father, Reb Dovid, served as Rav of the small town of Uzda and later of the city of Starobin. He was admired by everyone for his devotion to learning and exceptional *middos*. In fact, the great Ponovezh Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach, once said that Reb Dovid's *tzidkus* was “beyond description”!

### **Miracle of the Yeast**

The same could have been said of Reb Moshe's mother, of whom Reb Moshe wrote: “There was no one like her in fear of Hashem and love of Torah. All she wanted was that her children should become great in Torah. She did everything possible to make sure that we should not waste time from our learning.”

Reb Dovid earned a small salary as Rav of Uzda, not enough to feed himself, his wife, and their many children. That is why his wife sold yeast to the townspeople. This income, together with her husband's salary, was just enough to live on.

Then, a non-Jew opened a store that sold baking supplies, including yeast. Many of the townspeople, especially those who were not Jewish, began purchasing yeast from him. The Rebbetzin lost many of her steady customers. Their income shrank and there was not enough money even for basic foods.

Some people suggested that the gentile be asked to stop selling yeast, but Reb Dovid rejected this idea. Instead, he placed his full trust in Hashem, confident that somehow he and his family would have whatever they needed.

One day, the gentile's wagon, laden with yeast, rode down a path that brought it past Reb Dovid's house. As it came directly in front of the house, the horse pulling the wagon came to a sudden halt; no one understood why. The driver's repeated whippings and commands accomplished nothing; the horse simply would not budge.

The gentile knew that his yeast sales had hurt the Rabbi's business. He was smart enough to understand that the horse's strange behavior was a warning from Heaven that he had done wrong. He jumped off his wagon, knocked on Reb Dovid's door, and begged forgiveness for having caused anguish to him and his family — and he promised not to sell another speck of yeast.

The gentile then returned to his wagon — and the horse started down the road without a moment's delay.

When he served as Rav of Starobin, Reb Dovid stopped at an inn overnight while on a journey. The innkeeper recognized Reb Dovid, who was famous as a *rav* and *posek*, and treated him with great honor and respect. The innkeeper brought his only urn into Reb Dovid's room in case he desired a cup of hot tea during the night.

A short while later, a *chasan* and *kallah* arrived at the inn. When they asked the innkeeper for the use of his urn, he told them that the urn was in the Starobiner Rav's room, but he would ask the Rav if they could borrow it for a short while.

When the request was put forth to Reb Dovid, he replied, "What is the question? In fact, I think it would be best to keep the urn in the room of the *chasan* and *kallah* the entire night; they deserve to be treated royally."



The *chasan* and *kallah* were Rabbi and Mrs. Yosef Adler. Years later, they emigrated to America, where Rabbi Adler became *menahel* of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem. Later, when Reb Moshe came to America and was being considered for the position of Rosh Yeshivah at Tifereth Jerusalem, Mrs. Adler reminded her husband of the incident with Reb Dovid and the urn.



Rabbi  
Yosef Adler

"It is quite possible," she said, "that Reb Dovid's son Reb Moshe has the same wonderful *middos* that his father had. If so, he will set a wonderful example for the talmidim. I think you should appoint him as Rosh Yeshivah." Rabbi Adler agreed with his wife, and soon after, Reb Moshe became Rosh Yeshivah.

An act of kindness by Reb Dovid at an inn in Russia would result, many years later, in his son being appointed as a Rosh Yeshivah in America, and from that position, he would come to be recognized as a *gadol hador*.