

# 'The Torah Leadership We Need'

The Chief Rabbi of Britain's Federation of Synagogues, Dayan Michael Fisher, on his Shavuot visit to the Lubavitcher Rebbe

By Rabbi Michael Fisher

## Editor's Introduction

Better known as *Dayan* Fisher, Rabbi Michael Fisher was one of London's most formidable and well-loved rabbinic personalities for more than sixty years. He was the very image of an old-school "Litvisher" Torah Scholar, combining complete mastery of the Talmud with razor sharp wit, charm, a noble bearing, and an engaging rhetorical style. In 1966, he established the Beit Din (Rabbinical Court) of the Federation of Synagogues, and was later appointed as Chief Rabbi (*Rav Rashi*) of the Federation, a position which has not been filled since his passing in 2004. He also served as Honorary Vice-President of the Mizrahi.<sup>1</sup>

Born early in the 20th century (circa 1908-1912) in Grodno (then Imperial Russia, today Belarus), Dayan Fisher attended the Yeshiva of Rabbi Shimon Shkop. He was also a student in the great Lithuanian Yeshivot of Mir, Radin, and Kamenitz. In Radin, he was an attendant to Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan ("the Chofetz Chaim," 1839-1933). Later in life he would sometimes say, "these hands washed the hands of the Chofetz Chaim."<sup>2</sup>

As Dayan Fisher himself made clear in the article below, there was nothing in his personal background that in any way inclined him towards the Chassidic path. Yet as judicious in character as he was in vocation, he did not resist the opportunity to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe in person and to find out for himself what the Chabad movement stands for. His account of the visit, as reproduced below, was published in the Federation's periodical journal (*Hamaor - The Light*) in September 1977. The visit to the Rebbe's court in Brooklyn, N.Y., occurred more than a year prior, spanning the festival of Shavuot, in June 1976, and extending for another week afterwards.

In addition to his powerful appraisal of the Rebbe's energetic and erudite Torah expositions, Dayan Fisher's article provides illuminating perspective on the Rebbe's love for all Jews, his fearlessness as a leader, and his deep investment in Jewish life in otherwise forgotten corners of the globe.

Having grown up in Edgware, Northwest London—where Dayan Fisher moved in 1973—I have an early childhood memory of my father encouraging me to approach the dayan in shul and wish him a "good Shabbos," which I did. Later, I would hear various details about his genius, charm, wit, and also about his visit to the Rebbe. Among other things, I heard that the Rebbe's essay on the halachic and talmudic intricacies of making utensils kosher (*Likkutei Sichot*, Vol. 18, pages 363-371 - Matot II, 5736) originated as a response to a question posed by Dayan Fisher. Indeed, the original talk was delivered on the Shabbat following Shavuot in 1976, and a close reader of that essay will discern that the Dayan's comments below regarding the Rebbe's unique and

“fresh” approach to a Rashi that “has escaped the attention even of an expert” may well refer to this talk specifically. The Rebbe’s attention to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah is well known.<sup>3</sup> But in this instance the Rebbe went beyond the usual focus on the “plain meaning of the verse” (*peshuto shel mikrah*) and used a close reading of Rashi to re-examine and resolve a complex legal conundrum.

Rabbi Michael Seligson, and others who were present in the Rebbe’s court at that time, subsequently confirmed to me that Dayan Fisher had given a public talk on the day following Shavuot on this very topic, and also discussed it with the Rebbe in a private meeting. It was clear to everyone that the Rebbe’s Shabbat talk, which was “enormously long,” was a direct engagement with the issues raised by the Dayan.<sup>4</sup> Following this visit, Dayan Fisher initiated a correspondence with the Rebbe, in which they continued the Torah discussion that they had begun in person.<sup>5</sup>

In the article below, Dayan Fisher takes more explicit note of a series of talks delivered by the Rebbe about the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yosef. Some elements of these talks were later incorporated into an edited essay in *Likkutei Sichot* Vol. 16, pages 211-222 (Yitro III, 5737). The Rebbe discussed this topic on the second day of Shavuot itself as well as on the evening prior to Shavuot. An audio recording of that talk can be found [here](#). Transcripts of all the Rebbe’s talks during the period of Dayan Fisher’s visit can be found in *Sichot Kodesh* 5736 Vol. 2, pages 241-336.

Below we reproduce Dayan Fisher’s account in full, as it first appeared in *Hama’or - The Light*, Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3 (September 1977 – Tishri 5738) pages 24-30. We have added section headers and pull quotes. We have left the spelling and capitalization of Hebrew terms as they appeared in the original publication.

— *Eli Rubin*

## A VISIT TO THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By the Rav Rashi, RABBI MICHAEL FISHER

*(This is an edited transcript of an informal talk by the Rav Rashi)*

As far back as I can trace my ancestry, I have not been able to find a single Chassid in my family, either of Lubavitch, or Ger, Belz, or any other group. However, I have been fortunate enough since I have been in England to have been invited by the Lubavitch movement to take part in different functions: the Yahrzeit of the former Rebbe, the Yom Moledet of the Rebbe and Kislev 19, and to hear and share the experiences of the Lubavitch movement, and I found them to my liking.

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While I was in Warsaw before the Second World War, where 3.5 million Jews lived, being an inquisitive person, I wanted to meet the Gedolei Hador, all types of Gedolim, so I went to see the Gerer Rebbe, Reb. Alter; the Bobover Rebbe; the Belzer Rebbe; and the Alexander Rebbe. In fact, during the year I lived in Warsaw, my main occupation was to see Chassidim, to visit *shtieblech* to discuss their ideas with them and how they

differed from each other. However, it did not attract me until I came into contact with Lubavitch after coming to England, and I felt some *Kiruv levavit*.

## Seeing With My Own Eyes

I would call my journey the journey of a lifetime. It was my first visit to the United States, and I had the opportunity while there to address five or six communal gatherings, to give *shiurim* and to see what was going on in America, particularly the Lubavitch movement there. It was an act of *Hashgachah* that years ago, after the former Rebbe was released from prison in Russia, he chose to go to America. I have studied the *sichot* of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, *z.l.*, and I understand why he went, for he wanted to show that even in America it is possible to establish a movement of Chassidim and to do the wonders, absolute wonders that they have done in America. Of *all* the Chassidic movements, none can compare—and this I say as a Litvak—none can compare in their indescribable achievements. Words fail me to express what I have seen at 770 Eastern Parkway, the nerve centre of activities on a global scale.

I always remember the words of Rashi in Noach, in the account of the *Dor Haflagah*, where Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma to the effect that it is the duty of a *Dayan* before passing judgement upon anything, to go and see it with his own eyes. Even Moshe Rabenu, when told by G-d that “thy people has become corrupt,” when there was no doubt in the matter, decided that even if the *luchot* must be broken, he would not break them until he had confirmed the facts with his own eyes. Thus, all the critics from afar, who have never seen what is going on, fail to live up to the high standards of a *Dayan*, who must delve into a matter thoroughly before forming an opinion. So, following on this advice, I undertook my journey to see what was going on in the world of Lubavitch that the outside world still does not know about.

Although Lubavitch has emissaries and missionaries everywhere, there are still in the Anglo-Jewish community today those who do not realise the achievements and the good the Lubavitch movement has brought not only to Anglo-Jewry, but also to world Jewry. When I was in Africa two years ago, I saw Lubavitch Chassidim and a Lubavitch shul in Johannesburg. They are spread all over the globe, and it is enough to go into their offices in Brooklyn to see the telephone connections with all five continents, where they can contact Hong Kong, India, Australia and the whole world to spread their message. This is what I admire.

The Gemara says in Yoma: “The Kadosh Baruch Hu saw that *Tzaddikim* are few, and He therefore found it necessary to plant *Tzaddikim* in each generation.” The Gemara came to my mind when I saw the Rebbe as Rebbe for the first time. I was taken direct from the airport to the Lubavitch headquarters for Minchah (regrettably without *hachanah*) and then the Rebbe walked in and there was silence in the shul. I had never seen such adulation for a Rebbe. I grew up in the Chafetz Chaim’s Yeshiva and I was there day in and day out, and I have never seen such respect, and I saw here one of the *Tzaddikim*, one of the Gedolei Hador.

**“The Kadosh Baruch Hu saw that Tzaddikim are few, and He therefore found it necessary to plant Tzaddikim in each generation.”**

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## Lover of the Jewish People

I would like to give you a picture of the Rebbe as I see him, as an outsider. First, I regard the Rebbe as the greatest *Ohev Yisrael* I have ever met. With his great love he sees in every Jew, even those who are immersed in *mem tet sha'are tumah*, an uncut diamond. He sees an opportunity of cleaning it, cleaving it, to bring forth the beauty, lustre and splendour in every Jew. I have seen six, seven-foot-tall cowboys from Texas and Dallas [sic] with big cowboy hats standing in the hall inspired and electrified just by looking at the Rebbe. I saw the department of the *Ba'ale Teshuvah* and I saw there all types of people—great scientists, doctors, lawyers, dentists, all sorts of professional people with great learning and secular knowledge—divorcing themselves, separating themselves, from their past to start an entirely new life under the influence of Lubavitch. What a wonderful thing. The *kiruv rechokim* that I saw, the bringing near of those far away, the determination not to abandon any single Jew, however bad or however low he has sunk—such *Ahavat Yisroel* I have never seen.

As the Gemara says in Berachot, one of the most difficult things to do is to hate evil and to love the man who commits evil. This is something which only a great man, with a great *machshavah*, with a deep mind, a comprehensive mind, can do, to place a *techum*, to draw the line, to hate wickedness and not to hate the person. One of the conditions, one of the prerequisites of the Mitzvah of effective *tochacha*, reproof, which will be fruitful and bring about results—as we are commanded in the Torah “You shall not hate your brother in your heart ... You shall not reprove your neighbour”—is to show love to the person whom you want to win over to your ideals.

**“This is something which only a great man, with a great machshavah, with a deep mind, a comprehensive mind, can do, to place a techum, to draw the line, to hate wickedness and not to hate the person.”**

I call to mind the Gemara in Bava Metzia, 32. If you meet a man, a friend of yours, who is with an animal which is loaded and who needs help to take the load off the animal, which is the Mitzvah of *perikah*, and at the same time you have a man, an enemy of yours, who is in need of help to load an animal, which is the Mitzvah of *te'inah*, the question then arises which of these two Mitzvot should you do. The Gemara decides that the mitzvah of *te'inah* has priority. You are obliged to help your enemy, although this may entail causing pain to animals, which is itself *assur min HaTorah*, because you thus conquer your *yetzer hara*. And Tosfot then asks, since we are referring here to an enemy who is a sinner and one whom it is permitted, or even a Mitzvah to hate, how does the question of subduing the *yetzer hara* arise? The answer, as the Torah Temima explains, is that the enemy, the sinner, is someone who hates me, not that I hate him. And by showing love, I will make him better, and he will stop hating me. As the Englishman says: “You don't catch a fly with vinegar, but with honey.” So here we find that the best way to win people is not by hatred, if they commit an *aveirah*, but by showing love and concern. Moshe Rabbenu gave the Torah, but he also gave manna. It is with the stomach that you sometimes win a man. Thus the idea of *Ahavat Yisroel* which is practised by the Rebbe and the Lubavitch movement to such a great extent is a movement which has borne fruit. Thousands of people have come back to Judaism through this *kiruv rechokim*. One of the finest and most noble of the characteristics of the Lubavitch Rebbe is this *Ahavat Yisrael* without *g'vul*, which you will not find in any other movement.

## Torah Genius

I have seen the Rebbe in another context, and this I would like people to know. I am not an Am Ha'aretz, and I testify that the Lubavitch Rebbe is one of the greatest Geonim of our time in *nigleh*. As far as *nistar* is concerned, I did not understand a word of what the Rebbe said. I need a dictionary for the Lubavitch language, I have to become familiarised and acquainted with it. As I told the Rebbe I did not understand a word of his mamer. What I did understand was *halachah*. I heard the Rebbe give a hadran on Mesichta Sotah (studied by Lubavitch between Pesach and Shevuot) which lasted more than eight hours, and I noted how he tied up the loose ends at the finish. The Rebbe spoke for eight hours without notes, without gemara, without chumash, and not only did he quote everything perfectly, but if there were two readings in the gemara he quoted both exactly. I was sitting behind the Rebbe at the time. I would have liked to have seen his face because when you look at the face of a Rebbe you understand what he says better, you understand the depth of his thoughts, but unfortunately I was placed there by the Chassidim!

In the minds of some "Litvaks" *chassidut* is associated with *am ha'aratzut*. They say of a *Chassid*: "*Er kennisht lernen*," but I can testify that I have rarely met in the last twenty-five to thirty years, since the destruction of Eastern Jewry, a man who can "learn" so well and is *bakki bechol HaTorah Kulah*, in Babli, Yerushalmi, Shulchan Aruch, in Tosefta in Mechilta, in Rishonim and Achronim and in the literature of Chassidut. I was personally amazed at the Rebbe's vast knowledge and particularly at the way the Rebbe built up a subject as from a single word in a seemingly unnecessary gloss of Rashi at the end of Mesichta Sotah on a remark by Rav Yosef. The Rebbe went through the whole Shass wherever Rav Yosef is mentioned and found the connecting link between all the sayings of Rav Yosef, mentioning also his blindness; and he gave us a detailed description of the greatness of Rav Yosef, and everything fell into place like a jigsaw in such a masterly way that I have never experienced in my life, and I have heard great Roshei Yeshiva and have attended upon great Gedolei Hador.

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We need in this generation such a man with his energy, with his vision, enthusiasm, sincerity, dedication and commitment to the ideal which animates him.

I have seen the Rebbe in another way, from another angle. I have seen the Rebbe as a *Sopher*. The Gemara says in Kiddushin: "Why are the Rabbis called *Sopherim* (scribes)? Because they count (*sopherim*) the letters in the Torah." They have given us details of every sentence, of every word and letter in the Torah and have calculated them exactly. And the Rabbanim counted every letter in the Torah because each letter is a diamond. Every letter and dot contain mountains of *halachas*. I have noticed the way the Rebbe counts the letters in the Torah, particularly in Rashi. I have seen him notice a Rashi which has escaped the attention even of an expert, the way he notices a comment of Rashi which appears unnecessary or which he explains in a fresh way.

## Fearless Leader

Now, unfortunately of late, in the leadership in the Jewish world, Torah authority and lay leadership have been separated. They think politics belong to a Rabin, a Burg, and a Rebbe should distribute *shirayim* or make mikvahs, or quote the Tanya and never mix in politics. This is the greatest tragedy which has befallen the Jewish people. In times of old the *Cohen Gadol* wore the *Choshen Mishpat*. He was not only the leader religiously going into the Holy of Holies and praying for Klal Yisrael, he was also the political leader, the *manhig*, of the Jewish people in every respect, in every activity and endeavour.

Who says that a Talmid Chacham, a Rabbi has no say in political matters, why is it so? In the time of Rabbi Abuhu even the gentiles understood that a Rabbi could be on friendly terms, straight from yeshiva, with royalty, frequenting high places of government. He went straight from yeshiva to Washington, to the White House. When political problems arise, the Gadol should be consulted. Should it be rather the ordinary elected member of the Knesset—including the Arab members—who decide on political or on religious questions, who should decide the fate of Jewry? Or the Gedolei Hador? Thus, the greatest tragedy facing the Jewish people is the division between the *nassi*, the political leader, and the *manhig*, the religious leader. But the Lubavitch Rebbe takes no notice. He has a strong and determined mind and behind him a firm background going back to the Baal HaTanya and beyond, and having this background and training and knowledge of *kol HaTorah kulah*, he fears no person to an extent I have seen in no other Rebbe.

The injunction, “You shall fear no man” is a basic principle whose purpose is to secure Judaism—it is its passport to eternity. Once you come to the conclusion that a certain view is *da'at Torah* and you maintain your opinion without fear, it is my experience that people will respect you more. As the Gemara says in Sanhedrin: If one hires false witnesses, they lose the hirer's respect. And I have seen that the Rebbe fulfils that injunction. Despite vilification and attacks on the Lubavitch movement, he goes his way and says what he thinks. He says what he thinks about the policy Israel should adopt towards *Mi Yehudi*. He spent over an hour analysing in minute detail the Israeli Government's deliberations on the subject. He is astonishingly well-informed! His strength is such that it is to be admired and emulated by some leaders who are afraid of their own shadows. I would advise leaders of Anglo-Jewry and Israeli Jewry to visit the Lubavitch Rebbe for one Shabbat and see how the Rebbe behaves and talks, and believe me they would become quite different people. I am a little different from what I was before I went.

**"The injunction, “You shall fear no man” is a basic principle whose purpose is to secure Judaism—it is its passport to eternity ... And I have seen that the Rebbe fulfils that injunction.”**

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## The Mitzvah Campaigns

Some of the Rebbe's Mitzvah campaigns have aroused criticism, but their true value is not fully realised. The idea, for example, of *nerot shel Shabbat* is a wonderful idea. I myself did not realise what a good idea it was, and though I am not a Chassid, I advised my daughter that my granddaughter should light a candle every Shabbat. She bought a special candlestick, and it is a wonderful thing. It is a *chinuch*, impressive and

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important, and substantiated in *halachah*. I also saw much to admire in the Neshei Chabad, the Women's Organisation. It was the experience of a lifetime to see so many Yidden in one place: children, women, married girls, unmarried girls 15 years old. Only last night in my house, I spoke to a young *kallah*, she is only 18 years of age, and she had already seen the Rebbe, been received by the Rebbe. There are thousands like her. It is the only movement that has succeeded in winning over ladies of all ages—old, middle-aged, young and very young, caught in this wonderful experience which only the Rebbe can win with the power he has. I cannot explain or understand it. I still have not digested all I saw.

**the Rebbe. There are thousands like her. "**

What impressed me, above all, was the Sefarim campaign. I went to many houses of the young Lubavitch Chassidim in America, and everyone has a wonderful library. I can't afford to buy the books they have, even though they live on a very limited stipend. The Kollel pays hardly enough to cover the rent, and yet they save and manage to acquire a library. Here, in an English home you may see perhaps the Singer's Prayer Book or a "*bencherel*" from a wedding. And even where pride is taken in more important books, they remain wrapped in cellophane!

Unfortunately, we here in England have exchanged books for the billiard table and the cocktail cabinet. There are few houses in England which can boast even Chumashim or Machzorim, not to mention a Shass, Rambam or Shulchan Aruch. But if we are not divorced from books, we are certainly separated from books, and in order to restore the *Am Hasefer*, to reconcile the people with the book, the Rebbe has inaugurated a campaign whereby every Jew must have a library in his house. It is of the utmost importance that a Jewish home should have *sefarim*. Who needs expensive suites and carpets? In old Jewish homes, the finest room was devoted to the library, and our ancestors who could hardly afford a piece of meat during the week, only in honour of Shabbat, yet one could find in their houses the Rishonim and Achronim and every *sefer* they needed for study. I only want to show you the wisdom and foresight of the Rebbe; that he knows how to win Jews to Torah and Yiddishkeit by acquiring a love for sefarim, apart from the fact that you can fulfil the Mitzva of writing a *Sefer Torah* by buying *sefarim*, *sifrei kodesh*!

I met a man in South Africa, who had left Lithuania many years ago because of the pogroms, for a new world, a new continent. His mother was worried about him, maybe he would "*shmad*" or marry out. Who knows what can happen, especially in Africa? So she said to him: "Listen my son, I shall give you a Gemara Brachot, and promise me on oath that every morning before you go to work, you will open the Gemara and close it." He replied: "Mother, what is the point of just opening it?" She then said: "You must promise me." He promised.

He kept his promise and opened the Gemara each morning. One day there caught his eye the list of *mefarshim* printed on the front page and he became interested. Who were these people? The Rosh and the Maharsha and so on? Where did they come from, in what century did they live? It caught his interest and he went to his Rav and started enquiries, and I have been to his library—it took fifty years to collect—and gradually, gradually he became acquainted with those people and now he is a great *Talmid Chacham* — just because he promised his mother to open the Gemara!

What a wonderful idea it is to encourage and insist that people should have a library. Let children see, not only television, not only the nonsense and the filth in the magazines—let there rather be *sifrei kodesh* and let our children be inquisitive, ask what it is all about. Gradually, this is the way Judaism grows and develops, this is the way it ferments. The Lubavitch movement has its own publishing house—*Karnei Hod Torah*—a world-wide concern. In Kfar Chabad in Eretz Yisrael, a Rabbi Ashkenazai is devoting his time to the sources of the Rav's *Shulchan Aruch*. Indeed, a whole literature is growing up about the Rav's *Shulchan Aruch*. Some of it looks strange to me, and I questioned the Rebbe on a number of interesting points. The Sefarim campaign is for me the greatest thing that Lubavitch have done.

**"What a wonderful idea it is to encourage and insist that people should have a library ... the Sefarim campaign is for me the greatest thing that Lubavitch have done."**

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## Issues Facing Israel

The Rebbe is very concerned about Eretz Yisrael and the important issues that face it. Unfortunately, we are subject to influence by the press. The influence of the press is so great and so strong and so lasting that I myself experienced it when I was in Warsaw. I read an antisemitic paper for three weeks, and I almost became an antisemite. Three weeks reading a paper, the influence creeps in. You don't notice how it gradually grips you, and although you laugh at it the first time, it leaves a lasting effect, it is quite amazing.

I remember when I was at the Kamnitzer Yeshivah for a short time, someone bought the daily Yiddish paper and Reb Boruch Ber, the Rosh Yeshiva, did not want to touch it. We did not understand it then, but now we know what the wrong influence does. And, G-d forbid, if it comes into a Jewish home and children read it and we don't control the reading material of our children, it is absolute poison, and eventually you see that intermarriage and all the "*tzores*" of Klal Yisrael can be set down to the press, to the lack of control of reading material which is allowed our children.

I could hear the pain in his heart when the Rebbe spoke of the *matzev* in Eretz Yisrael, particularly that there could even be the suggestion of discussion in Parliament about the liberalisation of the laws of abortion. "Terrible" is not the word, for an Orthodox Jew to talk of liberalisation of the laws of abortion. It is a terrible thing to think that in the 28 years since the State of Israel was established, a million Jewish children have been murdered. At a time when to bring one immigrant to Israel costs \$10,000, there could now be another million Jewish boys and girls in Israel. Instead of spending millions to foster *aliyah*, with big offices and expense accounts to bring 200 or 300 Jews from Mexico or America or Brazil, there could have been another million Jews there. And then to talk about the liberalisation of abortion! It hurts him and that is why they don't like him. There are even in England people who don't like the Lubavitch movement, because they don't realise that the Lubavitch are the real guardians of Torah and Yirat Shamayim and the future of Jewry—and I speak in all honesty.

**"Lubavitch are the real guardians of Torah and Yirat Shamayim and the future of Jewry—and I speak in all honesty."**

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I am at an age when I have no ambition, and want no *kavod*. But I am also at an age when I must be honest and sincere, and I say it is wrong to vilify the Lubavitch movement.

## Concern for Every Detail

In conclusion, I should like to thank those who enabled me to visit the Rebbe. He talked to me for more than an hour and told me things about Anglo-Jewry, and I can tell you that he knows more of it than I do. He told me how many *chadarim* there are and how many teachers, what type of teachers. And he knows what is going on in Wales and Scotland, in the Federation of Synagogues and in Jews' College. It is amazing how a man who is steeped in Torah day and night should have the time and interest to bother himself with Swansea and Cardiff!

And therefore, I say to you, my dear friends of the Lubavitch movement, how lucky you are and how I envy you. There is a saying, "Chassidim think they have a Rebbe, and Mitnagdim think they don't need a Rebbe." I won't make a comment on the first part, but I will comment on the last—I can assure you we need a Rebbe.

**"It is amazing how a man who is steeped in Torah day and night should have the time and interest to bother himself with Swansea and Cardiff!"**

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## FOOTNOTES

1. For biographical details see, "Fisher, Michael," in William D. Rubinstein, Michael Jolles, Hilary L. Rubinstein (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 282. See also Dayan Fisher's preface to his commentary to Avot, *Atereth Mordechai* (London, 1953). For examples of his rabbinic scholarly writings see the journal of the Conference of European Rabbis, *Sridim: Bitton Rabbonei Europa*, issues 1, 2 and 4. He also authored a treatise titled *Kuntras Yikara Deshichba* (London, 1957), on the proper treatment of the dead and their burial according to Jewish law.
2. See Dayan Berel Berkovitz, "Hagaon Dayan Michael Fisher zt"l," in *Hamaor: Journal of the Federation of Synagogues*, Pesach 5764 2004, Vol. 39. No. 1 - March: 12-13.
3. On the Rebbe's treatment of Rashi's commentary to the Torah see Eric Lawee, *Rashi's Commentary on the Torah: Canonization and Resistance in the Reception of a Jewish Classic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 271-272; Chaim Rapoport, "[The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Super-Commentary on Rashi.](#)" See also the relevant section in Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, "[The Contributions of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Torah Scholarship.](#)" *Jewish Action*, Summer 2014.

4. Rabbi Michael Seligson, personal email to this writer, Jan 14, 2020. These details were also confirmed to me by Rabbi Chaim Gurevitch, who was also present at the time. See also the diary of Mr. Zalmon Jaffe of Manchester, who was also visiting the Rebbe's court during this period, and recorded some of Dayan Fisher's impressions as related to him in person at the time.

Rabbi Yosef Katzman likewise recalls that the Dayan began his public talk on the day following Shavuot with the following "thundering" preface (the transcription reflects the Litvisher pronunciation of the "sh" sound as "s"):

רבותי, איך האב ניט קיין איין טראפן חסידיסע בלוט אין מיינע אדערן, איך בין א ליטוואק ביזן גר"א, רבותי, איך זיך ביים פארברענגען ערב סבועס און אין צוויי סא ווארפט זיך דורך האלב סאס, און איר סלאפט? ווי קען מען סלאפן ווען מען הערט האלב סאס אין צוויי סא? רבותי איך רעד דא פאסעט וועגן האלב סאס.

"Gentlemen! I don't have a drop of Chassidic blood in my veins, I'm a Litvak all the way back to the Vilna Gaon. Gentleman! I sit at the farbrengen on the evening before Shavuot and within two hours half the Talmud (*"shas"*) has been cited, and you are sleeping? How can you sleep when you hear half the Talmud in two hours? Gentlemen, I'm literally talking about half of *shas* ..."

Rabbi Katzman also recalled that during the Rebbe's talk on the evening before Shavuot, the dayan's excitement was very apparent; he was "literally jumping around in his seat" and "also kept poking his neighbor who was falling asleep." For further testimony and some additional details see the weekly *Hitkashrut*, issue #45, pages 13-14.

5. See *Igrot kodesh* Vol. 32, pages 290-292. It is also noteworthy that Dayan Fisher subsequently contributed scholarly essays to two volumes of Torah novela published in the Rebbe's honor. See Rabbi Michael Fisher, "*Bedin lo maalin velo moridin beroei behemah dakah,*" *Kovetz Maadanei Melech* (London: Lubavitch Foundation, 1982) 90-94; idem, "*Bedin ayn aseh docheh lo saseh ve'aseh,*" in *Kovetz Chayolei Hamelech* (London: Yeshivah Gedolah Lubavitch, 1988) 105-117.

## By Rabbi Michael Fisher

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Rabbi Michael Fisher was the Chief Rabbi and Judge of Britain's Federation of Synagogues, until his passing in 2004.

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