

Perspectives

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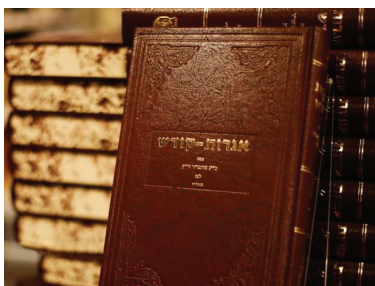
Moving Beyond Our Self

A Farbrengen with Reb Yoel Kahn



Rethinking Education

An essay by the Rebbe



A Year in Correspondence

The Rebbe's Letters 40 Years Ago



The "Right" Side

*Visual Halacha:
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Thermometer or Thermostat?

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Contents



14

Moving Beyond Our Self

A FARBRENGEN
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36

The "Right" Side

VISUAL HALACHA:
MEZUZAH PLACEMENT
Rabbi Shimon Hellinger



46

Rebbetzin Yebudis Heller a"b



60

Rethinking Education

An Essay by the Rebbe

10 THE MIND OF A CHILD
The Rebbe's Perspective

72 WHAT ARE WE
TEACHING THEM?
Di Yiddishe Heim

76 A YEAR IN CORRESPONDENCE
The Rebbe's Letters 40 Years Ago

88 GET REAL!
Rabbi Avraham Katz

112 BEHIND THE PICTURE
Batsheva Gordon

114 MY PERSPECTIVE
Readers write



68

THERMOMETER OR THERMOSTAT?
Rabbi Sholom Ber Avtzon



94

MY JOURNEY TO THE
YESHIVAH IN LUBAVITCH
Memoirs of Reb Shmaryobu Sassonkin



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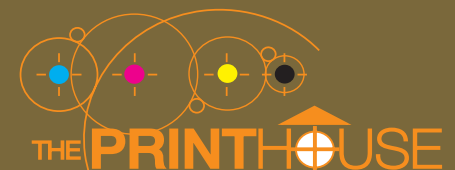
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Moving Beyond — Our Self —

A FARBRENGEN WITH REB YOEL KAHN

PREPARED BY RABBI YEHUDA LEIB ALTEIN

Adapted from "BeDarkei HaChassidus" - thoughts and stories heard from Reb Yoel Kahn



One of the foundations of *avodas Hashem* is the concept of *bittul*. Chassidus explains that *ein od milvado* doesn't merely mean that there is no G-d other than Hashem; it means that there is no other *existence*. Our *avodah* is to understand and feel how everything is *bottel* and insignificant in comparison to Him. As the Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya that in order to be a vessel for Hashem's presence a person must be *bottel* to Him. To quote the Tzemach Tzedek¹, a Yid should not say *ani* or "I"; instead, his task is to transform the *ani* into *ayin* (אני - אין).

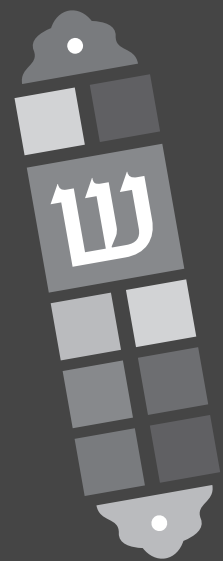
THE KELIPAH OF HONOR

Chassidus² explains that the passion for honor is worse than all other passions. This *taivah* is in direct opposition to what *kedushah* represents—*bittul* and selflessness.

To make it worse, this *taivah* encompasses one's entire existence (or to use the terminology of Chassidus, it comes from the level of *makif of kelipah*). If a person has a passion, say, for eating tasty food, you can still talk to him about spiritual concepts. It's just that as soon as he sees an appetizing food, his passion is aroused and he loses interest in those loftier ideals. But when a person is obsessed with honor, he is constantly focused on his self-image and cannot submit to anything higher than himself.

It is important to avoid this *kelipah* at all costs, as it can prevent Chassidus from having any effect on a person.

The “Right” Side



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LAWS OF MEZUZAH PLACEMENT

RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

Most observant Jews today are familiar with the importance of verifying the *kasbrus* of *mezuzos*. The multitude of details required to make a *mezuzah* kosher, and the host of issues that can invalidate them, compel the responsible consumer to research the authenticity of a *mezuzah* before buying it.

Even after ascertaining its legitimacy, he will ensure its ongoing *kasbrus* by checking

it regularly. Some conscientious people go so far as checking their *mezuzos* every year, particularly in preparation for the new year.¹

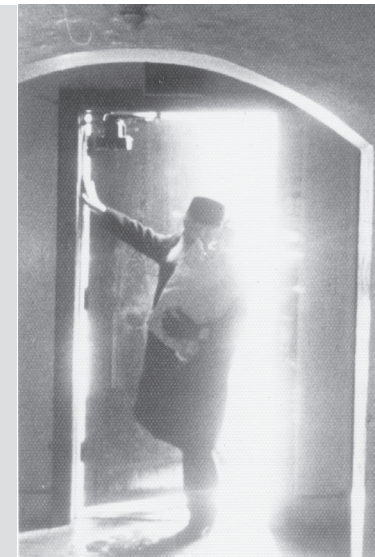
Yet, surprisingly, an essential aspect of the *mezuzah's kasbrus* has not merited the same level of attention: the *mezuzah's* placement.

1. *Mateh Efrayim*, §581. The Rebbe asked that this worthy custom be publicized – *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 2, p. 610.

OUR PROTECTORS

The Rebbe would often quote the words of the *Tur* (*Yoreh Deah* 285), “Whoever is careful with the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* will see the lengthening of his days and the days of his children. Moreover, his home will be protected.” The Rebbe would also add that not only does the *mezuzah* protect us while we are at home, but wherever we are.

Although we are generally discouraged from performing *mitzvos* for personal benefit, the protection of the *mezuzah* is not a *segulah*, but an inherent part of the *mitzvah*, (see *Likutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, *Parshas Eikev* 5).



Of course, even the most *mehudar mezuzah* only equals a *mitzvah* when it is placed on the doorpost. *Halacha* specifies in great detail exactly where on the doorpost it must be placed for every kind of doorway. If a *mezuzah* is placed incorrectly, *halacha* says it is as if the *mezuzah* wasn't placed at all.²

The problem of misplaced *mezuzos* is not a new one. Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim, the “Aderes,” (1843-1905) records in one letter, “In most of the homes that I have visited, I found some error in placement of *mezuzos*.”³ With the decline in rabbinic home visits and the rise of innovative architecture (the two are not necessarily correlated), the problem has only increased.

[It should be noted that the obligation of *mezuzah* applies equally to all doors in a home (provided that they meet all the

requirements for a *mezuzah*). In *halacha*, every room is called a “*bayis*,” and has its own independent obligation.

Rabbonim throughout the generations have decried the long-held myth that only the front door of a home is obligated.⁴ [Most likely, it originated from a time when the majority of average homes were “studio” huts. As homes grew larger, people continued their “tradition” of affixing a *mezuzah* on the front door only.]

In this article we will review some of the underlying principles and common errors of *kvias mezuzah*.

4. Ignorance of this matter was so widespread that the Maharil (c. 1365-1427) was asked whether it was considered arrogant (*mehzei keyuhara*) to place *mezuzos* on every door in a home, since most people only placed only one *mezuzah* on the front door. In his reply he tries to find reasoning for the prevalent custom based on outlying opinions in *halacha*, but concludes that these explanations are not valid and these people are missing out on both Torah and rabbinic obligations.

2. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deiah*, 289:2.

3. *Nefesh Dovid* §16.

Am I a Giver

Or a Taker?

REBBETZIN YEHUDIS HELLER A”H

Adapted from a lecture

Everything people do can be divided into two categories: giving and taking. Every social interaction has a giver and a taker, or, in the words of Chassidus, a *mashpia* and *mekabel*.

It seems that giving is the ideal, to be *mashpia*, a “giver” and not a “receiver.” A provider, not a dependent; whether money, care, or time.

Better yet, when a person does an act of giving, aside from fulfilling a *mitzvah*, the person becomes more like Hashem.

In fact, the word *Mitzvah* too connotes a connection (*tzavva*) with Hashem that comes as result of Hashem performing all the *mitzvos* Himself. When we then perform *mitzvos*, we are following Him and being like Him.

Doing acts of kindness particularly resembles Hashem, Who gives life and sustenance. Actually, all Hashem does is give. He has no need to receive from anyone. Our giving mimics Hashem and makes us more G-d-like.

GIVE TO WHO?

Every giving action, must be met with an act of receiving. A *mashpia* necessitates someone else who will be *mekabel*.

Our math might mean that at any given moment a giver becomes closer to Hashem, since Hashem only gives, and at the same time, the recipient becomes further from Hashem. However, such a social structure seems absurd. It is as if there are limited seats in the audience, and to get closer to Hashem requires someone else to move back, with nothing less than behaving oppositely of Hashem?

WHEN GIVING IS TAKING

Let’s start from the beginning: What is a ‘giver’?

Take a wealthy person giving *tzedaka* to a pauper. He is giving, right? On a deeper level, the receiver is giving far more. The wealthy man gives *gashmius*, food for this world; the poor man gives eternal wealth, in the World to Come.

Consider also, that giving tremendous amounts to *tzedaka*, might not be “giving” at all, if the giving is, say, motivated by

public recognition, having a name on a building, getting a picture in a newspaper, or being honored at a dinner. It is possible for a person to donate millions to a worthy cause, and yet his underlying thought is what *he* will get out of it. In this case, he is “taking” more than he is “giving.”

This, of course, does not take away from his *mitzvah* of giving *tzedaka*. The question though is, how much of that giving action is actually “giving,” and how much is “taking”?

The same can be true when a person is *mashpia* in *ruchnius*. Giving somebody the chance to better embrace Torah and mitzvos is giving, right? Well, again, the underlying motivation may still be to receive, be it satisfaction or honor. Here too, it doesn’t take away from the importance and value of what he has done. The point is that it’s quite possible that an action may appear one way on the surface, and be completely different deep down.

WHEN TAKING IS GIVING

And it works the other way too. While on the receiving end, someone can actually be “giving”.

It is possible for a person to donate millions to a worthy cause, and yet his underlying thought is what *he* will get out of it. In this case, he is “taking” more than he is “giving.”

ARE YOU A THERMOMETER OR A THERMOSTAT?

RABBI SHOLOM BER AVTZON

When I first heard that question, “Are you a thermometer or thermostat?” I looked up in surprise. What is the message that Rabbi Shmuel Lew is trying to impart at the *farbrengen*? But when he began explaining it, it all made sense.

A thermometer measures the temperature and informs us how hot or cold it is, while a thermostat sets and makes the temperature in the room according to its setting. In other words, a thermometer adapts to its surroundings, while a thermostat creates its environment.

Just as a thermostat that is connected to the boiler brings warmth into a cold environment and warms up an entire house or building complex, so too we who are connected to Rebbe have the ability to bring warmth and inspiration to the community in which we live. We can influence them to focus not only on everyday mundane manners, but also on something more spiritual.



Hearing this thought, I was reminded of a story that the Frierdiker Rebbe related about the esteemed chossid Reb Pinchos Reizes:

In the city of Lubavitch lived a wagon driver by the name of Nochum Nochumavitch. One ordinary weekday, Nochum entered the *shul* when Reb Pinchos was in the middle of his *davening*. Listening to Reb Pinchos’ *davening* inspired Reb Nochum that he also had an urge to pour out his heart to Hashem.

The simple wagon driver took out a *siddur* and turned to the *musaf* service of Yom Kippur. He recited the “*Avodab*” with great concentration, he cried emotionally when he recited “*Al Cheit*,” and he fell to the floor for “*Korim*.” Even though he was an unlearned person, at that moment he reached a lofty level.

When Nochum the wagon driver finished his *davening*, he exclaimed, “I can no longer be on the same level as the horse!” He felt that he could not remain on the simple ordinary level of the past. He gave up his job as a wagon driver and found a position as the *shamess* (caretaker) of a *shul*.

The Frierdiker Rebbe concluded this story by quoting the Mittlerer Rebbe, “Even a great Talmudic genius would envy the level this simple Jew attained.”

Reb Pinchos didn’t look around to see how many other Jews were willing to *daven* at length. He knew that was what he was supposed to do. He didn’t do it to impress anyone, because no one was there. He conducted himself that way because that is how a chossid of the Rebbe conducts himself.

And that is being a thermostat. We set the heat at the level we should be, and that itself influences and inspires others.



But we may ask, “How can one person influence his surroundings and not be influenced by them? I am only one and they are so many?”



RABBI SHOLOM BER AVTZON is a veteran teacher in Tomchei Temimim – United Lubavitcher Yeshiva, Ocean Parkway. He has authored numerous books, including the acclaimed *Rebbeim Biography series* and *Early Chassidic Personalities series*, and is a sought-after lecturer and *farbrenger*.



A YEAR IN Correspondence

THEMES IN THE REBBE'S LETTERS OF 5736

BY RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

There is something unique about the Rebbe's letters scarcely found elsewhere in the Rebbe's teachings.

In the *sichos*, and certainly in the *maamorim*, the discussions revolve around universal concepts, all-purpose inspiration. Even the proposed solutions are more general in nature. Reading those sources, brings to mind the image of an extraordinary *tzaddik*, genius of all areas of Torah and Chassidus, leader and visionary. However, pragmatic considerations of personal constraints, limited funding and social norms seem to be ignored, perhaps deliberately so.

Not so in the Rebbe's letters. Predominantly in the Hebrew letters we encounter a pragmatic approach and detailed responses to specific dilemmas. These pointed answers offer a more concrete understanding of the Rebbe's stance on the practical challenges that arise in personal, family, and community life. Besides the limited benefit for one who has that identical question, the collection as a whole paints a picture of the Rebbe's down-to-earth attitude. It seems, that besides being spiritually inspired, a *chossid* must be sensible and pragmatic, well familiar with the outside reality and mindset, and must deliberate the fine points of worldly technicalities.

As the years progressed and the questions posed to the Rebbe multiplied, the Rebbe

It seems, that besides being spiritually inspired, a *chossid* must be sensible and pragmatic, well familiar with the outside reality and mindset, and must deliberate the fine points of worldly technicalities.



began replying to questions with short handwritten notes which were then relayed to the questioners by phone or in person. Oftentimes, the Rebbe would simply underline the appropriate words in the question, and add nothing more. In the later volumes of *Igros Kodesh* these short replies were included as "letters," with footnotes including the question whenever it was accessible.

A few months ago, a new volume of *Igros Kodesh* (Vol. 31) was released which includes the Rebbe's Hebrew letters and handwritten notes of the year 5736 (1975-1976) – 40 years ago – totaling just over 300 letters and responses. Browsing through a year's worth of correspondence offers insight into what occupied the Rebbe during the span of that year, and completes the picture that can be gleaned from the *sichos* the Rebbe spoke publicly that year and diaries of the *bochurim* that have been released in various forums.





My Journey to the Yeshiva in Lubavitch

MEMOIRS OF REB SHMARYOHU SASSONKIN PART 1

Reb Shmaryohu Sassonkin, also known as Reb Shmerel Batumer (in reference to the town of Batumi, Georgia where he served as rov), was the Rov of the Chabad community in Yerushalayim from his arrival in Eretz Yisroel in 5710 (1950) until his passing on 19 Menachem Av 5736 (1976).

In his memoirs titled “Zichornosai”, he records in descriptive style his youth, the Tomchei Temimim yeshivah in Lubavitch, his rabbonus in Batumi and the state of Georgian Jewry, and his challenges of living Jewishly in communist Russia.

The following chapter includes his travels and travails, the various yeshivos he attended (including that of Reb Elchonon Vasserman hy”d), and his decision to study in Lubavitch.

MY HOMETOWN

I was born to my parents, Avrohom and Rivkah Sassonkin of blessed memory, in the small town of Prepoisk, in Mohilev, White Russia. The town stood at a junction, from one direction the road led to Tzerkov and from there to Krimchev and Amchislav. (The latter is mentioned in the Responsa of the Alter Rebbe, and I too feel a personal attachment to that town, for I studied there for two years.) In the other direction the road led directly to the city of Homel. This city is famous amongst Chabad Chasidim, for the great scholar and Chossid, Rabbi Yitzchok Aizik Epstein, known amongst Chabad Chassidim as Reb Aizil Homiler, served as the rov and headed the Beis Din there.

To the east of the town flows the River Sohz, which continues on to Homel and

runs into the great river, “the Dnieper”. In those days, communication with the outside world and especially with a city so far away as Homel was conducted by way of steam-boats. In this district they had not yet developed buses or locomotive-trains, and the primitive forms of ground transportation were only used if there was some pressing need.

My father was a student of the Babroisk yeshiva which was headed by the Rebbe of Babroisk, R. Shmaryahu Noach Shneersohn [a descendent of the Tzemach Tzedek]. My mother was the daughter of R. Chaim Sheinin, known as R. Chaim Rabinoker.



R. Shmaryahu Noach Shneersohn of Babroisk.

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