



The Mussar Revolution: Novardok and Kelm Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Rav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, who later became known as the Alter of Novahrdok, was a prime disciple of Rav Yisrael Salanter. As a young brilliant student, he became engaged to a wealthy girl. During the engagement, his future father-in-law passed away leaving his family bereft and penniless. People encouraged him to break the match but he stood firm and married the girl. To support his new wife, her widowed mother, and her orphaned siblings, he became a cloth merchant. He would smuggle cloth from Russia to Prussia. Close to the border, one day, he met Rav Yisrael and his disciple Rav Itzele Blazer. They told him he could be learning more Torah. Rav Yosef Yoizel answered, "But with what will I live?" They replied, "With what will you die?" These words pierced his heart and he abruptly left his business and went to study

with Rabbi Yisrael.

In the first two years of the Alter's founding of Novhardok, he started nine *yeshivot*. The network soon spread to 85 *yeshivot*. In each yeshiva he built a *beit hisbodedut*, a room where students could sit alone, study *mussar*, and introspect. The Alter wrote the *sefer Madregat Ha'adam* which would be used as a text for all Novahrdok *yeshivot*. In Novahrdok, the motto was *shiflut h'adam*, the lowliness of man. In addition, the Alter stressed three things: Meticulous observance of the Torah and *mitzvot*, *bitachon*, and *shevirat hamidot v'haratzon*, breaking one's evil traits and desires. The students of Novahrdok would employ rigorous exercises to accomplish this. They would renounce ownership of their possessions, roll in the snow, and subject

themselves to ridicule until they attained a hard outer resilient skin. This would serve them well in the face of the Bolsheviks and their campaign to destroy religion.

The Alter would sign his letters, *bet-bet*, which stood for *baal bitachon*. And in fact he was a master of trust. He taught that a *baal bitachon* is the happiest man in the world. He never worries and never lacks anything. He relies on Hashem to supply all of his needs and thus has total serenity. Yet many people simply don't have the patience and courage to completely trust in Hashem. If a person doesn't see desired results, his spirits fall, he becomes indifferent and then gives up. The Alter and his students never gave up and although the true *derech* of Novahrdok no longer exists, their message lives on.