

## **Yated Ne'eman**

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**First Release:**

## **Rabeinu Hagra, may his memory protect us, is descended from Rashi and back to King David.**

By Chaim Arbeli.

On the Parsha "These are the generations ..." we are witnessing a new revelation by the genealogy expert Reb Chaim Freedman of Petah Tikvah. Reb Chaim has engaged for decades in the research of families which descend from the Gra. Lately he has turned to research of the descent of the Gra himself – where he found a breakthrough which relates the Gra as a descendant of the Holy Rashi and back to David the King of Israel. According to substantiated calculations there exist today about one hundred and fifty thousand descendants of the Gaon of Vilna, may his memory protect us. Up until the two hundredth anniversary of his passing, twenty thousand of his descendants were collected in a family tree. In the last eight years another 10,000 descendants were located. It will apparently take considerable time until the families which constitute the remaining one hundred and twenty five thousand may be identified, if at all. In an interview with Reb Chaim Freedman, he tells about his new discovery, about families which mistakenly considered that they were descendants of the Gra, and more.

[The interview consists mainly of the text of articles which appeared in "Sharsheret Hadorot" (1995 Volume 9 #1, 1998 Volume 12, #1,2.) and "Avotaynu" (1997 Volume X111/4) about the reliability of oral traditions in the research of the family of the Vilna Gaon. Note that the statement made therein that civil records for the period of the Gaon were unavailable is outdated, since such records have subsequently been discovered and used to substantiate an analysis of the Gaon's family in Chaim Freedman's book "Eliyahu's Branches, the Descendants of the Gaon of Vilna and His Family", Avotaynu 1997.]

### **A new discovery**

Just recently Reb Chaim revealed a significant discovery about the descent of the Gra himself. It was always known that the Gaon was descended from several important families of Vilna. He was a descendant of the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Rivkas of blessed and saintly memory, author of *Be'er Hagolah*, and of the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Kremer of blessed and saintly memory. But relationships of the ancestors of the family did not go back for hundreds of years.

Regarding the important families, such a situation was rare, since usually the rabbinic families were connected to each other and it was possible to trace the roots of the families back for many hundreds of years. A few weeks ago Reb Chaim Freedman succeeded in revealing a new branch in the roots of the family tree of the Gra himself. According to this discovery the Gra descends from Rashi and King David.

Already years ago it was noted that the Gra was descended from King David, but without any shred of evidence or proof, this tradition was not taken into consideration.

The discovery was a result of extensive research and the merging of component sources to produce one entity. In another year and a half there will take place in Jerusalem an assembly of the descendants of King David. Reb Chaim is assisting with the preparations of this assembly from a research aspect. During recent weeks Reb Chaim disclosed the details of the discovery, which were presented in English, to the descendants of King David. This discovery joins other discoveries of Reb Chaim, such as research of the ages of the Gra's sons. The results of this examination showed that previous researchers erred with respect to the date of birth of Rabbi Avraham son of the Gra by fifteen years! After the fall of the Iron Curtain, census records were discovered which confirmed that he had found exactly the correct year.

The discovery sheds light on several comments in books. For example, the *Be'er Hagolah* makes note of his relativeness in several places, and he also refers to the *Sheloh*. How were they related? Rabbi Avraham the son of the Gra describes the *Arukh* and the *Baalei Hatosafot* as "*zikneynu*" [our ancestors]. How were they his ancestors? It appears that the distant ancestry of the *Be'er Hagolah* was from a family which descends from Rashi. So the *Sheloh* was his relative, and the *Baalei Hatosafot* were "*ziknav*" [ancestors] of the Gra.

He who succeeds to connect himself to the Gra, will thereby descend from Rashi and to David Melech Yisrael !

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