

# ❖ חתם סופר ❖ CHASAM SOFER ❖

RABBI MOSHE SOFER

PRESSBURG

1762–1839

One of the most important figures in European Jewry during the early nineteenth century was Rabbi Moshe Sofer. His education was under, among others, Rabbi Nasan Adler of Frankfurt, whom he regarded as his principal teacher. He became known as the Chasam Sofer, from the title of his novellae on Talmud, *Chiddushei Toras Moshe* (חדושי תורת משה).

In 1798, Rabbi Sofer was appointed to head the community of Mattersdorf, Hungary. In 1804, he was appointed rabbi of Pressburg—just east of Vienna—which was then the most important Jewish community in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He founded a yeshiva there which attracted hundreds of students, not only from Hungary itself but also from all over Europe. Many of them went on to be Torah leaders themselves in Hungary and elsewhere.

The Chasam Sofer was also one of the central halachic authorities of his time, to whom questions were addressed from all over Europe. In addition, he stood at the forefront in opposing any assimilationist influences among Jewry which were then being felt especially in lands farther west. He was famous for his statement, “*Chadash* [“new”] is forbidden according to the Torah.”<sup>13</sup>

The enormous number of responsa of the Chasam Sofer—nearly 1,400—were printed volume by volume in Pressburg in the years following his passing.<sup>14</sup> They remain basic halachic works to this day.



*She'eilos u'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah, first edition. Printed by Anton Schmid; Pressburg, 1841. Note the stamp: "Yeshiva Gedolah Beis Chasam Sofer, Saffed [Tzefas], Palestina."*

13. This is a paraphrase of the passage in the Torah that deals with *chadash*, the new crop of grain. The Chasam Sofer used it as a play on words to refer to new and foreign practices to Judaism.

14. First edition of *Yoreh De'ah*, 1841; first edition of *Orach Chaim*, 1855; first edition of *Even HaEzer I*, 1858; first edition of *Even HaEzer II*, 1859; and first edition of *Choshen Mishpat*, 1862.