



TITLE:
Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin

LANGUAGE:
Hebrew

AUTHOR:
Rabbi Yosef Tumarkin

PUBLISHER:
Kehot Publication
Society 5781

EDITORS:
Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Nachshon,
Rabbi Levi Holtzman

PAGE COUNT:
272

ISSUE #05

A LOOK Inside the BOOK

BY SHMUEL SUPER

Introduction

Chazal say "Everything needs *mazel*, even a *sefer Torah* in the *heichal* (*aron kodesh*)" (Zohar 3:134 a, see the linked pages for details). (Meaning, there are usually a number of *sifrei Torah* in an *aron kodesh*, and an individual *sefer Torah*'s chances of getting taken out for use more or less often come down to *mazel*.)

Rabbi Yosef Tumarkin (5579-5634), the Rov of Kremenchug, was one of those *sifrei Torah* that unfortunately didn't have much *mazel*. A prominent Rov and renowned *posek* in his time, he has been largely forgotten because most of his writings didn't survive and reach print. The new *sefer Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin*, published by Kehos, is an attempt to turn the wheel of fortune and grant this great Rov some of the recognition he deserves.

Our *sefer* is comprised of two main sections: biography and *teshuvos*. The two editors apparently split the work between them, with R. Levi Holtzman focusing on the biography and R. Menachem Mendel Nachshon on the *teshuvos*.

In this review, we will survey the contents of the *sefer* and then comment on some editorial decisions.

Biography

Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin opens with a lengthy 71 page biography of the *mechaber* R. Tumarkin. An earlier version of this introduction was published in *Heichal Habaal Shem Tov* 37, pp. 161-194, but the final version published here has been greatly expanded to include portraits of the *mechaber's* illustrious brothers and children.

Here we read about the roots of the famous Tumarkin family in Dubrovna, White Russia, where R. Yosef was born and studied under the tutelage of the renowned R. Nechemiah of Dubrovna, the author of *Divrei Nechemiah*.

Already at a young age, R. Yosef was considered one of the most prominent Chabad Rabbonim, and a member of the select circle of Rabbonim whose opinions the Tzemach Tzedek solicited on some of the halachic questions sent to him. The Tzemach Tzedek's high regard for R. Yosef is reflected in the fact that he sent him manuscripts of his *teshuvos* to review and comment on.

After the passing of the Tzemach Tzedek, R. Yosef played a key role in the Rebbe Maharash's assumption of the *nesius* in Lubavitch.

In around 5617, R. Yosef was appointed as Rov of the Chabad community of Kremenchug, now in Ukraine. Kremenchug was a legendary *chasidische* community, and the great *ovdim* and *maskilim* of the city are described here based on memoirs written by local residents.

After reading the story of our protagonist R. Yosef, we are then introduced to the other illustrious members of his family.

R. Don Tumarkin was R. Yosef's brother, and was also a prominent chasid of the Rebbeim. A *talmid chacham* in *nigleh* and Chasidus, R. Don was also a successful businessman, and was appointed by the Tzemach Tzedek to serve as the head *gabbai* of Colel Chabad.

The third Tumarkin brother was R. Tzvi Hirsch, who was also the son-in-law of R. Yosef. After his brother's passing, R. Tzvi Hirsch filled his position for a few years, before moving back to Dubrovna and passing the position on to the younger son-in-law, R. Yitzchak Yoel Rafalovitch.

A great *talmid chacham*, virtually nothing survives of R. Tzvi Hirsch's *chidushim*. The introduction quotes a *michtav brachah* from R. Tzvi Hirsch published at the beginning of a small *sefer* titled *Tiferes Bachurim*. However, it should be noted that the author of this book was a notorious forger and none of the *haskamos* or letters of recommendation he presents can be assumed to be authentic (see *Sefer Sofer Vesipur*, p. 283, fn. 31).

After the founding of Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch, R. Tzvi Hirsch was one of a few Rabbonim that would visit occasionally to test the *bochurim's* progress in learning and give *semichah* to those found worthy.

The introduction concludes with descriptions of R. Yosef's sons and sons-in-law, the most prominent of whom was R. Yitzchak Yoel Rafalovitch, who filled his position in Kremenchug. A chasid of the Rebbe Maharash and the Rebbe Rashab, he was also a very successful businessman and a major *askan* in general Jewish affairs, serving as a loyal lieutenant of the Rebbe Rashab.

The editors have done an excellent job with the lengthy biographical introduction. They appear to have successfully located



Available at:
**SeforimDeals.com/
LookInBook**

every available piece of information about R. Yosef Tumarkin and his immediate relatives, weaving together stories told by the Rebbeim and Chasidim with material from old, obscure newspapers to paint as complete and accurate a picture as possible of this great family. Regrettably, the editors' good work is somewhat marred by the occasional typo and spelling mistake.

One element missing from the introduction is an analysis of R. Yosef's method of learning and *psak*. While it is objectively difficult to write about this in detail based on the scant material available, some general points about his style and approach could certainly have been deduced.

Teshuvos

As related in the biographical section, R. Yosef's fame as a *posek* spread widely in his lifetime, and many of the Rabbonim of his time consulted with him on halachic matters. Eulogies published after his passing mention that his children possessed volumes of his *teshuvos* in manuscript form and were preparing them for print. Unfortunately, these *teshuvos* were never published and were eventually lost.

Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin contains only eleven surviving *teshuvos* that were preserved in the *seforim* of other authors or published from manuscript in the *Yagdil Torah* journal.

While none of the material here is new, the editors invested a lot of work in editing the *teshuvos* to make them more accessible. R. Yosef's style is terse, referencing sources and leaving it to the reader to open them up in order to understand his arguments. Our editors do all of this work for us in the copious footnotes, providing all the necessary background information to understand the *teshuvos*, referencing other *seforim* that deal with the same topics, and adding further explanation when necessary.

For example, *siman* 1 contains a brief *teshuvah* by R. Yosef concerning mead, a honey-based alcoholic beverage prepared for Pesach that became the subject of significant controversy, due to the use of *chametz* barrels in its production.

The editors provide us with a general overview laying out the facts, the chronology of the controversy, and the various opinions, and then publish R. Yosef's *teshuvah* along with five other *teshuvos* from other Rabbonim on the topic, all accompanied by detailed footnotes.

Most of the *teshuvos* concern niche topics,

such as the intricacies of the proper spelling of names in *gittin* and *hilchos mikvaos*, and will primarily interest Rabbonim that deal with these issues. However, with the help of the footnotes, readers with a solid yeshivah education should be able to learn the *teshuvos* and understand them.

Following the *teshuvos*, the editors present a collection of *shemuos* quoted in the name of the *mechaber* in other *seforim*. Of note here is a lengthy *siman* devoted to the question of how to spell the name "Yankel" in a *get*, a topic concerning which R. Yosef Tumarkin's opinion has been quoted and hotly debated among *poskim* for generations.

The *sefer* concludes with the text of the various *haskamos* given by R. Yosef to other *seforim*. His *haskamah* to *Divrei Nechemiah* is notable for his beautiful poetic description of his teacher's greatness.

A *haskamah* to a *sefer* titled *Matzav Hayashar* is accompanied by a disclaimer from the editors that suspicion has been cast on the authenticity of the *haskamos* to this *sefer*. Our editors could have been more definitive in this regard, as the fantastical over-the-top praises sung by the *haskamos* to this *sefer* can be dismissed as clear forgeries.

The *sefer* is followed by *mafteichos* and photocopies of manuscripts. The *mafteichos* provided only cover the actual text of the *mechaber's teshuvos* etc., unfortunately leaving out the lengthy biographical introduction and editors footnotes to the *teshuvos*.

Editorial Decisions

As noted, *Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin* only contains 11 *teshuvos* from the *mechaber*, most of them very brief. The *teshuvos* section is only 127 pages long, and without all the related *teshuvos* by other Rabbonim and the lengthy footnotes would only comprise a few dozen pages.

The decision to title this *sefer* as *Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin* is therefore questionable. A title such as *Sefer Zikaron Mahari Tumarkin* would have better reflected the content of the *sefer* and would also have been more respectable for the *mechaber*.

R. Yochanan Gurary published similar style *seforim* in the past, combining the biographies and *teshuvos* of R. Eizel Homiler and R. Baruch Mordechai of Bobroisk, under the titles *Toldos Yitzchak Eizik* and *Toldos Baruch Mordechai* respectively, even though both of these books contained significantly more *teshuvos* than the present *Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin*.


The publication of this *sefer* is noteworthy, as it is the first time Kehos has published a *sefer* of *she'eilos uteshuvos* by one of the *gedolei hachasidim*. (*Shu"t She'eiris Yehudah* by the Alter Rebbe's brother sits in a category of its own; and while *Shu"t Avnei Chein* containing *teshuvos* written by the Rabbonim of the illustrious Chein family appeared under the Kehos imprint in 5773, this *sefer* was independently edited and published.)

Conclusion

In summary, *Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin* is a very well-produced book combining biographical material and halachah. Students of Chabad history—and the many descendants of the broader Tumarkin family—will find the biographical introduction of great interest, and those interested in the specialized topics of the *teshuvos* will find them a pleasure to learn, thanks to the thorough editorial work.

It is hoped that *Shu"t Mahari Tumarkin* will be an auspicious beginning, to be followed by many more *sifrei shu"t* and halachah written by the *gedolei hachasidim* of past generations.

As an addendum, it is relevant to bring to the attention of the public a number of other unlucky *sifrei Torah* containing *teshuvos* by great Chabad Rabbonim, in the hope that someone will take the initiative to finally take them out of the vaults in which they languish.

- *Teshuvos Eliezer* by R. Eliezer Arlozorov (5602-5661), the Rov of Ramen, contains 243 *teshuvos* prepared for print over 100 years ago complete with the approval of the Russian censor. The manuscript can be viewed online at this link. A separate manuscript from the same author contains *shu"t* regarding *mikva'os*.
- An additional manuscript volume of *Shu"t Mishnas Rabbi Elazar*, by R. Elazar Barkahn, (5594-5653) the Rov of Polotzk, containing 72 *teshuvos*. This manuscript is also available online, at this link.
- *Shu"t Ziv Aryeh* by R. Aryeh Leib Zivov (5570-5647), a Rov in Homel and Dvinsk, was prepared for print many years ago by R. Yehoshua Monshine and others, but is yet to be published. See *Heichal Habaal Shem Tov* 39, pp. 211-213 for details.
- A manuscript containing *teshuvos*, *chidushim*, and chasidus written by R. Yitzchak Eizik of Vitebsk (c. 5528-5628), a *talmid* of the Alter Rebbe. 

To purchase the new book, visit
SeforimDeals.com/LookInBook