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## Ha-Admor of Erlau in Yerushalayim Ztz"l

[Eulogy given in Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim]

Ha-Gaon Ha-Admor of Erlau, R' Yochanan Sofer Ztz"l, also known as "Imrei Sofer" after his commentary on the Gemara, has ascended on high. He was a fifth-generation descendant of the Chatam Sofer, son after son, Imrei Sofer ben Yad Sofer ben Hitorerut Teshuvah ben Ketav Sofer ben Chatam Sofer.

The Gemara in Megillah (29a) says that in the future all of the Shuls and Yeshivot that are in the Exile will be established in Eretz Yisrael. There are many discussions among our great Rabbis as to the meaning of this Gemara. Will the buildings, dirt or people connected to these Shuls and Yeshivot be transferred to Eretz Yisrael? The Steipler Gaon related that the Chazon Ish said after Davening on the night of Simchat Torah that the Gemara says that in the future all of the Shuls and Yeshivot that are in the Exile will be established in Eretz Yisrael. Now that the Ponevezh Yeshiva has come here, we need to go there. And they went that very night to celebrate the first Simchat Torah of the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael (Kuntres Minchat

Todah p. 68). This means that the essence, the philosophy and the method of learning of the Shuls and Yeshivot will be uprooted from the Exile and re-established in Eretz Yisrael (Le-Netivot Yisrael in the article "Mivtzar Ha-Kodesh Le-Yisrael U-Le-Artzo", #5. Tal Orot – Vayikra pp. 32-33). But the essence of these places is not easily transferred. It requires a sort of bridge, which is connected to there and yet leads to here (This is similar to Yaakov Avinu who transferred everything he had from one side of the river to the other. See Eim Ha-Banim Semeichah 3, 48). This was the greatness of Ha-Admor of Erlau.

His grandfather, Ha-Rav Shimon Sofer, the author of Shut Hitorerut Teshuvah and Rav of the city of Erlau, Hungary for 64 years, and his father Ha-Rav Moshe Sofer, author of Shut Yad Sofer, were murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. Ha-Admor of Erlau survived and dedicated his life to reestablishing that which had been destroyed. He returned to the city of Erlau where there was barely a Minyan. A single Yeshiva in Hungary was established in Budapest, Yeshivat Chatam Sofer, and a descendant of the Chatam Sofer was sought to serve as its Rosh Yeshiva. Ha-Admor of Erlau agreed to fill this position, but was unwilling to abandon his community. In the end, a solution was found. Ha-Admor of Erlau served as Rosh Yeshiva for the first half of every week, and Ha-Rav Moshe Stern, Debreciner Rav and author of Shut Be'er Moshe, served as the Rosh Yeshiva during the second half. Ha-Admor of Erlau slept in the dormitory with the students and would not take a salary. His only goal was the resurrection of the Yeshiva world. After a year and a half, he succeeded in establishing a Yeshiva in the city of Erlau. After the Yeshiva in Budapest closed, the students transferred to his Yeshiva in Erlau.

The Jews of Hungary slowly fled on account of anti-Semitism and the rise of Communism. After the last Jew left Erlau, Ha-Admor of Erlau made Aliyah with his Yeshiva. He succeeded in fulfilling the words of our Sages that in the

future all of the Shuls and Yeshivot that are in the Exile will be established in Eretz Yisrael: he brought Yeshivat Erlau to Yerushalayim, in the neighborhood of Katamon. Over the years, he established communities in Bnai Brak, Tzefat, Petach Tikvah, Haifa, Elad, Beitar Ilit, Beit Shemesh, Modi'in Ilit and Asdod. He also established communities in cities outside of Israel, such as London, Antwerp, Williamsburg, Boro Park and Monsey. His children and grandchildren served as the leaders of these communities. He witnessed a world built up, a world destroyed and a world built up once again.

Many ask: Was Maran Ha-Rav Kook a Mitnaged or a Chasid? After all, his father's side was from the Volozhin Yeshiva and his mother's side was Chabad Chasidim. Maran Ha-Rav Kook combined all of the different worlds. He was Klal-Yisraeli. He opposed dividing Am Yisrael into groups and called such expressions "The names of idol worship" (Ma'amrei Ha-Re'eiyah p. 76). Similarly, Ha-Admor of Erlau had good relationships with the Eidah Ha-Charedit and Satmar on the one side, Zionist Rabbis on the other side, and everyone in between. He was very close with Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef and Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. This is the future vision of Am Yisrael as one body, without division into groups.

Ha-Admor of Erlau, a descendant of the Chatam Sofer who was a Mitnaged, became very close to the Belzer Rebbe and the Skever Rebbe. He combined both worlds. Like the Mitnagdim, he Davened Nusach Ashkenaz and did not wear a Gartel, but like the Chasidim, he immersed in the Mikveh every day, had a Tish and danced the Mitzvah Tantz at weddings.

Although he did not support the idea of Zionism, he adopted an approach similar to that of his Rebbe, Ha-Admor of Belz, who accepted the fact of the establishment of the State. This allowed for dialogue with the Zionist leaders and for representation in the Knesset.

Ha-Admor of Erlau strongly opposed any territorial concession on Israel's part, since it weakens us and encourages Arab attacks. He once said to the Israeli

Foreign Minister: "I am not prepared to cede even one grain of the Land of Israel to the Arabs". And regarding the expulsion from Gush Katif, he was quoted as saying: "Whoever leads to the transfer (of Jews from parts of Israel) is destroying the State".

The Chatam Sofer had incredible success through his students in spreading the Torah throughout the entire world. Many communities can find their roots in the Beit Midrash of the Chatam Sofer. Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter of New York asked: What is the great secret of the Chatam Sofer's students? He answered: The Chatam Sofer insisted that any community who hires one of his students as their Rabbi must commit to supporting a Yeshiva. In fact, every place the Chatam Sofer's students served, the Torah spread in a wondrous manner. This was the secret of the success of Ha-Admor of Erlau, who became Ha-Admor of Erlau in Yerushalayim.

The Chatam Sofer was a genius in learning, in Paskening Halachah and in leading the community against those who wanted to destroy traditional Torah Judaism. This sun was so strong that it continued to shine even in the fifth generation, and – Be-Ezrat Hashem – beyond.

May the soul of Ha-Admor of Erlau in Yerushalayim be bound up with the bonds of the living with all of the Tzadikim and Geonim.



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