

EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF TRADITION

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

THE PHILOSOPHER, THE WRITER AND THE CHASIDIC STORY

Mrs. Tzivia Emmer

WHO COMES FIRST?

Rabbi Binyomin Cohen



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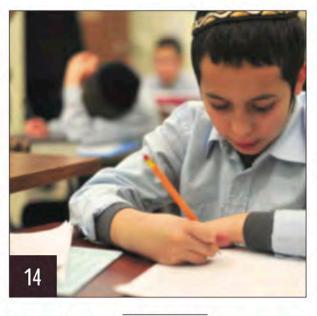
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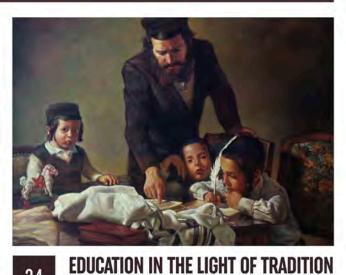


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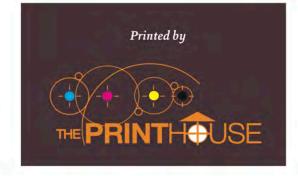
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FOREWORD

How Many Problems Do You Have?



TO ILLUSTRATE THE DIFFERENCE between Chassidus and Mussar in overriding the yetzer hara, R. Groinem, the illustrious mashpia of Lubavitch, told this parable:

A man once met his friend who looked worried.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm drowning in troubles," the poor fellow replied. "I have a daughter who is of marriageable age, and I have no way to marry her off. Firstly, I must arrange a dowry. Secondly, there's the cost of the wedding. Thirdly, I must provide gifts for the chosson and kalla. And finally, I have to pay for the band and other services."

"How much will all of that cost you?" his friend queried.

"Three hundred silver rubles," he replied.

"In that case, you have only one problem – how to get three hundred silver rubles!"

R. Groinem explained that Mussar focuses on eliminating each of the undesirable character traits with which a person is born – greed, jealousy, anger and so on – while Chassidus consolidates the problems into a single challenge: how to rise above the yetzer hara.

Instead of remedying specific issues, the Rebbe declared that moral and social ills can be remedied all-inclusively by an awareness of the Superior Being.

WHENEVER WE FACE a social or educational obstacle, our natural response is to seek a specific solution for that problem: make new



rules, step up supervision, establish a reward and penalty system, etc. If we probe deeper, we will come up with the sociological or organizational flaws that led to the problem.

In the campaign for a "Moment of Silence," the Rebbe challenged this attitude. Instead of remedying specific issues, the Rebbe declared that moral and social ills can be remedied all-inclusively by an awareness of the Superior Being.

Such an approach is advantageous on two accounts. Firstly, it is more effective: Instead of picking up the pieces after the fact, we avoid the problem from the get-go. Secondly, when problems do arise, they are addressed at the core instead of resolving them with mere patch-ups (leaving the possibility of the problems resurfacing in various forms). Yet, many people rejected the Rebbe's approach as simplistic and naïve, contending that the complexities involved in crime were being overlooked. Indeed, to confidently believe that humanity at large has an inner goodness entails a unique ability to see beyond harsh exteriors.

But there's another reason for society's dismissal of the Rebbe's precept.

Solving problems and restructuring systems doesn't demand that we change who we are. It's easier to change multiple issues than to relinquish our autonomous self. "Moment of Silence" demands that we, the educators, let go of our mindset and perception and submit to a Higher Authority.

The "Moment of Silence" education model is equally relevant to our own youth. By imbuing our children with an awareness that Hashem is closely involved in our lives, they could avoid many internal struggles. Instead of developing elaborate systems to track grades and behavior, we could give our children the motivation to rise higher and connect to Hashem through learning His Torah and doing His *mitzvos*.

Instead of developing elaborate systems to track grades and behavior, we could give our children the motivation to rise higher and connect to Hashem.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

 $General\,Editor$

TOTALLY TORAH

Sicha of Yud Shevat 5737 (1977)

Likutei Sichos vol. 16, p. 145

In the old-time cheder, it was unheard of for schoolboys to study any form of secular subjects. Yet, when the cheder migrated to the US and other western countries, it became commonplace, due to local regulations and other reasons.

Is it possible today to maintain the same educational standards as in the past? Are we required by Torah to follow local regulations on how to educate our children? How can we live up to such a lofty lifestyle?

NO NEED FOR SELF-SACRIFICE

Nowadays, everything must be spelled out in simple terms...

As a result of government regulations, we have come to a most shocking situation, in which children don't pass a school day without studying secular subjects. This isn't only limited to five-year-old children who study *Chumash*, but even for older children who have reached "age ten for *Mishna*," "age thirteen for *mitzvos*" and "age fifteen for *Gemara*."

We must take a lesson from the Frierdiker Rebbe in this matter.

The Frierdiker Rebbe worked with actual *mesiras nefesh*, risking his life as well as those of his delegates, to establish *chadorim* for Jewish children to study Torah "al taharas hakodesh," in its purest and holiest form, and to ensure that the methods of education were not *chas veshalom* altered from the traditional way they had been throughout the generations.

Certainly in our day, where Jewish education doesn't require self-sacrifice, we ought to invest the greatest efforts to assure that Jewish children receive an education which is totally "al taharas hakodesh," without any secular studies.

TORAH LAW IS FIRST

Those who find it difficult to withstand the challenge must be aware of the truth, that one can get by with teaching the bare minimum to meet local requirements, and with the least amount of importance.

Considering the fact that G-d-fearing men and women head the Jewish schools, there seems to be no need for the emphasis on secular studies which currently exists in many schools. The faculty need only be encouraged and reminded that they don't have to be so exact in fulfilling the state law, but should instead focus on Hashem's commandments, Whose decrees have been in order long before the laws of the country were instituted.

The Frierdiker Rebbe risked his life and he life of his delegates to ensure that the methods of education were not chas veshalom altered from the traditional way they had been throughout the generations.



True, according to halacha, "the law of the land is the law"; however, in matters of Yiddishkeit no one can dictate guidelines aside from Torah itself. Even those who can't withstand the challenge to teach only Torah subjects should realize that within the framework of the secular law one must seek to influence the students towards spending more time, and needless to say, more attention on Torah studies. Only that which is indisputably required by law may be granted for secular studies.

(This is aside from the fact that secular studies should not take place at the beginning of the day. As the Torah's instructs, "from the beginning of your dough you should lift up a tithe to *Hashem*," which in education refers to raising up the child to Hashem through the study of Torah at the onset of the day. It is not against the law that the beginning of the day should be utilized for Torah study, and then later on, when the child is tired and we have no other choice, we apportion a short amount of time for secular studies.)

In our day, where Jewish education doesn't require self-sacrifice, we certainly ought to invest the greatest efforts to assure that Jewish children receive an education which is totally "al taharas hakodesh."



BELIEVE AND SUCCEED

Hashem tells us, "I only demand according to a person's capacity." It is therefore certain that with the slightest effort, but with appropriate attention, we can immediately succeed in decreasing the time that Jewish children spend learning secular studies, and dramatically increase, both in quantity and in quality, their study of Torah subjects.

In order to be successful at implementing this, we need only resolve with absolute conviction that this is

a "must," being an explicit *halacha* in *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, and then we can be certain that our efforts will be crowned with success.

Just as the Frierdiker Rebbe succeeded in promoting *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* in a circumstance which seemed impossible, so too, those who follow in his footsteps to strengthen *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* will surely succeed in raising "the army of Hashem" who will soon go toward the *geulah*.

IN SUMMARY:

- Like the Frierdiker Rebbe, we must invest tremendous effort for our children to be educated in the traditional style and without any secular influences.
- If secular studies are unavoidable, they should be kept at a minimum and delayed until the end of the day. They should be presented in such a way that students won't render them prominence or prestige.
- When we truly believe that children must study only Torah, we will succeed in providing them with this education, and pave the way for the geulah.

- WHAT'S

JEWISH

ABOUT

JEWISH EDUCATION?

RABBI AHARON DOVID GANCZ

As parents and teachers, we invest so much energy and expense into the chinuch of our children and students, even mesiras nefesh. We are on the lookout for ways to improve our parenting and teaching techniques, and impact the children for the better. In the spirit of אין מזרזין אלא למזורזים, I would like to draw attention to a particular area in this article.

THE BASIS OF OUR VALUES

When we think about Torah and *Yiddishkeit*, we immediately think of evidently Jewish activities: *davening*, learning Torah and various *mitzvos*. Jewish education is to teach children about *parsha*, *yomim tovim* and everyday obligations. General life skills, however, are neutral and are not particular to one religion or another.

The Bartenura explains why Pirkei Avos specifically begins with the transmission of the Torah beginning with Har Sinai. Its subject matter, primarily ethics, might superficially seem similar to other moral codes which are the product of man. The Mishna emphasizes that these ethics trace back to Har Sinai just like the rest of the Torah.

The Rebbe points out (17 *Tammuz* 5738, §32) that everything we do must be sourced in Torah, notwithstanding its own merits. This is illustrated by the fact that the Gemara (Chullin 139b) finds it necessary to demonstrate sources in the Torah, not only for Haman, but even for Mordechai and Moshe Rabbeinu!

Even if it were true that exactly the same concept is taught in secular sources, it wouldn't be respectful to put the Torah aside and learn from those sources. As *halacha* states that one isn't allowed to settle a monetary dispute in secular court, even in a case when their laws are the same as those of the Torah.

We are taught that the Torah's wisdom surpasses the wisdom of the nations and that they will be astounded by it (Devorim 4:6). We must display our grasp of the Torah's wisdom by deucing our life teachings from the Torah.

LIVING IN FOREIGN SURROUNDINGS

There is a common expression, "vi es 'goyisht' zich, azoi 'yiddisht' zich," meaning that throughout history Jews were very much affected by the surrounding non-Jewish world, and inadvertently absorbed some of their values to a degree. No group or community is immune to this malady.

Given its nature of osmosis – which subtly seeps into our consciousness – and the difficulty in avoiding it,



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Of course, not every practice of non-Jews is "not-Jewish," and there are many foods and ornaments that we graciously adopted from surrounding cultures.



Moshe Rabbeinu repeatedly cautioned Bnei Yisroel when they entered Eretz Yisroel not to follow the practices of the nations who lived in the land at the time. He reminds the Yidden that they are a special nation chosen by Hashem to be unique.1

Each time we enter a new culture, we face the risk of being influenced by its ideals. Consciously or subconsciously, we think איכה יעבדו הגוים ההם ... ואעשה כן גם אני – "how do those nations serve ... and I will do the same." When we entered Canaan it was idol worship in its literal form, and in the other cultures was another "avoda zara," a foreign form of service (as explained in Chassidus).

The Torah tells us, הן עם לבדוד ישכון ובגוים לא יתחשב – "It is a nation that dwells alone, and is not reckoned among the nations." The requirement to remain apart from the other nations is so significant that we were commanded not even to admire their qualities (לא תחנם הנכרי זה נכרי זה -), so that we are not attracted to them.

CULTURE CLASH

Truth be said, it is difficult to discern what exactly is considered foreign. Of course, not every practice of non-Jews is "not-Jewish," and there are many foods and ornaments that we graciously adopted from sur-

1 "ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם ... פן תשחיתון ועשיתם לכם פסל ... והשתחוית להם ועבדתם אשר חלק ה' אלקיך אתם לכל העמים ... ואתכם לקח ה' ... להיות לו לעם נחלה כיום הזה" (דברים ד, טו-כ). "והי' כי יביאך ה' אלקיך אל הארץ ... השמר לך פן תשכח ... לא תלכון אחרי ... מאלהי העמים אשר סביבותיכם ... לא תכרת להם ברית

ולא תחנם", רש"י – לא תתן להם חן, אסור לומר כמה נאה נכרי זה (דברים ו, י – ז,ב). "כי יסיר את בנך מאחרי ... כי עם קדש לה' אלקיך בך בחר ה' אלקיך להיות לו לעם סגולה מכל העמים אשר על פני האדמה" (דברים ז, ד-ו).

rounding cultures. This leaves room for an argument that the laws are vague and that there are no defined guidelines about which societal practices are shunned.

An important distinction must be drawn between material substance – such as décor and food – and moral values. A style of décor which doesn't contain a pagan symbol or heretical message can often be adopted. Even cultural content, like music, can sometimes be extracted from its original setting and be integrated into Jewish culture. However, a value, motivation or perspective, which is the essence of our lifestyle and faith, must come from the Torah alone.

It is crucial that we recognize this broad rule:

Secular thinking does not tolerate Torah values, and surely not the nobler ideals and finer traits revealed in Chassidus.

It's not happenstance when Torah and secular values diverge, as they are based on inherently different ideals. Whenever they do seem to match, we need to probe and discover the fundamental difference.

To illustrate, here are some fundamental Torah values that are completely foreign to the secular mindset:

- Constant awareness of Hashem's presence (שויתי הוי').
- *Bitachon* and *hashgacha pratis* Trust in Hashem's assistance and not in our own strengths and talents.
- *Bittul* and true humility in recognizing that one's entire existence is from Hashem.
- Joy and satisfaction from serving and connecting to Hashem and not from material pleasures (ואלקים לי טוב אלקים לי טוב).
- Self-abnegation and simple materialism to facilitate avodas Hashem. Chassidus highlights the

value of *iskafya* in cracking the *klipa* and revealing the *neshama*.

HOW TO LEARN

To elucidate this idea, let us elaborate on one example.

In normal logic, the way to succeed in study and retention of knowledge is to study well. More hours and better study methods will produce a superior grasp of the material. This seems equally applicable to science, mathematics or Torah. However, when we look in Torah to see how to succeed at Torah knowledge, we come up with a very different course.

The Alter Rebbe in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (4:9) quotes numerous statements of Chazal that to succeed in Torah study one must curb his pursuit of pleasures.² Similarly, we are taught that only one who is sincerely humble is a vessel to receive the Torah.³ In the sciences, if one has the time and wherewithal, one can indulge in pleasures and pride, and still excel in scientific knowledge.

The study of Torah – though it shares the act of "studying" with secular subjects – is a G-dly activity and is set by G-dly laws. And the same is true of other Jewish activities which have a counterpart in the broader world. Though the external acts may be similar, they are defined by a different set of rules.

MODERN "CULTURE"

The Jewish disdain of secular ideals is especially true of the modern day secular culture which has produced the contemporary decadent society. Practices which were once considered averse by all normal people have

Proponents of secular educational theories argue that society has now changed, and there is therefore a need for new methods.

^{3 &}quot;אם משים אדם עצמו כמדבר זה שהכל דשין בו תלמודו מתקיים בידו ואם לאו אין תלמודו מתקיים בידו" – עירובין נד ע"א; "ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה, פתח לבי בתורתך" – שמו"ע, לקו"ת במדבר טו,ג; ועוד.

^{2 &}quot;אין התורה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה" – שבת פג ע"ב, שו"ע אדמו"ר הזקן הל' תלמוד תורה פ"ד ה"ט; "תורה שלמדתי באף היא שעמדה לי" – קהלת רבה הזקן הל' תלמוד תורה פ"ד ה"ט; "תורה שלמדתי באף היא שעמדה מתפלל שתהא פ"ב, ט, שוע"ר שם; "פת במלח תאכל" - אבות פ"ו מ"ד; "עד שאתה מתפלל שתהא תורה תיכנס בגופך תתפלל שלא תהא מעדנים יכנסו בגופך" – תוס' כתובות דף קד ד"ה לא נהניתי, ועוד.



Imagine a teacher facing a spoiled child, who throws a tantrum at any disciplinary action taken against him.

now become condoned and even encouraged. It is naïve to think that this decay sprung up without an educational base.

(It should be superfluous to note that values do not function in a vacuum, and they cannot be mixed and matched to form a patchwork ideology. Ideals and traits in a value system form an organic unit. It is therefore foolish to believe that one can choose the "positive elements" of secular thought and combine them with Torah values. Every ethic in a given system is a product of that system's core values, and they transmit, visibly or surreptitiously, the values of the system from which they originated.

There are indeed specific technical functions which aren't directly related to education - such as classroom organization or time management- which can be learned from secular sources. However, extracting them from their original setting and separating the technical function from its cultural trappings, requires a person who is totally free of any secular leanings.)

THE REBBE'S STANCE

It is ironic that our Rebbe, who possessed more knowledge in science than any other Rebbe or community leader, was the least moved by it.

To illustrate: In most *chareidi* communities, it is accepted to teach astronomy as it is taught by modern science. The Rebbe was from the few who held strong to the old beliefs and wasn't fazed by the scientific evidence.

Another example: In the early years of established Yiddishkeit in the US, virtually every frum school incorporated limudei chol to some degree. The Rebbe, however, insisted that children should not study anything unholy during their formative years.

If the Rebbe was so opposed to studying secular information or astronomical specifics, how much more did he oppose secular ethics or morals - "goyishkeit" as the Rebbe would call it - the basis of our lifestyle and conduct. Using secular educational theories or methodologies which influence their entire method of instruction, are at odds with the Rebbe's standard of chinuch.

(In the same vein, the Rebbe encouraged the use of secular media to further Yiddishkeit before it became accepted, yet he campaigned strongly against secular teachings. Utilizing everything in Hashem's creation to serve Him doesn't contradict rejection of secular ideals. - See "Unique Chinuch" by this writer in Perspectives 12.)

Our Rebbeim stood their ground against the Enlightenment, and didn't allow them to infiltrate us with foreign values. Naturally, it's easier to appreciate this in retrospect than to recognize the issues as they appear in modern culture. Secular ideals creep into

our lifestyle so subtly that we even mistaken them for Chassidic philosophies.

THE ROOT OF CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

Proponents of secular educational theories argue that society has now changed, and there is therefore a need for new methods. What it is often overlooked is, that it is these very secular ideas that have brought the *frum* community many of the widespread problems that are affecting our circles today.

In the last twenty-five years, our educational approach has turned liberal. Having expectations of a child or instructing them what to do is considered overbearing. The new approach requires offering a child suggestions or choices, and to abstain from telling a child off. We are told that if we follow this system, our children will grow into happy, healthy adults.

What are the results? Children today are less compliant, and countless children are leaving the path of *Yid-dishkeit* even without any major impetus.

Of course there were indeed troubling realities in previous generations too. There were children with learning disabilities, children from broken homes, and teachers who disciplined forcefully. Yet, by and large, children remained faithful to their holy values and to their parents. Those who did not were the exception rather than the rule.

Today's disregard for parents was not existent. Naturally, children weren't always happy with their parents' decisions, but as they had not yet been 'liberalized,' they didn't think of drifting away just because some demand wasn't met.

The contemporary belief that good learning skills will keep children from going off the *derech* has some merit. There is no question that learning difficulties must be addressed, and the danger that lack of learning brings with it nowadays cannot be overlooked. However, it is primarily the secularization of today's society that causes the unsuccessful child to leave everything behind.

Continuing the liberal path that has brought our children to this point will only aggravate the problem.

Imagine a teacher facing a spoiled child, who throws a tantrum at any disciplinary action taken against him. It is true that to avoid confrontation with such a child one would be well advised to discipline cautiously. However, to follow the advice of those who are spoiling the child will only make the problem worse.

A broken home is extremely challenging for a child, yet that need not cause a child to reject *Yiddishkeit*. Incompetent teachers are also not a sufficient cause for someone to discard their values, and the values of family and community. With a strong sense of values, children can stay devoted to Hashem and Torah despite their challenges.



It is true that an ill person requires a special remedy, however it is the Rambam or other qualified doctor who should dispense that remedy.

APPLYING CHASSIDUS ON OUR LEVEL

Some people reason as follows:

"Today we're not on the level of chassidim of the past, and we are influenced by the surrounding culture. The old chinuch won't work for the American child. and we need to educate this generation in a more relaxed fashion.

"In fact, the Rambam writes in Hilchos Deios that his diet is only for those who are healthy, but one who is diseased won't be able to tolerate his regimen. In chinuch too, we can't apply old educational means used in a perfect world to a diseased society."

While there is a kernel of truth in every argument, the conclusion is, in my opinion, the culprit for the downfall.

It is true that an ill person requires a special remedy, however it is the Rambam or other qualified doctor who should dispense that remedy. As the Rambam writes, "Wherever there is no doctor, whether a person is healthy or sick, he should not budge from the path described here, since each one of them will bring a good outcome."

True, we unfortunately can no longer live up to the level of iskafya, bittul, ahavas Hashem or hisbonenus as the chassidim of old. Yet, we can apply those principles in a way that is suitable for our generation. The principles are the bedrock of who we are as yidden and chassidim. It is only the degree of intensity that fluctuates according to the level of each person.

The commandment to be holy and abstain from excessive indulgences (kadesh atzmecha bemutar lach), not like Shabbos or kashrus, varies in application from generation to generation and from person to person. Nevertheless, it remains as an important mitzva and relevant as always. If children nowadays need tasty meals to function normally, we can teach them restraint and iskafya in a way that they can observe.

The essential question is how to view this change



Secular liberalism is like an addiction. Once you buy into it, you think that you need more of it to alleviate the problems that it itself had caused.

Should we bemoan the fact that we cannot live with the devotion of our ancestors or should we see it as "progress"? If the answer is the former, then Americanism will have impacted our lifestyle, but our *hashkafos* have remained pure. If, however, we will rejoice at the progress, then we will have become entirely secularized.

Chazal say that one should always ask himself, מתי (מתי יצחק ויעקב "When will my actions match those of my forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov?" This does not mean that one is actually expected to reach the level of our Avos, but rather that one should always strive for that supreme level. Chazal teach us that our focus should always be on our great forbearers, and not to lower the bar to match our current challenges. True progress, according to Chazal, is to come closer to the pillars of our past.

Having an elevated value system even without actually reaching it has much practical relevance. When a person with good *hashkafa* and healthy pride of *Yiddishkeit* fails in some way, his return is much easier since he knows "the way home." His home, his desire and outlook are healthy. However, if we fail in *hashkafa*, there is nowhere to return to.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the secular liberalism is like an addiction. Once you buy into it, you think that you need more of it to alleviate the problems that it itself had caused.

There are indeed instances when a person is too weak to take a medicine or to undergo a medical procedure. In that case, we must give him the medicine or perform the procedure slowly and delicately so that he can tolerate it. However, to give up or give in is not an option, for then we will have lost him altogether.

To illustrate:

In 5703 (1943), the Frierdiker Rebbe gave instructions that teachers must not strike children (later disseminated by Rabbi Yitzchok Ushpal as a list of guidelines for teachers – see Perspectives digest, Volume 12). On Yud Tes Kislev 5731, thirty years later, the Rebbe spoke fiercely against modern Jews who claimed that nowadays we should not hit children.

How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

The difference would seem to be one of underlying values.

The Frierdiker Rebbe said that recent generations can *unfortunately* not tolerate the medicine prescribed by Shlomo Hamelech. But, the modern declaration was something else: "We don't need Torah's primitive prescription, we prefer the new methods of modern education."

That is what pained the Rebbe so deeply in that *sicha*.

It is self-understood, that it isn't possible to outline an entire *chinuch* symposium in detail in the form of an article. The purpose of this article is merely to point out some general attitudes of the good old *emese Yid-dishe* and *chassidishe* approach – which should therefore be the new progressive approach – in the spirit of "ten l'chacham v'yechkam oid" (give a wise person an idea and he will develop it further).

Our Rebbeim have promised us, "chazaka l'taamula she'eina chozeres reikam" – effort invested will eventually succeed. May we all be blessed with success in educating our children in the path that our Rebbeim have laid out for us.



RABBI BINYOMIN COHEN

ONE OF THE earliest halachic codes is known as the Tur. Compiled by R. Yaakov ben Osher about seven hundred years ago, it served as a basis for the Shulchan Oruch, which it preceded by some two hundred years.

In the laws of tzedaka (Yoreh Deiah 251) the Tur quotes the words of R. Saadiah Gaon – who lived some four hundred years earlier – with regard to the order of precedence which should be followed when distributing funds to tzedaka. Before all else, says R. Saadiah, a person is obligated to take care of himself and to ensure that he has a steady means of support. He is not obligated to give tzedaka to others (apart from a token amount) until he himself has a source of income. He derives this from the posuk which says:יווי – your brother shall live with you, i.e. your life comes before that of your brother.

Once you have secured your own livelihood, continues R. Saadiah, you should proceed to look after your relatives in the following order: first your father and mother, then your children, then your siblings and, finally, your other relatives.

We find the same principle (of putting oneself first) in a slightly different context, where one is searching for lost property.

The Mishna (Bava Metzia 33a) rules clearly that if there is a choice between recovering his own lost property or that of his father, his comes first. The Gemara derives this from that which the Torah says: עוני אוני בר אביון (דברים טו) – which is here interpreted

to mean that you should be careful not to become poor. Obviously, the first step in avoiding any threat of poverty is to carefully guard that which one already possesses; hence the obligation to first find one's own lost object. Only after that will I help others, starting with my father, to recover that which they have lost.

All of the above is, however, said only with regard to one's own money. My personal assets should be used primarily to ensure that I do not myself become\poor, and, after that, to avoid the possibility of my parents, siblings, children and other relatives being left in need. The Shulchan Oruch, however, makes it very clear (*Yoreh Deiah* 257:10) that where a person has been entrusted with communal funds which he has to distribute to *tzedaka*, he has to be extremely careful not to give either himself or his relatives any sort of priority or precedence over others with whom he has no relationship.

The reason for the distinction between the two types of funds would appear to be obvious. With regard to my own money I am entitled to make my own decisions, and if I decide to place myself or my family before others that is my prerogative (and highly recommended according to Reb Saadiah Gaon). If, however, I have been entrusted with the disbursement of funds which are not my private property, what right could I possibly have to favor myself or my family? The privilege granted to me to oversee the suitable distribution of such funds does not accord me any



right whatever to utilize the said distribution for my own personal benefit.

THE MATTER might be more clearly understood through using the analogy of a bank teller who handles thousands of dollars each day as he makes deposits and withdrawals for the bank's customers.

Imagine if the teller were to persuade himself that since he is enabling so many transactions to take place, he is entitled to pocket for himself a small percentage of each transaction as his personal commission. Or even if he takes nothing for himself, but decides to sit in judgment on the bank's customers as he considers which withdrawal applications to grant and which to refuse. Such a person is obviously going to be dismissed from his position very rapidly. He has demonstrated his inability to distinguish between the rights enjoyed by the individual when distributing his own funds, and the entirely different function of giving them that which is really theirs. He is a mere employee of the bank and its customers and hence enjoys none of those privileges associated with the actual owning of the money.

Of course, the same principle applies even when no financial gain of any sort is involved. Even if the benefit derived is merely social or religious, it is totally unacceptable for a communal appointee to utilize his position for his own advantage. Through such behavior he indicates that, rather than viewing himself as a servant of the community, he apparently believes that he is some sort of public benefactor to whom the community is beholden. He is thus perfectly justified in allowing his own whims and fancies to govern the exercising of his generosity. Personal, private benefit and the public good do not often sit happily together.

The unfortunate fact that self-indulgence and nepotism are a continual challenge in even the

Personal, private benefit and the public good do not often sit happily together.

most religious circles, makes it imperative that the correct approach be incorporated and emphasized in the education given to our children. Together with encouraging our pupils to feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others and to be ready to step forward to fill positions of communal need, we should simultaneously emphasize in the clearest terms that no amount of devotion to the wellbeing of the community, and no degree of self-sacrifice in the public interest, can ever justify utilizing such a position for one's personal advantage.

RABBI YOCHANAN GORDON a"h, who later became the gabbai in the Rebbe's *shul* at 770 Eastern Parkway, graphically illustrated the above point with a story which he related to his children.

About a hundred years ago, the young Yochanan was a seventeen year-old bochur in the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch, Russia. In those days most of the bochurim did not go home for Pesach, but spent the whole yom tov in the yeshiva itself. Given that a large proportion of the student body was made up of younger bochurim, around the age of thirteen, older bochurim, aged about seventeen or eighteen, were appointed to be in charge of the younger ones at mealtimes. Ten younger bochurim were assigned to each table, at whose head sat an older bochur who supervised their conduct in addition to making sure that they had what to eat. Similarly, at the sedarim on the first two nights

of Pesach, each of the younger *bochurim* had three *matzos* (plus other essential items) in his place, and at the head of the table sat the older bochur with his three *matzos*, as he led the younger ones in the saying of the *haggadah*.

At that time the Rebbe Rayatz was the director of the *yeshiva*. He, together with his father the Rebbe Rashab, took a personal interest in the spiritual development of the *yeshiva* as a whole, and of each *talmid* individually. On the first night of Pesach, therefore, the Rayatz would come to the *yeshiva* dining room to inspect the Seder of the *bochurim*, and only after that would he go home (or to his father) to make his own *seder*.

The door of the dining room opened and the Rayatz walked in. All the bochurim stood up in respect and then resumed their seats. The Rayatz walked from table to table, and at the table presided over by Yochanan Gordon he decided, for some reason, to take a look at the *matzos* that Yochanan was using. He lifted up the cloth covering Yochanan's *matzos* and saw, to his surprise, three *shmura matzos*. (Apparently, *shmura matzos* were recognizable by their distinct appearance.)

As is well known, those *matzos* made from wheat which has been guarded and supervised since the time of its reaping, are called *shmura* (guarded) *matzos*. Ordinary *matzos* have also been guarded, but only from the time of the milling of the grain. The *halacha* is that one can fulfil all of one's obligations with ordinary *matza*, but it is far preferable to use *shmura matza*, especially for the Sedarim on the first two nights. It is nowadays by no means uncommon to find many Jews,

especially Chassidim, who will not eat any matzos on Pesach other than *shmura*. It would appear, however, that in the Russia of one hundred years ago shmura matza was either too scarce or too expensive to be plentifully available even for the Chasidic bochurim of Lubavitch. Apparently, most bochurim just had to make do with ordinary *matzos* rather than be able to perform the *mitzva* with the relatively unavailable *shmura*.

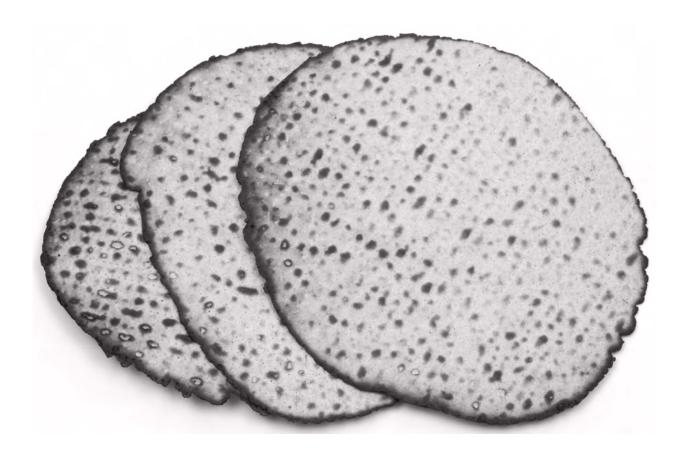
In light of this, the Rayatz's surprise upon seeing three shmura matzos in Yochanan's place was understandable. "Where did you get these from", he asked the seventeen year old. "If you are appointed to be in charge, you find a way", replied Yochanan confidently.

If Yochanan thought that his "clever" answer would find favor in the eyes of the Rayatz, he must have been sorely disappointed. The Rayatz indicated his sharp displeasure by informing Yochanan on the spot that as a penalty for his inappropriate behavior he would not be given any lunch the next day. The fact that the Rayatz ultimately relented and allowed him to eat the next day, in no way altered or minimized his condemnation of Yochanan's conduct.

What had happened here? A bochur had demonstrated his resourcefulness, his initiative and above all his personal commitment to observing a mitzvah in the best possible way. All of this was highly commendable. Unfortunately he had also demonstrated a readiness to achieve this enhanced performance of a mitzvah through exploiting his own privileged status for his personal benefit. This was unforgivable, and was punished accordingly. We may be sure that Yochanan Gordon never forgot that particular lesson, and that it stood him in good stead during the rest of his life, which was largely devoted to communal activity.

Only if stories such as these are repeated again and again to our children will the message sink in. The ends may be noble, but they do not always justify the means. The ultimate good may be that which serves all equally, rather than just benefitting a well-intentioned but self-centered individual.

There is something rather troubling about the leader who is happy to be placed, even by those whom he leads, on a pedestal of super-piety. Such leaders tend to isolate themselves from those to whom they should be close, and to gradually lose sight of why they were





The Skulener Rebbe (on left) with his son, R. Yisroel Avrohom Portugal, the present Skulener Rebbe

chosen in the first place. Abuse of one's position and a misplaced focus on one's own advantage are natural and almost inevitable consequences of such a mistaken approach. The truly devoted spiritual guide will rejoice in the opportunity to eat the same *matzos* as his flock. He would rather be together with them, than separated from them by his holiness.

SO MUCH for the importance of total impartiality and objectivity when dealing with communal funds, resources or opportunities. As mentioned earlier, however, no such lofty demands are made of an individual acting in a private capacity. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 33a) allows him to put himself first, in accordance with the injunction to avoid poverty.

Despite this, the same Gemara comments that, כל המקיים בעצמו כך סוף במקיים בעצמו כך מוף במקיים בעצמו בא anyone who is overly zealous in guarding his own interests and personal well-being, will ultimately come to poverty through this approach. Rashi explains that even if a person is not legally obligated, he

Throughout the ages, there have been countless Jewish leaders who put the interests of others before their own, and who saw their life's-task as giving rather than any sort of taking.

The ends may be noble, but they do not always justify the means.

should nevertheless go further than required by the letter of the law and not necessarily put himself first. For a person to choose, however justifiably, a path in life which excludes kindness and tzedaka, could in itself bring him to poverty. I am allowed to put my own interests first, but this is not necessarily the ideal mode of behavior for the children of Avrohom Ovinu who should aim for chesed rather than their own legal entitlements. Thus, throughout the ages, there have been countless Jewish leaders who put the interests of others before their own, and who saw their life's-task as giving rather than any sort of taking.

One such person, who was renowned for his almost total selflessness, was the Skulener Rebbe, Rabbi Eliezer Zusia Portugal. Books could, and have, been written about this exceptional Jewish leader who displayed great mesiras nefesh in his efforts to help thousands of Jews, especially behind the Iron Curtain. The limitations of this article permit the inclusion of only one story - again about matzos.

During the Second World War it was, understandably, very difficult to acquire wheat for the baking of *matzos*. Somehow or other, Reb Fishel Kerpel, one of the leading communal figures in the city of Tchernowitz, Romania, managed to obtain a quantity of suitable wheat which he then gave to the Skulener Rebbe. who lived in Tchernowitz at that time. He also gave a portion of the wheat to the Rebbe of Seret-Vishnitz, who was passing through Tchernowitz on his way back home.

The Skulener Rebbe decided to use the wheat to bake matzos which would then be sold, all the proceeds being donated to helping Jews who were in need. A hand-mill was needed to grind the wheat into flour, but this presented a major problem since the law forbade individuals to own mills of any sort.

Information was received that a certain Jew in the city owned a hand-mill. The Rebbe sent a messenger to the Jew requesting permission to borrow the mill, but the owner refused since he was afraid that the mill might be discovered and he would then find himself in serious trouble. The Rebbe decided to speak to the Jew personally. He went to him and managed to persuade him to lend the mill. Unfortunately, their discussion lasted longer than planned and when the Rebbe left the Jew's house it was already well past the time of the curfew. While on his way home the Rebbe was arrested by a military policeman, and was taken to a military station from which many people would be sent to the labor-camps. Fortunately, one of the guards in the





The Skulener Rebbe (in colored caftan) at the Rebbe's farbrengen

station decided, after a few hours, to turn a blind eye to the Rebbe's escaping from detention, and so the Rebbe was able to continue his journey home. The hand-mill was delivered, not long afterwards, by its owner and the Skulener Rebbe baked his *matzos* which he then sold.

Not surprisingly, Erev Pesach arrived and the Rebbe had sold nearly everything which he had baked and almost no *matzos* remained. A fair sum of muchneeded money had been raised through the sale of the *matzos*, and this had been given to those in need, but how were the Skulener Rebbe and his family going to eat *matzos* and fulfil the *mitzva*?

A sudden knock of the door heralded the arrival of a messenger coming from the Rebbe of Seret-Vishnitz with a packet of *matzos* for the Skulener Rebbe and his family. The messenger repeated what the Rebbe of Seret-Vishnitz had told him: "If the Skulener Rebbe

is the one occupied with the *matzos*, we can be fairly certain that nothing will remain for him. We therefore have to prepare *matzos* for him."

The story speaks for itself. The Skulener Rebbe had not only been the one who had organized the baking of the *matzos*, but had, as a result of his efforts, been arrested and been in danger of being sent to the camps. Surely the one who had put himself in danger was the first one to be entitled to enjoying the fruits of his own self-sacrifice? First take the *matzos* which you need, and then sell all remaining *matzos* to raise money for *tzedaka*. Apparently such a down-to-earth approach did not occur to the Rebbe.

We do not know how he would have answered the question of "Who comes first?" We are, however, certain what answer he would give to the question "Who comes last?" The answer would be, "I do, of course."

Only if stories such as these are repeated again and again to our children will the message sink in.

WONDERS

IN

KRISLAVA

A firsthand account of the Mitteler Rebbe's wondrous conduct

Recorded by

R. Yankel Kaidaner

in his work **Sipurim Noraim**

THE HISTORY OF CHASSIDUS

NO EVIL SHALL BEFALL HIM

Once I had the privilege of travelling together with the [Mitteler] Rebbe. We came to the town of Krislava, where we took up lodging in the home of the well-known chassid Reb Yeshaya'le Krislaver, although he was not home at the time. At night, the Rebbe delivered a discourse that went on until after midnight. Our hostess couldn't wait any longer to serve the Rebbe supper, so she went to sleep, and after the discourse the Rebbe's attendant served him the meal.

In the morning, after the prayers, I went to the vestibule of the house to smoke my pipe, where I heard our host's wife crying and wailing as though someone had died, Heaven forfend.

I asked her what the matter was, and she said, "How can I not cry? G-d has found me worthy of having the holy Rebbe stay under the roof of my home, and now something terrible has come out of it: The Rebbe ate non-kosher on my account!"

When I heard this, a dreadful feeling came over me.

"When I went to sleep," she continued, "I forgot to say that on one side of the stove was a saucepan of non-kosher meat we had prepared for a nobleman staying in the house. In the end, the nobleman did not come to eat, and I expected the food I had prepared for him to be left untouched. Now I see that they mixed up the dishes! They gave the *treif* to the Rebbe, and the kosher dish has been left in its entirety."

By now, I felt myself trembling with fear. I went over to the *meshares*, the attendant.

"What's this look of terror on your face?" the attendant said to me. I recounted what had happened to the attendant, and he laughed at me.

"Fool," he said to me, "Don't you know our holy Rebbe? How could you imagine that such a sin would befall our Rebbe?"

He took me into the Rebbe's room, and showed that the pot that had been brought to him was still full; not a drop of food seemed to be missing. "But perhaps he tasted some of the food, G-d forbid," I suggested.

"Believe me," he said to me, "this is what happened: I set the table for him, he then washed his hands and made the blessing for bread. After having some of the bread, he took the spoon, and used it to draw up some of the soup from his bowl. Then, after looking it over once and then twice, he said to me, 'I don't wish to have the soup.'

"I said to him, "Perhaps the Rebbe would like to eat the meat? All you've had to eat today is two cups of tea.'

"'Or the meat,' he said with a smile. Then he told me, 'You shouldn't eat from it either.'

"I took the bowl from him, and poured it back into the pot. Look! You can see clearly that not a drop of it is missing."

Afterwards, several prominent chassidim asked the Rebbe himself how he had known, just by looking at the spoon, that it was treif. Normally he would dress up his miracles in a more mundane veneer, since by nature he was totally discreet.

"It seems to me," he replied, "that you think this was some sort of miracle of spiritual perception. Not at all. When a thought suddenly occurs to a person it is never for nothing, and when I took the spoon in my hand, a law pertaining to *treifos* suddenly fell into my thoughts. That's why I didn't want to eat from it."

A wise person will understand that, even if it were as the Rebbe had said, this would still be greater than if he had understood with his own powers that the food was *treif*: That the thought simply fell into his thoughts shows how dearly the Rebbe is regarded above.

But the truth is that, familiar with the Rebbe as we were, we knew that it was a simple matter for someone of his stature to perceive that the food was *treif*.

"Fool," he said to me, "Don't you know our holy Rebbe? How could you imagine that such a sin would befall our Rebbe?"

Immediately after the meal, the attendant came over to me in a rush. "If you want to look at the Rebbe," he said to me, "now is an opportune time."

Furthermore, if he had only realized because of the thought that occurred to him, then why did he have to take a second look at the spoon? Then again, the notion that he really had understood by looking at the food—and not because of the thought—is untenable, because the Rebbe himself said otherwise.

It's obvious then, that two things happened: On account of the law in *treifos* that fell into his thoughts, he was reminded to take another look at the spoon. And, it was on account of being beloved and cherished Above, that Heaven had mercy and slipped the law into his pure thoughts in the first place, so that he would then remember to examine the spoon.

SECRETS FROM THE UPPER WORLDS

All of this was on the first night of our stay. On the second night, I had the fortune to witness even more wondrous scenes from the Rebbe, for on that night he delivered an extraordinary discourse, the likes of which had never heard from Rebbe, since the day we first began to hear Chassidus from him. Even the venerable, renowned, senior chassidim all agreed that they had never heard anything like this from him, or from his father the Alter Rebbe. After the discourse, the senior chassidim toiled and labored to review his holy words, but felt overwhelmed by their extraordinary profundity.

Eventually we went to dinner, and then, immediately after the meal, the attendant came over to me in a rush. "If you want to look at the Rebbe," he said to me, "now is an opportune time."

I knew that, as a naturally modest person, the Rebbe would get quite upset when people would come to gaze at him, and told the attendant that I didn't want to go.

In reply, the *meshares* gave me his word that this time, the Rebbe would not even notice me at all. This, I told myself, is a sight that I ought to see. I went along with the attendant, and he opened the door to the Rebbe's holy chambers for me.

There I saw the Rebbe standing in the middle of the room, so completely still that he seemed inanimate, but his face burned with a fiery glow, and his eyes were open. Surely he sees me, I thought to myself, and fearing his indignation, I shirked back towards the doorway.

The attendant grabbed me by my jacket, and said in a loud voice, "Don't be afraid at all. Right now he cannot see or hear, for he is in the Upper Worlds, even though you can see his holy body here in this world."

"How is a simple man able to tell such things?" I asked him.

"It's not a matter of telling," the attendant replied, "but of experience; this isn't the first, nor the second time I've seen the Rebbe like this."

After this, I gazed into the Rebbe's holy face myself, and I realized the same thing: At that moment, he could not see or hear, even though his eyes were open. And as far as his physical senses were concerned, it was apparent that he could feel absolutely nothing. Standing in the doorway of the room, I looked intently into his holy face, searching for even a flicker of movement, but only his eyes remained open, and his holy face burned like a seraph. There I remained, from about 9 at night, until 2 in the morning, as the attendants entered and exited the room, while the Rebbe simply stood, as straight as a poker, without any movement, or any signs of recognition.

As 3 o'clock approached, the attendant said to my wagon driver, "Go and set the table, because soon he will have something to eat. He hasn't eaten yet all day."

So he did. The wagoner set the table, and brought a washing cup before the Rebbe so that he could wash his hands for the meal. He stood beside the Rebbe for some time, until he realized that he hadn't seen him at all, even though his eyes were open.

"Why don't you rouse the Rebbe, so that he can wash his hands?" the attendant asked.

"I'm afraid to touch the Rebbe," replied the wagon driver.

"Well then," said the attendant, "come what may, I must rouse the Rebbe."



I looked intently into his holy face, searching for even a flicker of movement, but only his eyes remained open, and his holy face burned like a seraph. The attendant came over, and touching the Rebbe's sleeve, he said, "I request of the Rebbe that he wash his hands."

Without answering him, the Rebbe simply moved from the center of the room to the wall, and stood there as he had before. Now that he was standing by the wall, I realized that there wasn't anything for me to see; until then I had been looking at the extraordinary vision of the Rebbe's holy face, and now I could no longer see it. I went to my room.

The next day, the attendant said to me, "I'll tell you the meaning of the extraordinary scene you saw last night. After you left, the Rebbe stayed by the wall until after 3 o'clock, after which he went, on his own, and sat down at the table and ate his meal. He was in especially high spirits, happier than I had ever seen him, since the day I first met the Rebbe.

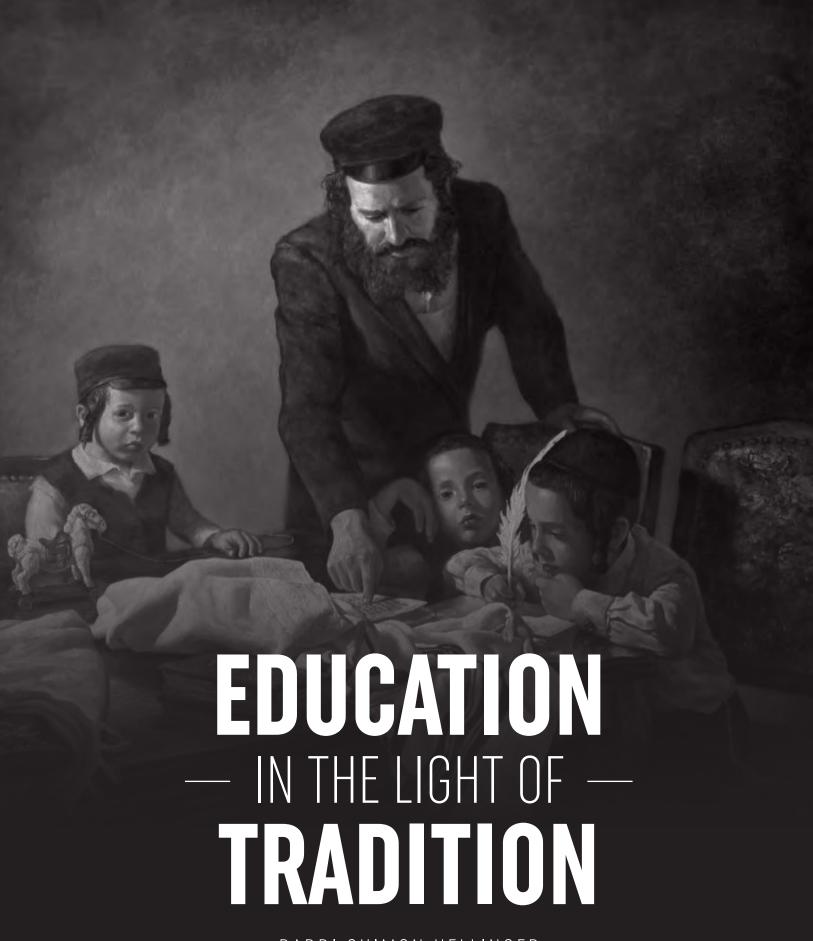
"I said to him, 'Rebbe, is it possible that I might so fortunate as to learn the reason for your great joy at this time, a joy that I have never witnessed in all my days of attending the Rebbe?'

"He replied, 'Should it come as any surprise that I have never been as happy as I am now? Whenever I deliver a public Chassidic discourse, my father, the Rebbe, reveals himself to me halfway through the discourse. But for this discourse, he revealed himself at the beginning, and then I also saw the Baal Shem Tov, as well as the Maggid of Mezritch. They departed after the discourse, but my father, the Rebbe, remained.'

"Then," continued the attendant, "he told me the following: 'The Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid lavished praised on the discourse I had delivered, and asked of me that in the future, I continue to expound on Chassidic matters in the same style. The reason I was standing all this time in the middle of the room was because I was reviewing the discourse for my father, who then offered several wondrous esoteric insights. One of those insights I heard from his mouth was simply beyond human logic; this is the cause of my joy."

From this true story, the reader can appreciate his incredibly exalted spiritual state. Rabbi Chaim Vital explains in his *Gates of Holiness* that this spiritual state—such as that achieved by the Mitteler Rebbe—is greater than any other mode of divine perception, and greater even than experiencing a revelation of Eliyahu the Prophet. So he writes in vol. III, p. 28, "...The third [way of receiving *Ruach Hakodesh*] is that as a result of the pious behavior discussed above, Eliyahu the Prophet will reveal himself to him; the fourth way, which is greater than all the others, is the privilege of having the soul of one of the great *tzaddikim*, from the early generations, who already passed on, to reveal himself to him."

"Those who achieve this state," he goes on to say, "such a person will perceive—when he is taught—the wisdom and hidden secrets of the Torah, to a wondrous degree; all of this is in proportion with his own deeds."



RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

In considering a suitable method of education, we are often faced with a question of changing conventional practice. On the one hand, we have new methods introduced to solve contemporary problems, and on the other hand, we have our time-honored tradition of education.

THERE IS AN ACCEPTED BELIEF

amongst Jews that our ancestors were of greater stature and had a better understanding of how to live. This is in direct contrast to the widespread secular approach that the previous generations were primitive, and that our generation is wiser and more cultured than they.

Chazal assert, "If earlier generations were angels, then we are humans; if they were humans, we are donkeys." A chassidic interpretation understands this statement to refer to a person's *perception* of earlier generations: If he views them as angels, he is a "mentch," but if he views them as mere mortals, he is akin to an animal...

This reverence is not limited to their direct Torah teachings, but even to widespread everyday conduct. "Minhag Yisroel Torah hi," an accepted practice of upstanding Jews is sacred and as binding as the Torah itself. If this is so for small everyday customs, it is certainly so in the area of education, which transmits the soul of Yiddishkeit for eternity.

A fundamental example lies in the method of teaching of Alef-Beis.

During the nineteenth century, the *maskilim* began methodically restructuring children's Torah education. Their objective was to "raise" the material to "educational standards" and to simplify the style for easier learning, arguing that the original texts and methods were clumsy and outdated (*R*"*L*). They published textbooks containing selected passages of Chumash and Mishna, omitting what they considered "uneducational."

In the year 5657 (1896), a book by the name Reishis Daas Sfas Ever (The Beginning of Knowing the Hebrew Language) was published in Warsaw by the maskil Magnus Krinski. The book was simply a reader which followed the newest methods of phonetic learning. Finding the names of the nekudos superfluous and

confusing, they were moved to the appendices at the end of the book. What may have seemed to be a triviality to most people, was viewed as a serious matter by the Frierdiker Rebbe and other *Gedolei Yisroel*, and they contested this change or any other changes to the way children were taught in *cheder*.

Besides the problem of changing traditional practice in and of itself, this had touched a fundamental difference between secular education and *chinuch*. Whereas in ordinary languages, learning the alphabet is merely a tool to read, in the Holy Tongue, pronouncing the letters and *nekudos* is itself a spiritual pursuit.

The Frierdiker Rebbe, and later the Rebbe, quoted sources in Zohar which explain the spiritual secrets in the names of the *Alef-Beis*, the *nekudos*, and their exact order. By teaching them properly, the child is thus imbued with a fundamental holiness which will accompany them throughout life. The traditional method of teaching *Alef-Beis* was not haphazard, and earlier *melamdim* taught the *nekudos* with intent and purpose.

As far as the argument that the secular method is more efficient, the Rebbeim argued:

- (1) In studying Torah, we aren't interested in academic study *per se*, but with the G-dly connection achieved thereby. Torah which is studied incorrectly lacks the connection to Hashem.
- (2) Since the traditional method empowers the child with Torah, the child will be able to study better in the long run. In addition, Hashem will bless the child with more time and a longer life.

The following is a sampling of quotations from our Rebbeim on traditional learning and teaching *Alef-Beis*.

A HOLY ACTIVITY

Throughout history, Jews have always known that the Alef-Beis was different than the script of other languages. While other languages invented the letters to communicate, the *Alef-Beis* letters were G-dly channels with which Hashem wrote the Torah and created the world. It followed, that the study of these letters, even before turning them into holy messages, is a sacred activity in itself.

HEAVENLY ANGELS

What holiness is attached to these letters? The Rebbe quotes the Zohar that the letters and nekudos correspond to names of *malochim*:

It is known, that the Hebrew letters and vowels originate from Moshe Rabbeinu who received them from Hashem at Har Sinai. This is obvious in the Zohar and Tikkunei Zohar.

This is true even for the names of the letters and nekudos, as it is written there that the names of the nekudos are acronyms of names of malochim, heavenly angels.

(Igros Kodesh, vol. 13 p. 93)

GUARDIAN ANGELS

The Frierdiker Rebbe discusses the effect of these angels in his notes:

The Alter Rebbe instructed that one should teach childrenAlef-Beis with nekudos. "komatz alef -uh." "komatz beis - buh." Special care must be taken that the children read clearly. An angel is created from each word, and these angels protect the children and their parents.

INHERENT HOLINESS

Do the letters of the *Alef-Beis* have inherent holiness? This question was forwarded to the Rebbe by a community rabbi who was challenged on some basic

matters of Jewish faith (the existence of Hashem. Torah from Sinai, and why Chazal's decrees can't be reversed). After referencing the ancient sources for their holiness, the Rebbe pinpointed the underlying motivation of those who dispelled the holiness of the Alef-Beis.

Regarding your question whether there is holiness to the letters and if it is mentioned in Shulchan Aruch:

It is actually written in a book even before the Shulchan Aruch, that is the Gemara Shabbos (104a), and in several places in the holy Zohar and Tikkunei Zohar, and likewise concerning the nekudos...

Now, all of the above is extremely simple and logical. The fact that there are some who question it and argue against it, is only because it is their excuse to justify to themselves, how they dare to transgress the Torah's instruction. Ashamed to say that they can't withstand their temptation, they rationalize and take the burden off their shoulder by casting doubt on the matter itself.

(Igros Kodesh, Vol. 11, p. 9)

LET THE CHILD KNOW

The Rebbe highlights the need to make the child aware of this kedusha:

When a child learns Alef-Beis, he must feel that he is learning Hashem's wisdom.

(Likutei Sichos, Vol. 4, p. 477)

HOW DO YOU TRANSMIT LIGHT?

When working towards a goal, it doesn't matter how exactly you get there. But, if the means is an end inand-of-itself, a substitute can obviously not do the job.

The study of *Alef-Beis* is primarily about connecting a child to the intrinsic holiness of the letters and the nekudos; it's not just a tool for reading. A child is not learning to read "Hebrew," rather they are practicing "We see clearly that those who learn in the holy manner have an inner yiras Shomayim, and are sensitive to G-dly matters.

Those who are taught by other Those who are taught by other methods – their mind and heart are spiritually stopped up..."

kriah (which Chassidus also explains as "drawing forth") of "*Lashon Hakodesh*," a holy tongue.

As the Rebbe says:

Only through teaching a child in the traditional manner do we imbue within him the "alef" of all of Yiddishkeit!

As my father-in-law, the Rebbe, explained, that "komatz alef- uh" is connected to the letter alef of the very first word of the Aseres Hadibros, "Anochi," and that alef represents Hashem, who is Master of the world (Alufo Shel Olam).

Thus, by teaching a child "komatz alef- uh," we connect him with the entire Torah, which is included in the Aseres Hadibros.

(Toras Menachem 5742, Vol. 4, p. 2123)

WHO HAS THE LIGHT?

If the objective is to shine a spiritual light into the student and not merely to teach reading skills, it is





"With the melamdim of the past, the letters of Torah burned in their hearts.

When a melamed taught his pupils Alef-Beis, the alef was aflame, and when he taught komatz alef, the komatz was aflame."

ever-important that the reading teacher has this light himself. In the Frierdiker Rebbe's words:

American yungeleit, bochurim and boys need to be told very clearly what a melamed is, and particularly what a chassidisher melamed is. The term "melamed" refers to a Yid who knows the preciousness of the Torah's letters, and for him those letters are dear and holy.

With the melandim of the past, the letters of Torah burned in their hearts. When a melamed taught his pupils Alef-Beis, the alef was aflame, and when he taught komatz alef, the komatz was aflame. In the heart of the melamed it was aflame, and this he imparted to the children.

(Sefer HaSichos 5701, p. 122)

BUBBE MINHAGIM

What weight does the practice of Jews carry when it isn't recorded in halacha or any Torah book? At the Simchas Torah farbrengen of 5731 (1970), the Rebbe explained:

Even the customs of "Jewish grandmothers" must be followed, as the Rashba famously writes. The custom of Jewish women was to sing a lullaby which tells of a rebbi teaching his students "komatz alef - uh." It was worded this way, since that was how Alef-Beis was learned in previous generations in the centers of Torah, Yiddishkeit and yiras Shamayim.

(Sichos Kodesh 5731, p. 87)

ONLY THROUGH MESORAH

The Frierdiker Rebbe thanks a teacher in the following letter for using only kosher methods:

I enjoyed hearing about your involvement in chinuch and that you teach only by the way of the mesorah, namely, emphasizing the holiness of the letters and nekudos, "komatz alef, komatz beis," etc.

Impure educational books should not be seen nor found in your cheder, and may you be blessed with many blessings. And may you be granted success in your holy work, to raise G-d-fearing students.

(Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Vol. 8, p. 323)

IMPACT FOR LIFE

A NOTICEABLE DIFFERENCE

The Frierdiker Rebbe writes in a maamar:

We see clearly that those who learn in the holy manner have an inner yiras Shomayim, and are sensitive to G-dly matters. Those who are taught by other methods – their mind and heart are spiritually stopped up...

(Sefer HaMaamorim 5687, p. 200)

FAITHFUL HEARTS FOREVER

When learned properly, Torah study has an incredible power to fortify the *emunah* of a child for life:

The reinforcement of pure Torah study pushes away and eliminates all disturbances and delays, and especially so the learning of schoolchildren whose voice contains no sin. The study must be with yiras Shomayim, that they should be aware of the holiness of the letters. They should know that the shapes of the Alef-Beis, as well as their cantillation (taamim-trup) and pronunciation, were all transmitted to us at Har Sinai.

It is then that the innermost point ("nekuda"), the nekudas haYahadus (the pintele Yid), is strengthened and takes root, so that their hearts be faithful to Hashem and His Torah forever.

(Sefer HaMaamarim, 5689, p. 116)

DESTROYING PURE HEARTS

Conversely, when Torah is taught improperly, the child's innate holiness is compromised.

Chadorim and teachers who don't teach in the proper manner – "komatz alef uh, komatz beis buh" – but, instead, teach them to say, "uh, buh," similar to how mundane languages are taught, are profaning the shining holiness of the letters, and are breaking and destroying the inborn pure and genuine hearts of the children.

(Sefer HaSichos 5701, p. 88)

A LADDER DOWNWARD

When the book *Reishis Daas Sfas Ever* (*The Beginning of Knowing the Hebrew Language*) was published, it became widely popular and became a standard reading curriculum in many undiscerning *frum* schools. Wherever he went, the Frierdiker Rebbe made people aware of the danger in using those new methods.

In the year 5688 (1928), when I arrived in Riga, Latvia, I spoke at the yeshiva called "Torah and Derech Eretz (worldliness)." I told them that the objective must be "Torah with yiras Shomayim."

A child must be taught "komatz alef uh, komatz beis buh." Not like in the curriculum Reishis Daas, which is actually void of understanding (bli daas) and was initiated by people with inadequate understanding (kalei hadaas).

The most corrupt and immoral among the kings of Israel was Achaz. Our Sages say that he seized (achaz) the shuls and batei midrash so that there wouldn't be any schoolchildren. His true intent was that the study should follow the "new teaching methods," and omit the study of the nekudos by their names.

Learning the nekudos with a child instills holiness in him. The nedukos were given to Moshe Rabbeinu together with "Anochi Hashem Elokecha," and they bequest the child the power for mesiras nefesh. It is this holiness that Achaz wished to take away.

Yeshaya Hanavi realized that this was the first rung of a ladder of descent which would eventually lead to actual kefira (heresy). When he managed to acquire two students and teach them in the correct manner, he no longer feared Achaz, for he knew there would be a future for pure education.

(Sefer HaSichos 5704, p. 156-7)

A CHINUCH GUARANTEE

How will our children turn out in years to come? What can we do to ensure their Yiddishkeit for the future?

The Alef-Beis letters are literally vessels to receive the light of the Torah. However, this is only so if the child recites "komatz alef uh, komatz beis buh."

If the child merely verbalizes the sounds without saying "komatz alef," he is at risk of becoming a heretic R"L. But if he is taught to say "komatz alef" he will remain a believer in Hashem.

(Sefer Hasichos 5689 p. 44)

A QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Many Yidden were unaware or indifferent to how Alef-Beis was being taught to their young children in cheder or Hebrew school. The Frierdiker Rebbe made it clear that this was a serious matter that required their urgent attention.

The letters and nekudos of Torah are holy. Komatz contains the spiritual light of Kesser, patach contains the light of Chochma. The holiness of these letters and nekudos radiate into the neshamos of the children who learn them, so that they will always remain loyal Jews.

This must be publicized amongst Yidden everywhere, so that parents know that their child must learn "komatz alef, patach alef." Life itself hinges on this matter.

There has risen a new generation of teachers who seek to uproot the kedusha of the letters and nekudos from these children. They present themselves as good and loving people ("baalei tovah'nikes, ohavei Yisroel"), who have the children's best interests in mind. I am telling you, Yidden, they are your biggest enemies! They are turning these children into apikorsim!

Yidden! Remember this well, that it is the cheder and the chinuch of your child that will determine the future of your entire life, namely, that your child should remain a faithful Yid.

(Sefer Hasichos 5691, p. 159)



"Yidden! Remember this well, that it is the cheder and the chinuch of your child that will determine that your child should remain a faithful Yid."

TRADITIONAL TORAH VS. MODERN METHODS

HASTE MAKES WASTE

Reading experts had challenged the traditional method of learning *Alef-Beis*, and argued that it held children back and delayed the reading process. At the Purim *farbrengen* of 5716 (1956), the Rebbe countered that even if it were true, it is irrelevant, for it is learning in the traditional way that fulfills Hashem's desire:

We must begin children's education in the correct order – that is, by teaching them Hashem's Torah, according to Hashem's ways. For example, how Alef-Beis should be taught...

Do not think that it would be preferable for Hashem's sake to save time by trying to get the child to read sooner by not telling him about the holiness of the letters and the nekudos, so long as he can repeat the words like a parrot...

Time is in Hashem's hands. If we take the time to teach children in line with the holiness of the letters and the nekudos, Hashem with compensate the child with longevity and good years, so that he can make up for what he missed, and add even more.

(Toras Menachem, Vol. 16, p. 142; Sichos Kodesh 5716, p. 184)

TRUTH PREVAILS

When the Frierdiker Rebbe insisted that the *Alef-Beis* should be taught in the traditional style, it seemed to be a sacrifice of good methodology for the sake of pure *chinuch*. Only years later did the experts discover that, in the long term, the traditional manner actually brings better results:

Now that we are on the threshold of Moshiach, when everything becomes much clearer, the methodology experts too have realized the truth, that specifically through teaching the child in the traditional manner will the child succeed, though it may seem that another method is quicker."

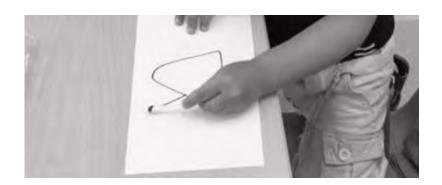
(Sichos Kodesh 5729, p. 48)

Thirteen years later, in Elul 5742 (1982), the Rebbe reemphasized this point:

Our Rebbeim instructed to teach children to read, by first teaching them the letters, then the nekudos, and only then to blend them together. This is in contrast to the erroneous claim that the traditional method slows the child's development and reading progress. It is not true; in fact the opposite is true!"

(Toras Menachem 5742, Vol. 4, p. 2123)

"We must begin children's education in the correct order - that is, by teaching them Hashem's Torah, according to Hashem's ways."



Thus, the Rebbe reveals the underlying reason for the long-term effectiveness of the traditional method: It bequeaths the child with the spiritual potential to understand Torah. While it may take a little longer to read, it will ultimately pay off in years of Torah study.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

In response to someone who argued that the traditional method was too burdensome, especially for children who are accustomed to the English alphabet, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote a sharp and lengthy letter:

The worst moral offence is to exchange that which is primary for that which is secondary, thereby disgracing the primary function and uprooting it from its place. Especially when they do so with brazenness and pride saying, "I am an expert of education, and I know how to teach Jewish children and to give the proper knowledge of the language."

The Frierdiker Rebbe continues to explain the difference between the dikduk studied by the earlier generations, which began with the correct pronunciation of the holy words, and the dikduk propagated by the maskilim, which approached it as any ordinary language. The Frierdiker Rebbe concludes by writing that although some rabbonim were excited by the maskilim's revival of dikduk, our Rebbeim sensed their unholy motivation and opposed them, and the unfortunate end of that study is widely known today.

ARE YOU DOING IT RIGHT?

A common challenge to this notion is the sense that the facts seem to prove otherwise. When looking around we find "products" of the traditional system who have failed. If the traditional system is really superior, what explains all these failures?

This letter of the Rebbe, signed by the Rabbi Chadakov, clarifies that the success of traditional methods is naturally dependent on being implemented correctly.

On the subject of teaching Alef-Beis the traditional way, or as you put it, "the approach that was the convention in the 'cheder,'" we must really divide this issue into two:

- 1) The approach itself, which is teaching children the Alef-beis using the proper names, "alef, beis," etc. in sequential order, and the same for the nekudos, using their names and combining them with the letters in the proper order.
- 2) The means of teaching this approach, namely the methodology, which is a science of its own, since it is necessary to know how to use even the best system, as it's possible for two to employ the same method, and one succeeds while the other doesn't, or worse. So when we witness a lack of success in a particular system, we can't extrapolate to the approach in its entirety, because we have to assess whether the person administering it is aware of the means of using it and whether he is in fact doing so.

Now, on the first count, teaching the Alef-Beis in order and so on is based on holy foundations as is well-known, and while this is not the place to do so, you can certainly locate all the relevant sources. Not only may this approach not be abandoned, but whoever tampers with it is tampering greatly with implanting a sense of holiness in a child's soul.

Even if one could argue (although realistically it isn't true) that learning this way isn't as interesting etc. in comparison with the new systems, it would still not justify retreating from our sanctified approach and employing a new system whose losses outweigh its benefits.

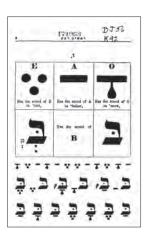
But in truth, when we think into Chazal's statements that "Hashem consulted the Torah and created the world," and "Its ways are pleasant ways," it becomes clear that if only the method of teaching Alef-Beis according to Torah's instructions was used properly, there would be success not only in matters of holiness, but simply in the very learning and progress of the child. We have seen from experience, that the teachers who became adept in the knowledge of the means and methods of teaching beginner's kriah realized that specifically this approach is the most successful.

For example, I'm aware of a number of teacher training programs in Europe and in the Unites States, which



 $Pages from \ the \ Reish is \ Daas \ reader \ that \ the \ Frierdiker \ Rebbe \\ vehemently \ opposed.$





"What may have seemed to be a triviality to most people, was viewed as a serious matter by the Frierdiker Rebbe and other Gedolei Yisroel."

"Although some rabbonim were excited by the maskilim's revival of dikduk, our Rebbeim sensed their unholy motivation and opposed them."

elected for teaching the Alef-Beis the traditional way over all the other approaches.

In light of the above, not only should the method not be switched, but the teachers using it should be encouraged, and those who are struggling with it for whatever reason should be directed to experts who, in addition to being *G-d-fearing, should be well-versed in how to train these* teachers on how to teach their pupils in the best possible way according to this system.

And we're confident that your honor, as an educational counselor on behalf of the [Israeli] Ministry of Education in the religious schools, will investigate and learn more about everything discussed above, and will yourself assist as much as possible in this area, and you'll be from those bringing virtue to the public, the merit of which is great and eternal.

(Igros Kodesh, Vol. 26, p. 234)

The case of kriah is just one example of the need to be keenly aware of subtle changes to traditional modes of education. What may appear to be more effective in the here-and-now, can unfortunately cause devastating results in the future. And since the purpose of *chinuch* is, of course, to make a long-term impact, it would only be wise to choose the path that was tried-andtested in producing generations of chassidim and baalei mesiras nefesh.

Let's do this right. We can't afford to experiment on our children.



PHILOSOPHER, THE WRITER AND THE CHASIDIC STORY

MRS. TZIVIA EMMER

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A STORY? A Jewish, Chasidic story especially—one that enters the heart like an arrow of truth and wisdom. There are stories of *tzaddikim* and of simple Jews of another era, stories that show the workings of Divine Providence in everyday life, stories that illuminate an abstract concept or a verse in the Torah, and stories that show the value of certain character traits like kindness and charity. Some stories contain little more than a play on words or a flash of wit. In the classic Chasidic tales we find traces of the vanished world of Eastern European Jewry, glimpsed across the chasm of time and destruction that separates us from that world.

"Through telling stories of *tzaddikim*," says Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, "one draws down the light of *Moshiach* into this World, and repels from it all manner of darkness and tribulations."

Chasidim are fond of saying that relating stories about the Baal Shem Tov on *Motzoei Shabbos* is beneficial for one's livelihood, but that the aforesaid statement contains three errors: first, not only the Baal Shem Tov but any *tzaddik*; second, not only on *Motzoei Shabbos* but at any time; and third, that it is good not only for matters of livelihood but for any worthwhile aspect of life.

Our Sages asked why the *Torah*, usually so sparing of words, devotes a long and repetitious segment to the activities of Avraham's servant Eliezer in acquiring a wife for Avraham's son, Yitzchak. The Talmud answers that the conversation of the patriarch's servants is loftier than the Torah as studied by their sons. Reb Shlomo of Radomsk wrote: "This is so because the conversation—the story-telling—of the servants of the patriarchs becomes the Torah of the

sons." Tales of tzaddikim and authentic Jewish stories deepen our appreciation of Torah and sustain faith.

Chasidic stories are less a literary form than a part of life. They serve to enliven the classroom lecture, the *Shabbos* table, the discussion of serious topics, a children's party. New stories complement the old; a rich oral tradition continues to grow even as more of the oral tradition is recorded and now translated into English.

But stories must be authentic. Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, a formidable Torah scholar of recent times, notes in the introduction to his *Sippurei Chasidim al haMoadim* (English version: A Treasury of Chasidic Tales on the Festivals, translated by Uri Kaploun and published by Mesorah Publications, Ltd.) that he has "neither adapted [the stories] to suit his taste nor tampered with the facts as related, whether in content or in style."

Not so with many of the stories in books that we may encounter in a bookstore or the public library, where a word, a phrase or a nuance can easily distort the entirety. I remember reading stories by the secular Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and coming away from them wondering what they meant. Like food sculpture in a museum they looked quite good-but you couldn't bring them home and eat them. Why didn't they nourish my soul? Even worse, there were Jewish folktales and novels filled with superstition and madness. Was this indeed Jewish culture? There was a taste of something Jewish, but nothing to inspire belief or impel further inquiry. Stories outside authentic Judaic tradition often contain traps for the unwary and subtle forms of spiritual sabotage, even when they are called "Chasidic."

Tales of tzaddikim and authentic Jewish stories deepen our appreciation of Torah and sustain faith.



Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin

Stories outside authentic Judaic tradition often contain traps for the unwary and subtle forms of spiritual sabotage, even when they are called "Chasidic."

THE CHAMETZ ON THE SHELF

"Looking back over the seder he had just completed, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev noted with satisfaction that he had succeeded in suffusing each of its successive stages with the light of kabbalistic meditation—that he had indeed done justice to each of the mystical kavanos at their respective moments.

"But at that moment a voice from heaven intimated to him: 'Be not proud of the manner in which you conducted your seder. In this town there lives a Jew called Chaim the Porter: his seder is loftier than yours."

So begins a popular story about one of the bestloved personalities of Jewish history -- Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, defender of the people of Israel, arguer with G-d, the Rov who always in his abundant love for his people found something good to say about everyone, even the biggest sinner. The Berditchever, as he is called, is the central figure in many Chasidic stories.

The story continues:

Reb Levi Yitzchak turned to address the Chasidim who had completed their seder at home and had come to observe how the *tzaddik* conducted the final stages of his seder.

"Do any of you know Reb Chaim the Porter?" he asked.

One of them knew him, but did not know where he lived.

"If it were possible to call him here I would be most pleased," said the tzaddik.

The Chasidim immediately fanned out over all the streets of Berditchev until they found his dilapidated cottage.

His wife opened the door gingerly and asked: "Why do you need my husband? He's in there snoring, dead drunk."

The Chasidim ignored her, walked straight in, succeeded in waking him up, and just about hauled the burly fellow on their shoulders to the home of the tzaddik.

Reb Levi Yitzchak offered him a chair, and said: "My dear Reb Chaim! Did you recite Avadim Hayinu on Shabbos HaGadol?"

"Yes," blinked the porter.

"Did you search your cottage for chametz last night?" asked the tzaddik.

"Yes," said the simple fellow.

Reb Levi Yitzchak had one more question: "And did you conduct the seder tonight?"

Flushed and flustered, the poor man unburdened himself. "Rebbe, I'll tell you the truth. I heard that a man's not allowed to drink vodka for eight days on end. So this morning I drank enough to last me for eight days. So of course I was sleepy, and I went to bed. When it was night-time my wife wakes me up and she starts nagging me. You know how. She starts saying like this: 'Chaim,' she says, 'why don't you make a seder like all the other Jews?'

"So I said to her, I said: 'What do you want from me? I'm an ignoramus, and my father before me was an ignoramus. I haven't got a clue what it's all about. The only thing I know is this—that our fathers were in exile amongst the gypsies. But we've got a G-d, you see, who took us out of there and made us free. And now we're all in exile again. But G-d will bring us out again, for sure!' Then I saw that on the table there were *matzah* and wine and eggs, so I ate the *matzah*



and the eggs, and I drank up the wine. And then I was so exhausted that I had to go back to sleep."

The *tzaddik* told the *Chasidim* that they could now take the porter home. After they had left, he said: "Heaven was exceedingly pleased with this man's words, because he said them with all his heart, without any ulterior motives. His sincerity was unblemished—for he knows nothing more than what he said."

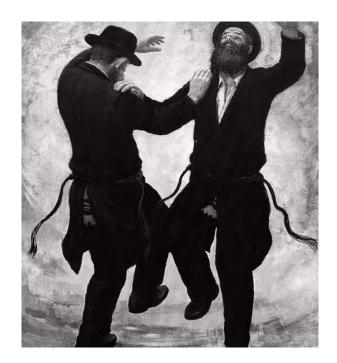
We have in this story several themes common in Chasidic lore: the tzaddik in his mystical meditations, the ever-watchful and responsive Chasidim, the value of humility, the simple man whose sincerity pierces the heavens.

"Rebbe, I'll tell you the truth. I heard that a man's not allowed to drink vodka for eight days on end. So this morning I drank enough to last me for eight days."

THE SAME STORY?

A nearly-identical story is found in "Tales of the Hasidim: Early Masters" by Martin Buber. There are several differences in the wording and details of the story. Concerning Rabbi Levi Yitzchak himself, in Rabbi Zevin's version, he "notes the level of his *seder* with satisfaction," while in Buber's version, Levi Yitzchak sits in his room, "joyful and proud." A small difference, barely discernible, but Buber's effect is to distance us. When Chaim the Porter is brought to the

If Chasidism represented joy, it was joy in the mitzvah itself; if it was a release from dry learning, it was a release allowing for a new depth of learning.



tzaddik, Buber's Levi Yitzchak asks, "Rabbi Chaim, dear heart, what mystic intention was in your mind when you gathered what is leavened?" Astonished at the porter's simple answer, the *tzaddik* continues, "And what consecration did you think upon in the burning of it?"

Note the very different questions asked by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak in Sippurei Chasidim. We are not led to the conclusion that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, tzaddik though he may be, is so lost in his own holy world that he does not have even the critical faculties that we have. Further reinforcing the point, Buber' story lacks the framing element through which Rabbi Levi Yitzchak comments upon the meaning of the event. Surely the tzaddik understands its significance far better than we do, and the story becomes a lesson that he teaches.

Even more significant is another detail of Buber's story: Chaim the Porter reveals that he has forgotten to burn his *chametz* altogether. It is all still lying on the shelf.

Possession of chametz during Passover is a serious transgression of Jewish Law. The fact that the porter drank up eight-days' worth of the forbidden vodka is testimony not only to his propensity to imbibe but also to the sheer weight of the Passover laws, felt even by the simple man. There is no chametz on the shelf in Sippurei Chasidim, nor would there be. It is a symbol of the erroneous notion that Chasidism, in stressing enthusiasm and sincerity in the service of G-d, thereby somehow negated the importance of careful observance of the commandments.

The power of the mitzvah itself, the holy deed, runs as a theme throughout the entire body of Chasidic lore. In contrast to this is the idea that Jewish Law as it relates to physical performance represented a desiccated and dead religion of outward forms, while the Chasidic movement represented only joy, release from dry learning and dry performance. If Chasidism represented joy, it was joy in the mitzvah itself; if it was a release from dry learning, it was a release allowing for a new depth of learning.

The Baal Shem Tov showed the value of the simple, unlearned Jew at a time when the disruptions of persecution and poverty had left the majority of the population bereft of a Torah education. But the Baal Shem Tov had an inner circle of disciples who numbered among them some of the greatest Torah scholars of the age. These disciples too had to learn the value of the simple, sincere, G-d-fearing person. The myth that the Baal Shem Tov himself was of such ilk is one that persists to our time. It is a myth which allows the twentieth century observer to admire the 'fervor' and holy innocence of the tzaddikim

Martin Buber was the quintessential secular philosopher, his Jewishness filtered through a haze of universalism.

and *Chasidim* of a bygone age and at the same time remain curiously untouched and as distant as ever from Judaism.

The *tzaddikim* of the stories are meticulous and knowledgeable in the observance of the Code of Jewish Law—were they otherwise they would be charlatans and fakes—as indeed Shabbetai Zvi, the false messiah, proved to be. In one story the Baal Shem Tov senses an invalid mezuzah on the doorpost as soon as he walks into a room. The mezuzah must be written according to physically precise specifications as well as with the proper concentration in order to fulfill its spiritual function.

The role of the mitzvah itself is never overshadowed, in authentic Chasidic stories, by mystical contemplation or miracles. Many stories attest to a caution, as in the case of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak in the *seder* story, about getting carried away with the notion of Kabbalistic meditations. Not that such meditations were not—are not—a reality. It is precisely because of their power that the stories present a kind of antidote.

In the story, titled "Not on Purpose," when the blowing of the shofar prevents the sinking of a ship in a storm, Reb Simchah Bunem of Pshischah warns his disciples not to think that the *tzaddik* in this story blew the shofar in order to supernaturally calm the storm. Rather, his desire was to perform the mitzvah of blowing the shofar once more before his death. "And so holy a man was he, that the mitzvah saved them all."

Martin Buber was the quintessential secular philosopher, his Jewishness filtered through a haze of universalism. Long ago I came upon another book of stories by Buber, entitled The Way of Man. As the title implies, the stories embodied spiritual concepts that would appeal to the person who was not familiar with and perhaps not even interested in Judaism. As I remember these stories, they were ostensibly about *tzaddikim* and Chasidim, but these in reality could as well have been Sufis or Buddhists—hence

their appeal for anyone hoping to find in Chasidism a purely conceptual system that is easily reconciled with other religions.

The concept here is that the "great religions of the world" contain a common core of truth and that Moshe *Rabbeinu* and, *l'havdil*, Buddha, for example, would have more to say to one another than the rabbis would lead us to believe. But if there is any tradition having the power to negate this concept totally it is that of Chasidism itself, a movement whose spiritual giants have had the mystical appeal to strike a responsive chord in the spiritual seeker, as well as the Torah knowledge that keeps the whole thing on track.

Buber was far enough from the shtetl not to have to rebel against its ethos, not far enough from it to look back with the kind of nostalgia that produces Fiddler on the Roof, but never close enough to love and appreciate its very particular, uniquely Jewish contribution. Writing before both the Holocaust and today's Torah renaissance, he may well have thought that in recoding his Chasidic stories he was preserving the last glowing embers of a moribund flame. But the reader should be aware that they are written from a point of view far from the impulse that inspired the stories to begin with.

The *chametz* is always on the shelf.

Tzivia Emmer is a freelance writer and personal historian helping people tell their life stories and family histories. An expanded version of this article appeared in Wellsprings magazine.

A CALL FOR Education

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE

In 5706 (1946), the Frierdiker Rebbe handed over the manuscripts of the Rebbe Rashab's *Kuntres Eitz Hachaim* and *Kuntres Ha'avoda* to be printed. To those works he appended a letter calling upon educators to rethink their attitude in education.

I HAVE STATED MY OPINION several times that the

saying "America is different" – thereby excusing oneself in matters of Torah, *mitzvos* and *yiras shamayim* – is an absolute fallacy. Especially, concerning the youth of this country, and particularly the students and graduates of the *yeshivos*, they are open to every word that comes from the heart with G-d-fearing inspiration and the strengthening the Torah and *Yiddishkeit*.

There are those who deceive themselves, saying, "In order to draw the youth near to Torah and *mitzvos*, we must sing their praises and refrain from any word of rebuke, warning, and demand." However, the truth is just the opposite, for then the listener feels he is being spoken to with glossed lips and words of empty flattery. Not with this path of falsehood will they be drawn near to our Torah.

There will come a time, when the young generation will bring a claim against all its leaders and especially to the *yeshiva* faculties and their deans, saying:

"Why did you not rebuke us for our ways?

Why did you not tell us the truth, the truth of the Torah, in its entirety?

Why did you not instruct us on the way to live in day-to-day life, by telling us:

How we ought to pray every day before our Father, the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He,

How we ought to study His Torah, and as we have been commanded – 'With awe and fear, with trembling and tremor,'

How we ought to fulfill His mitzvos, and as we have been commanded 'With joy and gladness of heart' which is a vast service."

What will we say, and how will we justify ourselves on that day?

We, all, and the *yeshiva* faculties especially, must organize our work, especially in adjusting the *yeshivos'* curriculums and policies of decorum, so that the *yeshiva* will not just be a place that teaches how to be a *lamdan*, *rov*, *Ra"m* (teacher in *yeshiva*), or similar, but that the *yeshiva* should be where they educate the student to be a complete *Yid*, whole in body (*mitzvos*), in soul (*tefilla*), and in Torah....



The GREAT DEBATE



A conversation about Chassidus during its early years

PART TWO

AN OVERVIEW

The Great Debate,

known in Hebrew as *Vikucha Raba*, was first published in 5618 (1858) as a polemical discussion on the validity of Chassidus, and due to its popularity, was reprinted many times since.

This debate between two scholarly friends – a *chossid* and a *misnaged* (an opponent to Chassidus) – touches upon many central questions regarding Chassidus: What is Chassidus about? Why is it necessary? Why the need for a Rebbe? Why do chassidim invest so much time in preparing for *davening*? Why do so many people oppose Chassidus?

The supposed debate is said to have transpired between two childhood friends, R. Binyomin Zev of Slonim, a student of the Vilna Gaon, and R. Yosef of Nemirov, a follower of R. Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev. The two had studied together in Lithuania, and at some point R. Yosef became a chossid. His old friend writes to him for explanations on certain chassidic practices which he found objectionable.

In this letter, R. Binyomin Zev raises fundamental questions on the ideology and *hashkafa* of Chassidus.

He records a conversation that he held with a chossid in his town and what the chossid responded, and he asks his chossid-friend to share his opinion on those responses. In another letter, R. Yosef offers his thoughts on the chossid's explanations – sometimes affirming and sometimes critiquing, with distinctly Chabad ideas.

As outlined in the previous issue, the debate appears to be the original work of R. Yaakov Kaidaner, a respected chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, who organized the philosophies of Chassidus in the form of a debate for the sake of presentation.

The discussion sheds light onto what changes Chassidus introduced and for what purpose. With that, we can appreciate the path of Chassidus and increase our commitment to its core values.

In this translation, we have integrated variances from a version of this debate printed under the name *Metzaref Ha'avoda – The Refinement of G-dly Service*. We have marked those additions by placing them in square brackets.



THE GREAT DEBATE - II

12. WHY DOES YOUR DAVENING AND CONDUCT FLUCTUATE?

I ASKED HIM:

You preach well, yet you don't practice it – to stand steadfast in battle every day – for I see that some times are good while others are lacking.

One time, I heard your davening, and I was awed by the cries from the depths of your heart, with such sincerity, that it impressed upon me that I should also daven at length. But another time, I heard you davening quickly just like an ordinary person.

Even on days that you daven at length, your conduct throughout the day doesn't match the picture I get from your davening. I presumed

were of disgust in your eyes, and wouldn't be of import to excite you. However, I see that you get agitated from minor things, and can't stand when something isn't to your liking. In sum, I don't discern any difference between you and those people whose davening is, in your eyes, tainted and a mere lip service [whose excitement during davening is only external].

On the other hand, this inconsistency is not an issue by the devout amongst us (the *misnagdim*) who *daven* with *kavana*, for all times are equally good and their *davening* is the same every day. Also, they conduct themselves throughout the day with humility, in contrast to

the mix of good and bad traits that I see by you.

I told him further: This fits with what I heard from the Gra, that the "group" (Chassidim) is sourced in kelipas nogah. It is explained in the writings of the Arizal that this kelipah consists of good and evil, as the posuk says, "the flame of the turning sword" - that alternates between good and evil. Therefore, the conduct and character traits of the "group" are also comprised of good and evil. These were the Gra's words.

HE REPLIED:

One's davening can be consistent every day by two types of people:

One type is men whose hearts are in their control;² their Nefesh Elokis rules the faculties of the body, and even the Nefesh Habehamis agrees to delight in Hashem by davening.3 These are Bnei Aliya (Superior Men) about whom the Sages said that "the righteous are judged by their yetzer tov"⁴ – it alone rules over the body and subdues it.⁵ We are unable to imagine this level, just as an individual blind from birth can't envision the appearance of colors.⁶ One who merits this level will certainly not fluctuate from day to day, for his heart is directed solely towards his Father in Heaven.

The second type is men who lack knowledge, and don't apply their Nefesh Elokis during davening. Although they don't entertain foreign thoughts, but focus on the meaning of the words, their davening is cold, involving only their external bodily faculties. This type of person as well can daven in the same manner every day, as he has become accustomed to, for an hour or two.

The sages hinted to this situation by stating, "Don't make your prayers a matter of routine ("keva"), but rather entreaty for mercy and supplication before Hashem." The term "keva" can also mean "fixed," that he remains stuck on one level and does not budge.

By a Beinoni, an in-between person, however, "This one and that one (both the yetzer tov and yetzer hara) judge him."8 Sometimes this one overpowers and sometimes the other one [as is the way of battle]. Consequently, it is not possible for all days to be equally good. A person is termed a mehalech ("mobile")10 because he does not remain static in one place. Though he is continuously moving, he doesn't walk the same distance every day, as his strength varies; sometimes he walks swiftly, while other times his stride is weak and feeble.

This is the case by one whose G-dly faculties are subservient [bound] to his natural faculties. The primary natural emotions are joy, depression, and a state in between. The balance of these emotions depends on the blood flow, which constantly varies based on diet and other factors. The physicists explain that joy is a result of the life spirit being infused in the blood, while depression is from a constraint of the blood.11

Sometimes, one awakens in the morning joyful and good-spirited due to the diffusion of the life spirit in the blood, and on such a day it proves easy to reach a G-dly excitement. However, on days that one awakens depressed due to a constraint of the blood, his heart is blocked like a stone, and the G-dly light does not rest in his heart, resulting in defeat during davening.

Regarding what you said that my "conduct throughout the day didn't match your picture of me based on my davening, that I should be completely steered from evil." Your estimation was inaccurate, as the time of davening is a tremendous battle, as I explained. One who is familiar with warfare understands that one who emerges victorious over his enemies can't be certain that they won't return, unless he utterly eradicates them. If he merely enslaves them, he cannot be sure that they won't fight again.

As we find that the Torah commands us regarding the seven nations, "Utterly destroy them," 12 and "You shall not allow anyone to live." ¹³ For as long as we don't



destroy them – even if we subjugate them to pay taxes – the *posuk* warns, "Those that remain amongst you will oppress you..." and indeed this is what transpired.

This applies especially so when chasing an enemy who flees. It is possible that this is a mere ploy to distance the pursuer from the city and ambush him.

The same is true by one's battle with the *yetzer hara* during *davening*. One who overcomes his *yetzer hara*, completely eradicates his natural drives, and is disgusted with evil; he will certainly never falter from his spiritual standing. The Zohar calls this the nullification of the *sitra achara* [*is'hapcha*],¹⁵ and this is a level reached by *tzadikim* whose hearts (*yetzer hara*) are slain within them.

But my situation is such that even during *davening* the evil is not eradicated totally from the left ventricle of the heart; it is merely suppressed somewhat on a temporary basis. ¹⁶ This is called "the subdual (*iskafya*) of the *sitra achara*." ¹⁷ It is like one who uses his hand to make his fellow bend over; when one lets go, his friend will revert to his upright position. Similarly, even during *davening*, at times that my mind and heart slack from the battle even slightly, the *sitra*

achara immediately reawakens and disturbs me with foreign thoughts.

All the more so am I not assured that I won't be defeated, G-d forbid, when I go out to the market. Although I thought that I had chased away the *yetzer hara* during *davening*, in fact it was only a cunning trick. When I venture out to the market, there he stands, opposite me, with the ambush at his disposal – foreign matters to which a person's heart is naturally drawn.

One who is unfamiliar with warfare, imagines that when his enemy is defeated and flees, he will never rise up again. You are of this mindset, as you have never seen war in your life. One who is acquainted with the methods of warfare knows that it is a profound science, as the *posuk* says, "with strategies you can wage war [for your benefit]." ¹⁸

With regard to the devout amongst you (*misnagdim*) whose *davening* is consistent every day and conduct themselves humbly; if their *davening* is of the first category mentioned above, that they are from the *Bnei Aliyah* who are scarce in number, ¹⁹ then their humble demeanor is no wonder, as is fit for the proper and righteous.

However, if they are of the second category, then their davening discloses the true nature of their humility. Just as their davening is cold and external, in the same way their humility is fallacious, 20 and a product of the yetzer harah's seduction. At first, he views himself haughtily, reasoning that based on his superiority, he should remain exalted above his fellows and avoid contact with them. But it is also a mitzvah to be humble and befriend even those that are much lower than him. Therefore, he proceeds to fulfill the mitzvah of humility as well, acquiring completeness of all qualities. In truth, this is all the persuasion of the yetzer harah, ensnaring one who doesn't wish to face the truth.

Regarding what you said that you "did not discern any difference between me and those people whose davening is tainted and a mere lip service, in my eyes;" I do, in fact, see a major difference. One who hasn't begun fighting at all, and doesn't see the need for it because he considers his path to be proper, as he is learning and davening and his soul isn't lacking anything, such an individual does not discern the cunningness of the yetzer harah. To such a person, it all seems straightforward, although in reality he walks on a crooked path. As the posuk says, "they do not know with what they stumble"21 - meaning they don't even realize the stumbling block, and are not aware of the fact that they stumbled, thus they remain with their mistake.

It is different by one who has waged battle at least once before, in order to chase away the evil partially, even temporarily. If later he stumbles, he will be cognizant of this, and he will feel bitter. He will do teshuva and distance himself as much as possible from a repeat.

Now, regarding what you said that you heard from the Gra, that the "group" (Chassidim) is sourced in kelipas nogah, and it is brought in the writings of the Arizal that this kelipah consists of good and evil; it baffles me how someone familiar with the writings of the Arizal can say this!

I don't profess to be proficient in the writings of the Arizal, but I have seen what Rav Chaim Vital writes in Shaar HaKedusha²² that every Jew, whether righteous or wicked, possesses two souls, as the posuk says, "And neshamos which I have made." These are two nefashos; one soul is a part of Gd above,24 as the posuk says, "For [Gd's] people are part of Gd." 25 Even the souls of the light headed and common folk are drawn from Gd above, just as by a son who is derived from his father's brain, and even his toenails come into existence from the same drop.

The second soul originates in the kelipah and sitra achara. It is this nefesh that is clothed in the four elements [blood] giving life to the body, and from it stem the evil characteristics, deriving from the four evil elements within it. Good traits are also inherent in every Jew's character, stemming from this soul, for by a Jew this soul is derived from kelipas nogah. This kelipah also contains good, and it is from the esoteric "Tree of Knowledge" which is comprised of good and evil. The souls of idolaters, however, emanate from the other unclean kelipos which contain no good at all.

One who sees the words of Rav Chaim Vital would laugh at the statement you quoted in the name of the Gra that the "group" derives from kelipas nogah. For on account of the neshama, even by the lowliest individual it is a part of Gd above. As the Anshei Knesses HaGedola enacted for every Jew, without exception,26 to recite in Elokai Neshama: "The soul

One who hasn't begun fighting at all, and doesn't see the need for it because he considers his path to be proper ... doesn't discern the cunningness of the yetzer harah.

which You have given within me is pure." In reference to the *nefesh habehamis*, there is also no differentiation between the righteous and wicked; it is always derived from *kelipas nogah*.

The difference lies only in the rectification of the *nefesh habehamis*. The *neshama* descended to this world in order to rectify and refine the *nefesh habehamis*,²⁷ to transform his natural attributes, or at least that they be subservient to the good. In this area, there is a distinction between "one who serves Gd" and "one who does not serve Him,"²⁸ Gd forbid. Consequently, the words that you quoted from the Gra [the "Chossid"] have no basis.²⁹

I judge him favorably, however, as he did not personally see the leaders of the "group." [Presumably his intentions were for the sake of Heaven, as he felt that he had acquired the proper path, devoting himself to Torah study day and night, and was not lacking. He was satisfied with his lot, and did not wish to discover anything else by speaking with the leaders of the "group."] He was only informed by people who had seen the external appearance of their customs, and it was novel to him, thus he feared that it might be a foreign path, Gd forbid. For this reason he said that the "group" derives from kelipas nogah, [thus exaggerating,] in order to frighten the common folk [who are unfamiliar with the teachings of Kabbalah] from having any contact with them. [Just by hearing the word "kelipah," they will stand back and be afraid to approach them.]

13. YOU SHOULD RATHER USE YOUR TIME TO STUDY TORAH!

I SAID:

Your explanation makes sense to me; however, I still wonder how you can spend so much time on davening, leaving less time for your learning.
Regarding such conduct
Chazal remarked,³⁰ "They leave aside the everlasting life (Torah study) and involve themselves with the temporary life (prayer)."

HE REPLIED:

You seem to be unfamiliar with the ethical works of Kabbalah and therefore do not understand the concepts of *davening* and Torah study. *Tefilah* takes the place of *korbanos*, regarding which the *posuk* says,³¹ "When a man from among you will bring an offering from the animals..." Just as the person ("*adam*") offers and elevates the animal as a sacrifice, similarly, the [G-dly] soul elevates the *nefesh habehamis* (animal soul) to be absorbed in [the unity of] Gdliness. The G-dly soul is also referred to as "*adam*," as the *posuk* says,³² "[Hashem] created *adam* in the image of Hashem."

The daily *olah* offering was consumed on the *mizbeiach* by a fire that was started below. In a similar manner, the *nefesh habehamis* is elevated by the fiery excitement during *davening – pesukei dezimra*, *birchos krias shema*, *krias shema*, and the eighteen blessings of *shmoneh esrei*.

Subsequently, the arousal from below elicits a reciprocal arousal from above. When the offering would rise up as a "pleasing fragrance" to Hashem, this would draw down additional light to the *mizbeiach*. The fire would grow stronger on its own, and the Kohanim wouldn't need to add wood, as Chazal say regarding the times of Shimon HaTzadik.³³ Similarly, after one *davens*, G-dly light shines in his Torah study, as Hashem learns opposite him.³⁴

For this reason, it is impossible for a person to have the G-dly flow in Torah study without first elevating his soul and cleaving to Hashem through davening. The Tannaim possessed lofty souls, thus they didn't need the time of davening as much to elevate their nefesh habehamis, and could constantly experience the G-dly flow in their Torah study. Their animal soul was considered foreign by them, as Hillel the Elder expressed himself that he is going to do a favor to the "lowly and poor creature."35

In later generations, however, much time [knowledge] and toil is required in order to refine the nefesh habehamis that is covered over by its negative attributes.

This was their intention when Chazal said,³⁶ "If only one would daven the entire day." Even if this results in less time for learning, we are told, 37 "Whether one does a lot or a little, as long as he has the proper intention." [Though in truth, even today, one who possesses a lofty soul must occupy himself primarily with Torah study.]

[I remarked: Your explanation is pleasant and sound. If your lengthy davening is with good intentions, to strengthen the G-dly fire and exterminate the evil, this is possibly the intent of the Talmudic adage, "If only one would daven the entire day!" I can't decisively reject or accept this conduct as it is a matter of the heart.]

[But even according to your explanation, One who hasn't begun fighting at all, and doesn't see the need for it because he considers his path to be proper ... doesn't discern the cunningness of the yetzer harah.]

But I asked: Your parable fits well for those on an inferior level and who require time to prepare themselves and their instruments. What about those who you consider tzadikim, who already possess good instruments and don't need time to prepare themselves, and they nevertheless daven late?]

Regarding your complaint about those who daven past the appointed time, I already stipulated that you should not ask me regarding the customs of select individuals that are not common amongst everyone.

The head of all the *tzadikim*, R. Yisroel Baal Shem Tov, would daven at sunrise, as would his student, the Mezritcher Maggid, most of the time. In extremely difficult situations, such as severe sickness, he would at least daven at the time of the congregation.



14. WHY AREN'T YOU PARTICULAR TO DAVEN WITH A MINYAN AND AT VASIKIN?

I ASKED HIM:

Since you put much effort to daven with [contemplation and]

tactics of battle, it would seem that you should also be careful regarding the opportune time for battle, as this is also imperative for successful combat. The choicest timing for davening is to recite krias shema as the vasikim before sunrise and to daven the amida at sunrise.

I would expect such conduct from devout individuals who endeavor to fulfill mitzvos properly, as is indeed the conduct in our circles among those who fear Hashem.

They dispel sleep from their eyes, awakening before the light of day to recite krias shema and daven. In your group, on the other hand,

they are not even careful to daven with the congregation, notwithstanding the halacha that one who comes late must skip sections of pesukei dezimra in order to daven the amida with the congregation.

HE REPLIED:

I perceive that you take things at face value without the depth behind them. The inner meaning of the *mitzva* of *krias shema* is the intent to accept the yoke of Hashem's kingship. If one failed to have intention when reciting the first verse, one must repeat it with *kavana*. The same applies to the first blessing of the *amida* as well.

Even according to the view that mitzvos do not require kavana (i.e., intent to fulfill the obligation), ³⁸ this only applies to action mitzvos, in which the required act was performed, albeit not in the best manner. The recitation of krias shema and tefila, on the other hand, requires kavana (i.e., focus on the words he is saying) as part of the essential mitzva. These are matters of the heart, and without kavana one has not accomplished anything. ³⁹

The time for *krias shema* extends to the end of the third *halachic* hour, and for *tefila* until the end of the fourth hour. One who recites *shema* past this time is still rewarded as one who reads the Torah, and according to one view may even recite it with its blessings.

Certainly, one who recites *krias shema* as the *vasikin*, and does so with *kavana*, is performing the *mitzva* in the optimum way. However, if the recitation as *vasikin* is lacking *kavana*, it is like a body without a soul, and he has accomplished nothing. On the other hand, one who puts in effort to have the proper *kavana* and *davens* at the third or fourth hour is fulfilling the *mitzva* properly.

Davening with the congregation is also not indispensable to the essential *mitzva*, as we find in the Talmud various Tannaim and Amoraim that davened privately. It is told regarding Rabbi Akiva's prayer at times that he would pray at his own pace, that he would begin in one corner of the room etc.40 The integral aspect of tefilah is kavana, thus if one knows that the only way to have proper *kavana* is to *daven* privately, he must do so.

In your circles, they focus on the external aspects, and make sure to daven as the vasikin. This is notwithstanding the fact that they do not have a clean body, not allowing time for the body to excrete its waste, and without any preparation to be able to have kavana by krias shema and tefilah. They run to daven, and take credit for following in the ways of their ancestors who would daven as vasikin.

They don't realize that even in Talmudic times this was not the practice of the masses, rather of the select few who were called "vasikin." As Rashi explains, they were humble individuals that cherished *mitzvos*. Their bodies were holy and they didn't require time for preparation. Their nefesh elokis dominated them, their faculties served as a holy abode for Hashem, and their body was considered foreign to them. They knew and understood the kavanos of krias shema and the esoteric meaning behind juxtaposing geulah to tefilah at sunrise, to the point that it is said in praise of the amora Rav Bruna that one time he juxtaposed geulah to tefilah and a smile did not leave his face for the entire day. 41 In those times they cherished fulfilling the *mitzva* properly.⁴²

What can we say regarding ourselves, in the ikvesa dem'shicha (the heels proceeding Moshiach), who are on the level of heels relative to the brain in the head. We don't possess the same holiness and purity, and almost the opposite Gd forbid. Thus we require much preparation to cleanse and purify the external faculties [i.e. the thoughts].

The pious ones in the times of the Mishna would spend time (an "hour") preparing themselves in order to direct their hearts to Hashem during davening. The amount of time necessary is not equal for everyone; in those times a short amount of time would suffice, as they were constantly connected to Hashem in a conscious manner. Rabbeinu HaKadosh would merely pass his hands over his eyes and accept the yoke of Hashem's kingship.43

We, however, are tied down [essentially] to the vain pursuits of this world [and foreign desires], and require much time to remove the external aspects from our hearts, and break the faculties of the body through bitterness. For this reason, we are unable to fulfill the external aspect of the *mitzva* by reciting *shema* as the vasikin, for we would not be able to have kavana. If only we were able to have proper kavana [daven in the proper time] after all our preparations!



The pious ones in the times of the Mishna would spend time (an "hour") preparing themselves in order to direct their hearts to Hashem during davening. The amount of time necessary is not equal for everyone.

Similarly, when *davening* at the same pace as the congregation, it isn't possible to even think what the words mean. For this to be feasible, one would need a special *minyan* who are all unoccupied by the troubles of this world.

In the present times, unfortunately, the yoke of exile and troubles of *parnasa* are great, and most people don't have the time to *daven* at even a moderate speed. They therefore appoint as the *shliach tzibur* one who snatches the words hurriedly and grinds them up, in an effort to rush to their dealings.⁴⁴ Thus, one who endeavors to *daven* along with the congregation loses more than he gains.

I once heard a parable for this situation. There was a king who derived immense pleasure from music. He chose servants who possessed musical talent, and instructed them to come at the fourth hour⁴⁵ with their harps and lyres – each one with their designated instrument⁴⁶ – to play before him, and he awarded them handsome payment. Those who would come extra early before sunrise⁴⁷ would be praised, bringing more satisfaction to the king, and receive double pay.

Among the musicians there were two groups. One group⁴⁸ was comprised of talented musicians who loved bringing pleasure to the king, and enjoyed their service more than the payment they received for it. Their instruments were of good quality, fashioned from expensive wood, and did not require any fixing. Thus they arrived early in the morning and were able to immediately play music for the king. One of them who possessed extraordinary talent was appointed to conduct the orchestra based on the musical notes, and the king derived much pleasure from their performance.

The second group⁴⁹ was not as musically talented, and did not possess as good quality instruments. They wouldn't go straight to the king; they first needed

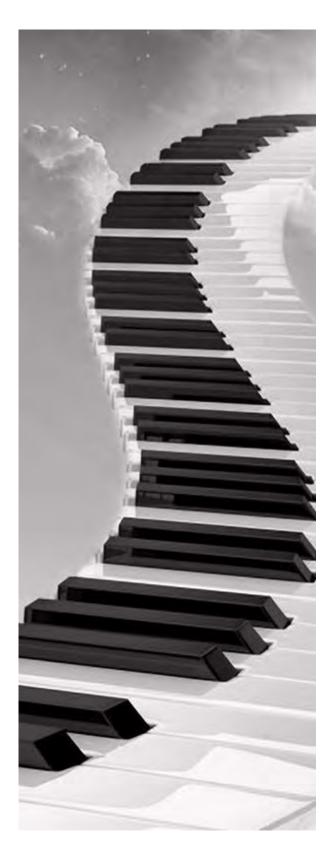
to prepare themselves and their instruments to ensure that none of the harp strings rip during their performance. Therefore they would suffice by going at the appointed time – the fourth hour – and their preparations would result in an elegant presentation. The king derived satisfaction from their music as well.

In the next generation, the descendants of both groups succeeded their fathers' roles. Many of them possessed neither musical talent nor good instruments. They did not have the same love for the king, and their primary interest lied only in the reward they would receive.

The sons of the first group remembered their fathers going early before sunrise, thus they followed suit and also went early – without preparation and with their inferior and broken instruments – in order to receive the double payment. When the king heard their music, hollow tones not based on musical talent, he closed the door before them. They failed to perceive that the king didn't appreciate their service, and they continued this habit every day.

The successors of the second group had seen their fathers go at the fourth hour, thus they would sleep until the fourth hour, and then immediately upon awakening they would go to the king with their broken instruments. They did not care to make any preparations or adjustments to their instruments, and their performance for the king was very brief, as their intention was solely to receive the payment. When the king heard their music which was not skilled either, he turned away from them as well, but they weren't cognizant of this.

A select few in the second group⁵⁰ eventually realized that they were not appreciated before the king, as their instruments were inferior and they had forgotten the skills of music playing. They therefore set out to study music and also to fix up their instruments.



Once they had studied a little music, they would allow some time in the morning to fix their instruments before coming to the king, and would arrive slightly later than their colleagues. Their contemporaries' unskilled music would disturb their own music, thus they would stand separately in a corner to play their music properly, based on their newly-acquired musical skills. Their colleagues would finish up quickly and leave, while they would linger longer, continuing to play their melodies with musical skill.

The king appreciated their efforts, notwithstanding the fact that their music was not yet as befits the king. He saw that their instruments were inferior, but that this bothered them, and they attempted to fix up whatever they were able to with their limited knowledge. Therefore he graciously accepted their service.

The moral to be derived from this parable is selfunderstood to one thinks about it.

[I said: Your words are satisfactory and pleasant with fine witticism. Your epigram hits the mark with regards to the majority of those that daven as *vasikin*.

Even most of the contemporary tzadikim don't delay their davening, besides for specific ones, such as R. Michel Zlotchover, and R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, who daven later, and rely on the shortened version of shema that they recite with korbanos earlier. Certainly they have a hidden reason, and this is an exclusive path for them.

We are not allowed to question them, as they are extremely righteous in all their ways, and fulfill the entire Torah and rabbinical precepts with inner love and fear of Hashem, but for some reason do not adhere to the time of *davening* which is a rabbinic precept.

Halacha delineates various circumstances that allow delaying the time of davening, for example in order to daven with a clean body. Thus, we must judge them favorably, and assume that they have a valid reason to do so, and they rely on the krias shema they recited earlier.

We must leave them under their status even if there is something we don't understand. It is a mitzva to attempt an explanation that would justify their conduct in a simple manner, as the fact that they rely on the shema recited earlier with korbanos.

This is similar to what the Tur⁵¹ quotes in the name of Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid, that he would recite the *pesukim* of *Shema Yisrael* and *Baruch Sheim* with intention to fulfill the *mitzva*, due to the concern that the congregation would recite hymns (*krovetz*⁵²) and delay *krias shema* past the allotted time. (We recite all three paragraphs earlier to fulfill the obligation according to all authorities.)

If they would delay *krias shema* past its time for the recital of *krovetz*, certainly the *tzaddikim* who delay the congregation are involved in matters which are of greater importance than *krovetz*, which are poetic hymns. This is allowed even as a preferred option.

Regarding the *halacha* you referred to that "one who arrives late must skip parts of *pesukei dezimra*" – the Arizal wrote that it is forbidden to skip or change the order of the prayers which is based on mystical *kavanos* corresponding to the supernal worlds. One who alters the order is in effect changing around the channels of life-force.⁵³ If you would have known about this, you wouldn't have written about skipping *davening*.]

I said:

Your words are good and straightforward. My eyes lit up when I tasted a bit of the honey.⁵⁴ P

Endnotes

- 1 Bereishis 3:24
- 2 I.e., Tzadikim see Bereishis Raba 34:10; 67:8.
- 3 See Tanya, Ch. 10.
- 4 Berachos 61b.
- $5\,\mathrm{As}$ explained in Tanya, Ch. 13.
- 6 See Rambam's commentary to Mishnayos, Sanhedrin, introduction to ch. 11 ("Cheilek").
- 7 Avos 2:13.
- 8 Berachos, ibid.
- 9 Tanya, Ch. 9.
- 10 Based on Zecharia 3:7 "I will grant you strides among these [angels] who stand here." See Tanya, Introduction to Shaar Hayichud Vehaemuna ("Chinuch Katan"); Likutei Torah, Naso, 20c.
- 11 See *Torah Ohr*, Beshalach, 63c; *Maamarei Admur Haemtzai*, Nach, pg. 326. These sources, however, imply the other way around, that diffusion of the life spirit depends on one's conduct; acting melancholy results in a constraint, while joy effects a diffusion.
- 12 Devarim 20:17.
- 13 Ibid 20:16.
- 14 Based on Bamidbar 33:55, where it is stated, "If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those of them

- whom you leave shall be pins in your eyes and thorn in your sides, and they will harass you upon the land in which you dwell."
- 15 See Zohar, I, 4b. Tanya, Ch. 10.
- 16 See Tanya, Ch. 12.
- 17 See Zohar, II, 128b; 67b; 184a; Tanya, Ch. 27; $Likutei\ Torah$, beginning of $parshas\ Pikudei$.
- 18 Mishlei 24:6.
- 19 Sukkah 45b.
- 20 On the subject of fallacious humility, see also Kesser Shem Tov, vol. 2, §315.
- 21 Mishlei 4:19.
- 22 Gate 2. As quoted in Tanya, Ch.1-2.
- 23 Yeshayahu 57:16.
- 24 In Tanya the order of the souls is reversed.
- $25\, {\rm Devarim}\, 32.9.\, {\rm Explained}\, {\rm similarly}\, {\rm in}\, {\it Igeres}\, {\it Hateshuva}, {\rm ch}, 4.$
- $26\,\mathrm{See}$ Likutei Torah, Haazinu, 74b; Derech Chaim, in the beginning.
- 27 See Tanya, ch. 37.
- $28\ \mathrm{Based}$ on Malachi 3:18, as explained in Tanya, ch. 15.

- 29 Beis Rebbe, in a footnote, contains the rebuttal of the Gra's words in a slightly different style with additional details, apparently based on a different version of the Metzaref Ha'avoda.
- 30 Shabbos, 10a. Rashi explains that prayer is referred to as "temporary life" as one prays for sustenance, healing, and peace, all related to temporal life. For an explanation according to Chassidus, see Sefer HaMaamarim, Kuntreisim vol. 1, pg 108 and further.
- 31 Vauikra 1:2.
- 32 Breishis 9:6.
- 33 Yoma, 39a.
- 34 Tana D'vei Eliyah Rabah, beginning of ch. 18.
- 35 Vayikra Rabah, 34:3.
- 36 Brachos, 21a.
- 37 Menachos, 110a.
- 38 According to this view, this intention is not indispensable, and even if one performed the mitzva casually without any particular intent, or even with a different intent not for the sake of the mitzva, one has still fulfilled the obligation.
- 39 See Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, 60:5.
- 40 Brachos, 31a. He would end up in the other end of the room because of his bowing numerous times during his prayer. The Gemara implies that he would often daven alone.
- 41 Brachos, 9b.
- 42 See Shaar HaKavanos, The Meditation of Krias Shema, section 3: "Those who wish to daven 'vasikin' and recite krias shema at sunrise must be completely righteous."
- 43 Brachos, 13b.
- 44 Igeres HaKodesh §1; Kuntres Acharon, sec. beginning "Behold, the rumor is not good."
- 45 Analogy for zman tefilah.
- 46 Analogy for the body.
- 47 Analogy for praying at the time of vasikin.
- 48 Analogy for the individuals who were vasikin.
- 49 Analogy for the common masses who were not vasikin.
- $50~\mathrm{At}$ this point, $Metzaref\,HaAvoda$ has a significant variance in the parable:

[Much time passed, and generations later it had become their nature to mimic their ancestors. This continued until there arose one talented musician, similar to the original musicians, who possessed good quality instruments. He loved the king dearly, and it bothered him very much when he saw the foolishness of his contemporaries who were ignorant of musical talent and used inferior instruments. For the sake of the king's

honor, he began imparting his knowledge to his confidants and brought them to understand their mistake and lowliness. They should not rush to the king before sunrise without first preparing themselves and their instruments.

Other select individuals who possessed some of this knowledge joined his circles, and he taught them the wisdom thoroughly until they were well-versed. Once they acquired this wisdom for $\,$ themselves, they began developing parables with which to explain at least a fragment of these concepts to the less initiated, and they attracted a small gathering. Once they had studied a little, they began tuning their instruments prior to going, and would arrive a bit late.

They segregated themselves from the misguided group, came alone to the king with their fine-tuned instruments, and played their musical pieces masterfully. The king found satisfaction in their music.

The original group resented the fact that these individuals had segregated themselves, but they didn't dare openly argue with them. They had recognized these individuals before their segregation as being wise and possessing fine character.

Later, the original members of this segregated group passed on and diminished, leaving only their students who had each learned on their own level. Others had also joined their ranks that did not possess any of their wisdom, rather merely called themselves with the same name.

This led to controversy erupting, and the hatred of the antagonists brought them to speak waywardly regarding the original wise individual who had begun the new movement, exchanging light for darkness and darkness for light.

All of this is what happened to us.]

- 51 Orach Chaim § 46.
- 52 Krovetz an acronym for kol rina vi'yeshua be'oholei tzaddikim - referring to special piyutim recited during birchos krias shema on Yomim Tovim and special Shabbosos.
- 53 See Magid Meisharim of Beis Yosef, parshas Ki Sisa.
- 54 Paraphrasing Shmuel I 14:29.



ONE TORAH IN AMERICA

At *Yud Shevat fabrengens*, the Rebbe would make an appeal for *Keren Torah*, which was first established at the *farbrengen* of 5715 (1955).

"There are two issues which must be battled in America," the Rebbe began. "One is the culture to overemphasize *parnassa* concerns. Materialism is the norm; parents worry and children are fed *limmudei chol* - usually with little bearing on their actual future livelihood.

"Another issue is the obsession with publicity. In America, actual pleasure from anything is only derived from the fact that it is known!"

The Rebbe concluded that we must take these values head on. Any *bochurim* who are willing to dedicate their lives to Torah, and not think about their parents or their *parnassa* worries, should submit their names. Anyone wishing to financially support this endeavor, should do so on the condition that they receive no public acknowledgment. Thus the two *kelipos* were combated.

(See Toras Menachem, vol. 13, p. 244)



DAILY COMMITMENT

During one yechidus with Mr. Peter Kalms (Teves, 5737), a famous British philanthropist and activist, various world issues were discussed.

Suddenly, the Rebbe said, "I would like to change the topic. It would be a good idea for you to begin setting aside time to learn Torah."

To this Mr. Kalms replied, "Certainly, Rebbe. I will set aside time twice a week for Torah study." But the Rebbe was not satisfied with this. "No, it has to be every day. It could be for just a few minutes at a time, but it must be a daily study. It is not important that you learn from the original; many *seforim* have already been translated."

"And," the Rebbe added with a smile, "If you do it in public, without keeping it a secret, others may learn from you..."



Mr. Peter Kalms

THREE

"HOW COULD YOU PASS A DAY WITHOUT LEARNING?!"

The famous *mekubal* of *Yerushalaim*, Harav Bentziyon Moshe Yair Vainshtok, took ill and was hospitalized in New York. His son, Reb Yosef Menachem, was at his side, assisting in all that he can.

"One day, in the year 5718," relates Reb Yosef Menachem, "the Rebbe, from whom I used to ask advice regarding my father's treatment, asked me what I am learning. I explained to the Rebbe that I am at my father's side from early morning until late at night, and so I simply don't have the time.

"The Rebbe would not let me go and said to me, 'Surely, you can learn three to four hours a day. How could you let a day go by without learning?! You could learn *Gemara, Mishnayos* or *Chassidus*, but I don't want to hear any excuses!'

"The Rebbe spoke with me for half an hour and did not relent, as if I was a *Lubavitcher chossid*, until I promised to learn every day. It was then that I realized how much Torah learning means to the Rebbe."



FOUR "JUST START"

The Rebbe would not only demand of chassidim to accomplish more than they were doing, but to accomplish more than they thought they were capable of.

Harav Yitchock Meir Hertz, the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Lubavitch London, reminisces, "When I was a *chosson*, I went into *yechidus*, and the Rebbe told me to finish the entire *Shas* within the first year of my *chassunah*. In a state of shock, I mumbled to the Rebbe that I don't see how I would be able to do accomplish such an undertaking, in so short a time.

The Rebbe smiled to me and replied: "Du heib on, vestu shoin gefinen tzait!" (you start; you'll already find the time). And indeed, Harav Hertz accomplished the Rebbe's directive, much to his own surprise.

GIVE ME YOUR SOUL! FIVE

On the 6th night of Chanukah, 5747, the Rebbe suddenly asked Reb Leibel Groner whether Reb Yossel HaKohen Gutnik was present at the recent farbrengen. The Rebbe immediately continued: "zog im der possuk" (tell him the possuk).

Reb Leibel was mystified. To which possuk was the Rebbe referring? The Rebbe explained, "I am referring to the *possuk* "ten li hanefesh" (give me your soul). Tell him I want a detailed list of his *shiurei Torah*!"

The next day, after Reb Yossel handed in a summary of his *shiurim*, the Rebbe called him and his father Reb

Chaim, for a special *yechidus* in *Gan Eden Hatachton*. When they entered, the Rebbe lifted both hands in the air, and said with a smile, "We live in a strange age, when a Yisroel asks for Chanukah gelt from a Kohen..."

The Rebbe turned to Reb Chaim and said, "I want you to publish a book of all your pilpulim and talks."

Then to Reb Yossel, "From you I also want Chanukah gelt. I want you to increase in your shiurim."

"Ten li hanefesh - Tell him I want a detailed list of his shiurei Torah!"

HAVING TIME



When a boy would come into the Rebbe before his *bar-mitzvah*, he would receive a special brocha. Often, the Rebbe would ask him to say a part of his drasha, on which the Rebbe would often comment on the content and delivery.

One bar-mitzvah bochur was asked by the Rebbe what he prepared to say for the bar-mitzvah, and upon his reply was asked to begin reciting the *ma'amer*.

When the bochur reached the part where the ma'amar says, "Yidden say to Hashem, 'We want to learn Torah, but we have no time!", the Rebbe stopped him and asked lovingly, "And what is with someone who does have the time? He certainly must learn! And now, since you have the time, are you going to learn?"

SEVEN

THE TELEPHONE - LIKE ON SHABBOS

Reb Ya'akov Yosef Gurkov *a"h*, of London, served as a fundraiser for the Lubavitch *mosdos*. Since his work was very time consuming, he asked the Rebbe whether he should lessen his learning schedule in order to spend more time fundraising.

The Rebbe answered:

"Generally speaking, it is safe to assume that it is the work of the *yetzer hara*, convincing you that you do not have time for both. If indeed it is necessary, you

could catch up on your learning during *leil shishi* (Thursday night)."

On another occasion, the Rebbe told a Shliach:

"When you learn your daily *kvias itim laTorah*, the telephone should be like on Shabbos. It may ring and ring, but it cannot be answered."

(Hiskashrus, issue 359)



YOU DRAG ME IN! EIGHT

A well-known Lubavitch activist related part of a yechidus, from Tishrei 5737. The Rebbe spoke with great anguish.

"I never hear from you regarding your daily Torah learning. I understand from this that you indeed do not learn on a daily basis.

"This puts a question mark on your entire work. It is well known that the Tzemach Tzedek dealt with thousands of chassidim, and nevertheless he still found time to write a wealth of divrei Torah. Although we are not the Tzemach Tzedek, we are able to accomplish something of his level!"

The Rebbe raised his voice, and continued, "Not to have structured times for learning iz a vilde zach, un a vilde hanhoge (is a reckless thing, and a rash behavior).

"In fact, when there is no learning, the activities themselves suffer as well. We see time and again that those who have set times for learning every day are more successful..."

"And the most frightening thing of all is that you schlep me into this! You justify the fact that you're not learning by saying that you are doing my work!"



When there is no learning, the activities themselves suffer as well. We see time and again that those who have set times for learning every day are more successful..."

NINE A LUBAVITCHER SHUL

Beis torah ubeis tefillah (house of study and prayer). This is the phrase used by the Rebbe, to describe the Shul at 770, almost every time it was mentioned.

And so it was that the Rebbe demanded from all Lubavitcher *shuls*, that they serve not only as a place of *davening*, as a classic American 'synagogue', but rather as a center of Torah learning.

Harav Tuvia Blau, the founder and Rov of the Chabad Shul in the Sanhedria neighborhood of Yerushalayim, had a personal yechidus, in Tishrei 5728 (1967). He heard from the Rebbe the following words:

"Every Shul, especially one in Eretz Yisroel, must have a *shiur torah* on a daily basis.

"Moreover, a Shul which has a connection to our holy *Rebbeim*, is obliged to also have a *shiur* in Chassidus every day."

(Heichel Menachem vol. 1, p. 221)



TEN

"IN THE MIDDLE OF THE KINNUS TORAH?!"

A gathering where Anash and Bochurim would share novel Torah thoughts, coined *Kinnus* Torah, was first instituted in 5718. The Rebbe held the *kinnus* very dear, and showed his appreciation by delivering a *chiddush* Torah in the Farbrengen preceding each gathering.

During one such *kinnus* in 770, *Isru Chag Shavuos* 5726, Reb Yeshayohu Hertzel, a *chosson*, and his future father-in-law, HaRav Friedman, were conversing outside. Unexpectedly, the Rebbe passed by.

Stopping where the two were standing, the Rebbe motioned with his hand, as if to exclaim, "What are you doing here?!" HaRav Friedman pardoned himself, saying that they were discussing issues related to the *chassunah*. In response, the Rebbe exclaimed, "In the middle of the *Kinnus* Torah?!", and repeated again, "In the middle of the *Kinnus* Torah?!"

ELEVEN

COMMUNICATING WITH HASHEM



You are now communicating with Hashem through His Torah! You don't even know if it's an important call...

At most major *fabrengens* in the early years, one *sicha* would focus on the role of women. Oftentimes, the

Rebbe would empower the women to take charge of their children's chinuch.

"The righteous women of our age must educate their children not to follow the ways of their fathers and grandfathers!" the Rebbe declared at the Moshiach Seudah of Pesach 5723 (1963).

"These men are too engrossed in parnassa. Even their Torah study has lost its vigor; it's done by rote, without life, without a niggun. In bygone days, it was unheard of to learn Torah without a singsong.

"As soon as the telephone rings," the Rebbe continued, "they pick it up. Why do you pick it up? You are now communicating with Hashem through His Torah! You don't even know if it's an important call...

"The solution lies with the mothers, to help their children rebel against their fathers. The obligation to honor one's father doesn't apply here. Indeed, the fathers may be educated by their own children."

(Toras Menachem, vol. 36, p. 334)

TWELVE

CONQUERING THE WORLD WITH LEARNING TORAH

At the famous farbrengen of Chamisho Asar B'shvat 5731, the Rebbe said to "conquer the world with learning Torah."

From the archives of Harav Ephraim Wolf, a great Lubavitch askan in Eretz Yisroel, we find some of the activities that were done in the aftermath of this unique farbrengen.

In a telephone call from Harav Chodakov, on 4 Nissan 5731, he was directed to utilize *Chol Hamoed Pesach*, to involve as much of anash as possible in learning. The next day, he received an instruction to shorten the leave given to the kollel yungeleit, so that they begin learning immediately after Yom Tov.

In a fascinating *yechidus* with the *Gerrer* Rebbe, the Leiv Simchah, on 30 Shvat 5731, the Rebbe told him:

"This year on Chamisho Asar B'shvat, I was at the Ohel, and I 'was told' to farbreng. And so, I spoke about learning Torah. It turned out, that a few days later, there was an attempt to enforce yeshivah bochurim to sign up for the military in the U.S.A. It was only due to "conquering of the world with learning" that this was withheld!"

THIRTEEN

I SIMPLY HAVE A TA'AYVAH!

One of the new ideas which were introduced by the Rebbe in Lubavitch is the concept of a *kollel*. The reason for this, the Rebbe explained at the *farbrengen* of *Chof Av* 5733: "I simply have a *ta'ayvah* (desire) that *yungerleit* should sit and learn!"

The Rebbe closely monitored the learning and development of the *yungerlait*, and would sometimes express disappointment to the *Roshei Hakollel*.

In a 5735 yechidus with the Rosh Hakollel Tzemach Tzedek of Yerushalaim, Harav Chaim Sholom Deitch,

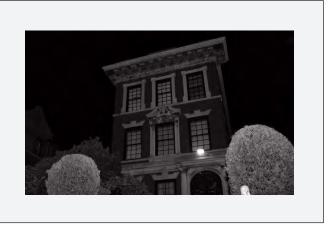
the Rebbe said the following: "In Lubavitch and in Kremenchug there were no *kollelim*. The purpose of my instituting the *kollel* was solely to enable those with an enthusiasm ("*koch*") in learning, to continue to do so.

"When a *Kollel yungerman* walks down the street, he should be stopping someone to say, 'Today I have discovered a new explanation for the opinion of the *Tanah Sumchus*!"

"I simply have a ta'ayvah (desire) that yungerleit should sit and learn!"

FOURTEEN

WHAT THE REBBE DOES ON SHABBOS



"The Lubavitcher chassidim think that their Rebbe sleeps on **Shabbos**, let me show you what really happens." Reb Yosef Menachem Vainshtok relates:

During the year 5718, I would stay for many *Shabbosos* at the home of the Bostoner Rebbe, who lived directly across the street from the Rebbe.

One Shabbos, after midnight, the Bostoner Rebbe called me over to a corner of the house and said to me, "The Lubavitcher chassidim think that their Rebbe sleeps on *Shabbos*, let me show you what really happens."

He then showed me that by standing at a certain angle, it is possible to peer into the Rebbe's dining room, because one of the blinds was slightly damaged.

The Rebbe was sitting and learning. Every so often we would see the Rebbe get up to get a sefer from the bookcase. We stood there for three hours in silence, watching the Rebbe delve into the depths of Torah.

"I was shocked. I had dealt with many leading Rabbonim in the past, but in those tumultuous years, in war torn Europe, who had the peace of mind to care for their learning?!



FIFTEEN

A LOVE FOR TORAH

Reb Binyomin Klein relates:

"As a mazkir, I saw the Rebbe's love for seforim. Whenever we would bring in a new *sefer*, the Rebbe would stop all that he was doing, and read the sefer from cover to cover.

"In fact, this often left us in a predicament. We would have letters regarding health matters, shidduchim awaiting approval etc, and a new sefer that came in. If we would hand in the sefer, we knew that it would hold up the Rebbe, but our job was to hand in whatever came in. And so, we would watch the scene repeat itself; the Rebbe would take the sefer, and not let go until it he finished going through it."

"I distinctly remember once being called into the Rebbe's room at 3:05 pm, and on my way, a renowned rov presented me with a new sefer. As expected, the Rebbe immediately took it and began learning.

"Ten minutes later, the Rebbe came out for minchah. As the Rebbe walked past, the rov asked the Rebbe to comment on the sefer. The Rebbe turned around and replied, "Why do you not mention the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* once in the entire *sefer*?"

"He was shocked. This was a thick sefer. How had the Rebbe looked through the entire work in ten minutes?"

SIXTEEN

THE REBBE'S CHOL HAMOED

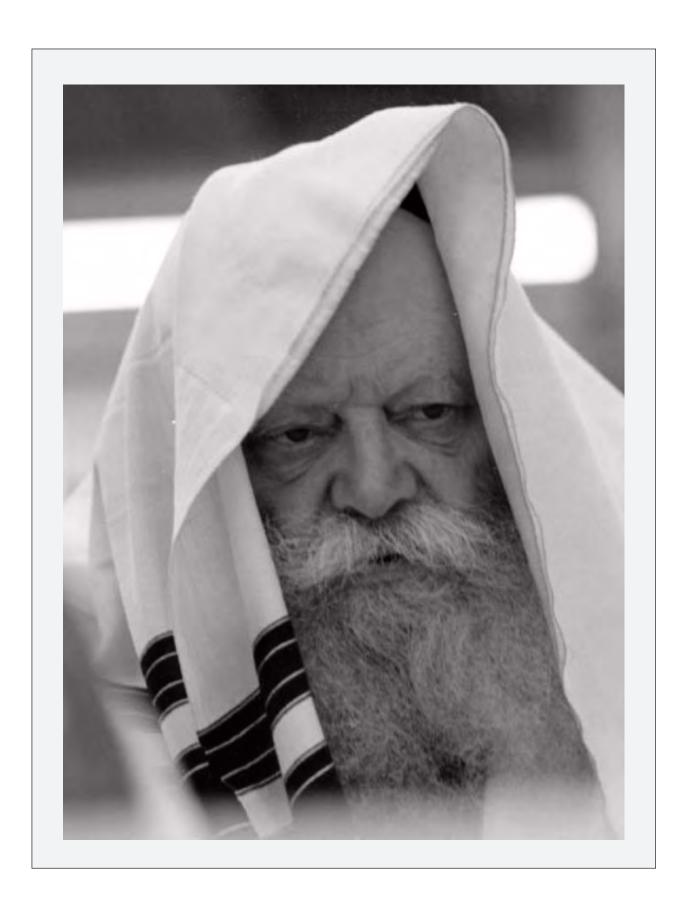
Reb Yosef Yitzchok Groner, Shliach to Charlotte, North Carolina, relates:

"As children, my twin brother Mendy and I would often play in the corridor next to the Rebbe's room. The bochurim and Anash revered this corridor, and called it Gan Eden Hatachton, but as children of the mazkir, this was where we spent our afternoons. Consequently, we would sometimes see things that others did not.

"One picture is stuck in my mind to this day.

"It was a chol hamoed, and the Rebbe had just come up from davening, still wearing his tallis. The Rebbe rushed into his holy room, took out a large sefer, a Gemara or a Shulchan Aruch, and began learning.

"The image of the Rebbe, still in his tallis, his holy face aglow, swaying over the sefer is something that will never leave me."



SEVENTEEN

BITTUL TORAH

When Rebbetzin Chana finally left communist Russia, the Rebbe traveled to Paris to meet his mother, after not having seen her for almost twenty years. In Paris, the Rebbe met with the vaad hatzalah, to assist her in her immigration to the U.S.A.

Reb S. Lerner, the clerk of the vaad hatzala related: "One day, the Rebbe walked into my office and asked me to assist him in sorting out the appropriate documents. The Rebbe asked me how much of his time I assume it will steal, for he wants to plan his schedule accordingly.

"The Rebbe then said, 'I want to make sure it will not cause me too much bittul Torah!'

"I was shocked. I had dealt with many leading Rabbonim in the past, but in those tumultuous years, in war torn Europe, who had the peace of mind to care for their learning?!

"Twelve years later, I was at a farbrengen of the Rebbe, and the Rebbe called me up to his place. He had recognized me in the crowd, and he wished to express his heartfelt *hakoras hatov* for the work I had done for his mother." P



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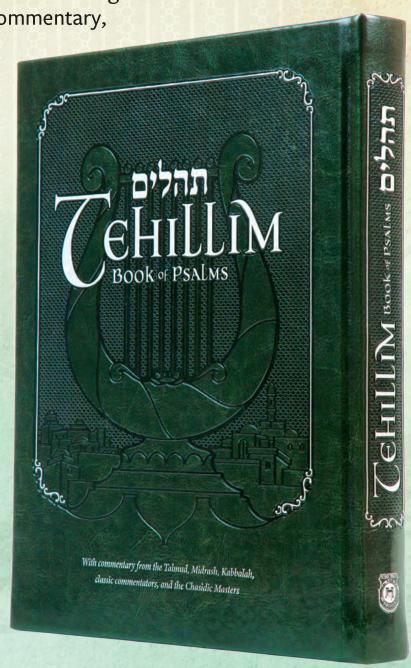
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