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Perspectives

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WHO NEEDS CHASSIDUS?

*Monumental Interview
with Reb Yoel Kahn*

UNDER-AGE CHINUCH (II)

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz

RECOGNIZING THE PRIORITY OF THE TIME

New Letters of the Rebbe from "The Folders"

THE INTERNET: HEAVENLY BLESSING OR TOOL OF DESTRUCTION?

HaRav Yosef Heller



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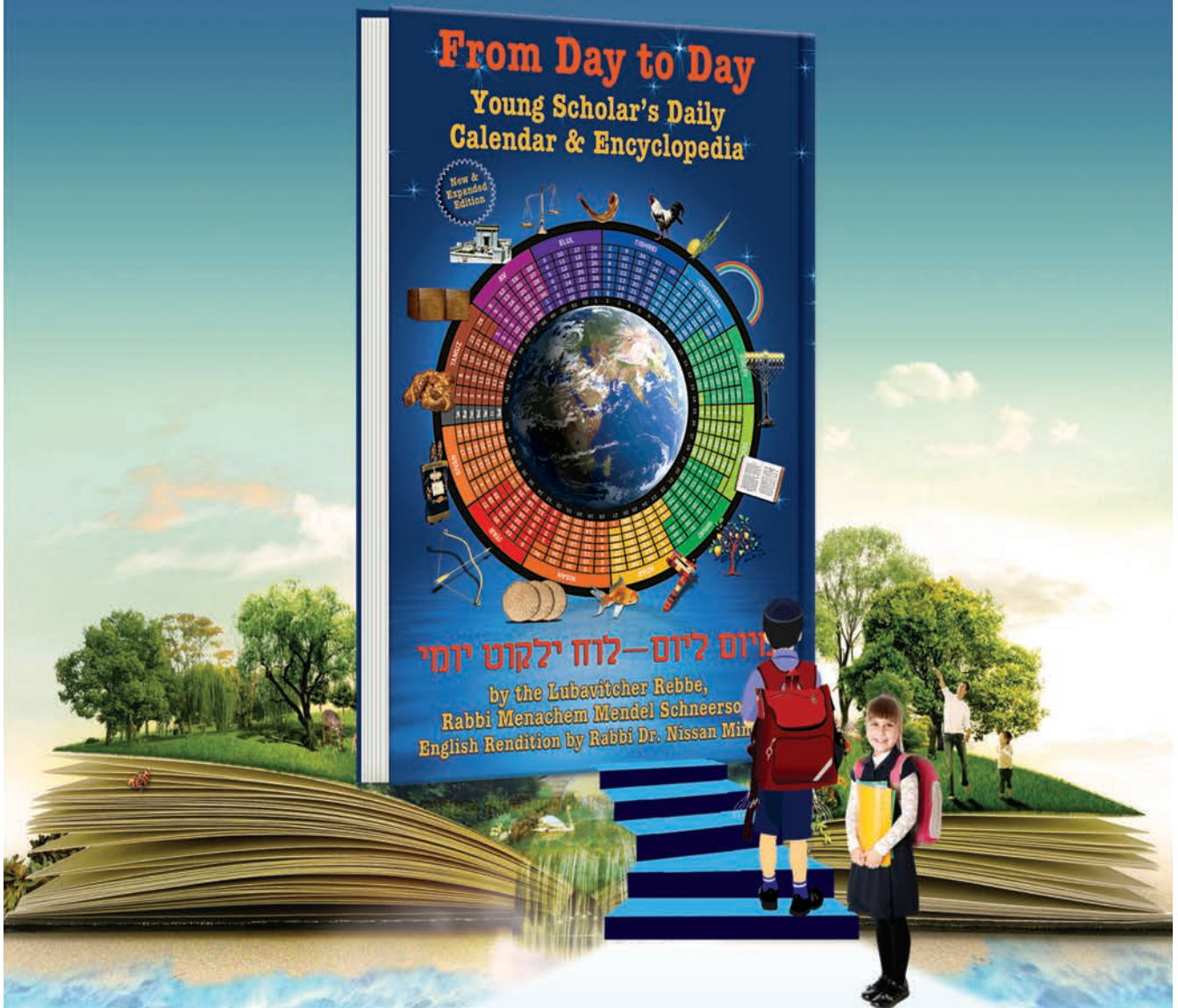
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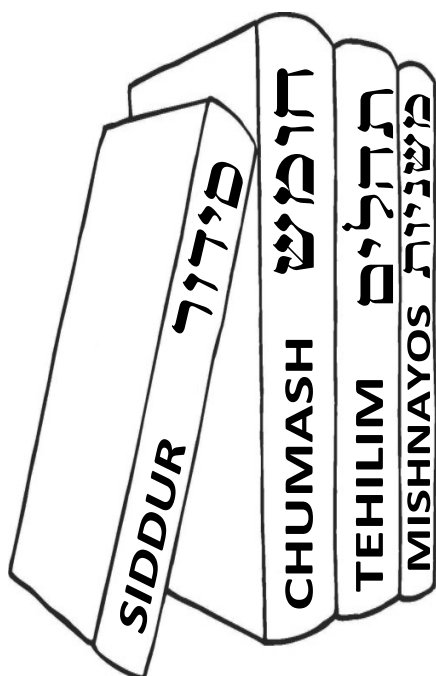
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■ FOREWORD ■

It is our pleasure to present you with the second issue of **Perspectives**.

Soon after the first issue was released the overwhelming feedback began coming in. Anash from across the world called and wrote, thanking us for a much-needed publication. Rabbonim and *mechanchim* send their thanks for an insightful magazine that addresses some of the issues they face daily.

Many people have asked us why we do not publish a regular magazine with quality content for *anash*. While we do have plans for a regular magazine (aside from our popular Shabbos table companion **Lma'an Yishme'u**), Perspectives has come to serve a different purpose. More than to provide quality reading material, its goal is to bring in-depth, thought-provoking timely articles to *anash* who are looking for more.

We live in a challenging time period. It is over twenty years since we last heard the Rebbe's voice, and many of us are desperately searching for some direction in these trying days. As we prepare for the imminent arrival of Moshiach, it is our holy duty to tackle the final challenges that will hasten the *geulah*. We may not and cannot ignore the issues that face us today, and we may not and cannot lower our heads in despair. We must, and we are therefore enabled, to rise to the task left for us by our holy Rebbe.

We invite each one of you to share your perspective with the rest of *anash* – in an essay, short thought, or letter of response, which we hope to include IYH in the next issue.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger
Editor



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Recognizing the Priority of the Time

The following never previously published letter of the Rebbe is from the archives of Rabbi Nissan Mindel, the long time secretary of the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe and author of many works.

This letter will be printed, together with many other fascinating files, in "The Folders," an upcoming release by Nissan Mindel Publications. The letter was kindly shared with us by his son-in-law Rabbi Sholom Ber Schapiro to whom we owe our thanks.

By the Grace of G-d
21st Kislev, 5733
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. Yehudah Stulman
777 United States Plaza
New York, N.Y.

Greetings and Blessings:

Many thanks for your letter of Nov 15th. I appreciated your taking time out of your busy schedule to write to me at length, explaining your views and activities.

Needless to say, I welcome your remark to the effect that basically your views coincide with mine. Yet, though I do not care to indulge in polemics, least of all in a letter, the overriding importance of the subject matter calls for a response. I must state that in the final analysis what really matters is not so much agreement in principle as how this expresses itself in practical results.

Perhaps the best way I can make myself clearer is by means of a parable. If some may object that the assessment is overly pessimistic, I can only say – would it were so.

When a house is on fire on all sides, and some people are trapped in it, it is the elementary duty of anyone within reach, even if not a relative of those inside the burning house, let alone a close relative, to do everything possible to save the endangered persons and help put out the flames. Clearly, this is no time for any person in the immediate

vicinity to say that he has more important business to do, being engaged in a project that would benefit the entire neighborhood, or the entire city, or even humanity at large.

Starting with this premise, with which I am sure you will agree, I am also certain that we are both in agreement also on the principle that the Jewish people must not be permitted to forfeit its identity as a unique nation among mankind. Even if its physical existence were not endangered, there can be no doubt it is spiritually endangered. It is common knowledge that we are losing daily countless young men and women, flowering Jewish youths, because of their appalling ignorance of what Jewishness is and what is a Jew. Yet we cannot afford to lose a single Jew, especially after having lost one third of our people in the holocaust, i.e. one third numerically; infinitely more in terms of our spiritual heritage.



Perhaps the best way I can make myself clearer is by means of a parable. If some may object that the assessment is overly pessimistic, I can only say – would it were so.



It is also a well known fact that existing educational facilities are woefully inadequate not only to provide full measure of Jewish education for all Jewish children and adolescents, but even a bare minimum. Means are lacking even to establish a mere contact with vast majority of Jewish students in the campuses and elsewhere to make them aware that they owe it to themselves and to our people to remain Jews. Most of them are either completely alienated from our people or on the road to complete alienation, intermarriage, and assimilation.

Add to this the fact that the birthrate is relatively smaller among Jews than among non-Jews (a particularly alarming factor also in the Land of Israel), and other factors contributing to the erosion – and there can be no gainsay that the above parable is unfortunately very realistic, to say the least.

It follows that every Jew, as the first of kin of his fellow Jews, must consider it his primary duty to help save those who are trapped in the "burning house." There is only one way to do it: to concentrate all resources and efforts on the expansion of educational facilities and on all activities directed toward awakening Jewish consciousness within the broad ranks of our endangered youth.

At the same time, similar efforts must be directed towards bolstering Jewish consciousness among parents. For, despite the so-called generation gap, Jewish parents and grandparents have traditionally played a vital role in the preservation of the Jewish heritage.

Only after the fullest needs of Jewish education of the young and of the adults have been taken care of, and only if there is still a surplus of resources, time and personal effort, can the question arise as to what to do with that surplus. In other words, it all boils down to a simple question of priority: the vital, life-saving needs of our brothers and sisters versus any long-range, or even short-range plans – however ambitious or

promising- for the welfare of underdeveloped countries, or humanity at large.

A further point. If a Jew should declare that he has not time to worry about the survival of the Jewish people, or to help save Jewish children, because he is too busy with personal affairs – we can only feel sorry for his selfish attitude. But we can also hope that inasmuch as he is a Jew and possesses a soul which is "verily a part of G-dliness Above" (a basic doctrine in Chabad), he will in time renounce his selfishness for the benefit of his people. But if the reason for refusing to do his share for the survival of his people is based on the claim that he is engaged in a humanitarian effort of global proportion, etc., there is less chance that he will turn his attention to the immediate needs of brethren. This is not to detract from the merit of the humanitarian cause the Jew may be engaged in. Yet, however commendable it may be per se, it must take a secondary place in the present situation.

You, my friend, are an idealist, but you are also practical businessman, and a successful businessman. So I will take the liberty of asking you a straight, practical question, hoping you will forgive the stark candor: how many Jews, especially children and young adults, have been saved from assimilation and loss to our people in the last decade as a result of the plans and projects to which you refer in your letter?

I have no doubt, of course, that you made financial contributions to Jewish causes during this period. But I also have no doubt that had your best efforts been channeled towards what should be your primary concern, as I see it, many many more Jewish would have been saved.

I trust you will bear with me if some of the expressions in this lengthy letter appear overly harsh. I believe friends should have a right to indulge incomplete candor, occasionally at least.

To conclude on a bright note, now that we are about to celebrate the Festival of Lights by lighting the Chanukah candles in increasing numbers, symbolizing the light of the Torah and Mitzvot, as Scripture defines tree light; "For a Mitzva is a lamp and the Torah is light,"

May I express the fervent hope that each one of us, in the midst of all our people, should kindle ever more lights and spread ever more light to the fullest G-d-given capacity.

With prayerful wishes for a bright and inspiring Chanukah and always,

Cordially,

*Every Jew, as
the first of kin of
his fellow Jews,
must consider it
his primary duty
to help save those
who are trapped
in the "burning
house."*



Reb Yoel Kahn



Who Needs Chassidus?

Reb Yoel. The name says it all. It would be safe to say that there is not a Lubavitcher, man woman or child, who is not aware of his stature. That is, besides one great Lubavitcher – Reb Yoel himself.

At his place, directly across from the Rebbe, Reb Yoel stood for forty years, absorbing, integrating and then transmitting on paper thousands of hours of Torah. Even when in the latter years he was assisted by his students, nothing was printed without his approval. The Rebbe had fully entrusted his written Torah in his hands.

Apart from his work as *chozer*, Reb Yoel is the undisputed teacher of teachers of Chabad, and unquestionably the man who influenced Lubavitch today more than any other chossid. No *yungerman* or *bochur* today is not a *talmid* of his, or of one of his *talmidim*.

Yet another revolution spearheaded by this gentle, lovable genius: the transformation of *hafotzas hamayonos*. Through the printed word, and via audio shiurim, Reb Yoel's lucid explanations of *Chassidus* have found their way into tens of thousands of minds and hearts world over. Indeed, to the thousands who fill the stadium in Eretz Yisroel during his visits, he is their life cord, connecting them to *Chassidus*.

How he simultaneously managed to fashion

the revolutionary *Sefer HaArachim* (popularly pronounced as *Sefer HaErchim*), forging an original path in expounding *Chassidus*; to serve as a master mentor to hundreds of *bochurim*; to be active in attracting thousands from outside Chabad circles; is unfathomable. How at his age, and despite his health condition, he still travels the world and delivers ten *shiurim* a week in New York, advises the publication of the Rebbe's Torah and publishes periodical articles, *farbrengs* with the *bochurim* and invests painstaking work on *Sefer HaErchim*, can be explained only one way: his true admiration and love for his Rebbe.

■ ■ ■

Before I had the *chutzpa* to ask for an interview, I discussed it with one of his students. He suggested I spend a Friday night with the *mashpia*, and only then propose my request. Let me share the experience.

After *Mincha* on *erev Shabbos*, upstairs in "the little *zal*" in 770, Reb Yoel sits down with the *bochurim*, and begins, in a throaty voice, to teach a *sicha*. I am told he sat till late last night *farbrenging* in Borough Park, and has worked all morning on *Sefer HaErchim*. The fatigue is apparent. Within minutes, however, his voice begins to carry – as if the *sicha* itself, which he is now reading for the hundredth time, invigorates him. Soon enough, he

is plowing through the holy words with the lively energy of a *bochur*.

The *shiur* lasts well past two hours, through which he patiently deals with difficulties posed to him, expounding, elaborating and elucidating. Apparent on all sides is the love and respect the *bochurim* have for him. Now, after *davening*, multitudes throughout the bustling building meet, greet, and exchange trivial talk; upstairs, surrounded by his eager listeners on a peaceful island of his own, Reb Yoel takes them on a journey through the depths of *Chassidus* and the innovative insights of our Rebbe.

The *shiur* draws to a close. As Reb Yoel clarifies a textual difficulty for one *bochur*, the others prepare for *seder niggunim*. Reb Yoel, renowned for his phenomenal aptitude in Chabad *negina*, leads the singing. I cannot help but be reminded of those sweet days, when his warm voice would lead the *niggunim* at the Rebbe's *farbrengens*.

The walk home is difficult for the *mashpia*. Surrounded by his closest *talmidim*, he stops to rest every few blocks. Yet while his weary feet may rest, his mind is working ferociously. He is still talking about the second addition to footnote number 37...

He stops for a moment, and I decide that this is my chance. I bend over, and begin to make my request. Immediately, I hear someone hissing through my ear: "Not now! He's thinking..." I apologize, and await the next opportunity.

We make our way to his modest home, where the table has been set for twelve – for the lucky *bochurim* who are going to join him at his table this week. It won't be long, and the folding chairs will be brought out, and so will the standing space be utilized. I learn that the not-so-lucky *bochurim* also want to be here...

Reb Yoel has barely tasted his food, and he begins talking. Again he is talking about the *sicha*, but this time from another perspective. He describes the *farbrengen* at which this *sicha* was heard, the Rebbe's expressions, the *niggunim*, and the questions that he later asked the Rebbe. He is filling in the picture, and in full color. For fifty minutes, while forty *bochurim* sit and stand in silence, he walks them through the annals of *Chassidus*, making associations with previous *maamorim* they had learned, and spicing that discussion with anecdotes of *chassidim* he had known.

A *niggun* is begun, but stops short. Reb Yoel had smiled softly, and motioned with his head. He begins to teach the *niggun* in its correct version, but doesn't stop there. He begins to talk about the *niggun* itself. "What do you think?" he asks his students. "Is this a *niggun* of devotion, or of yearning?" And so he teaches the subtle nuances of Chabad *negina*.

A question is asked. Something about Reb Sheiel [Bruk], Reb Yoel's *mashpia* from Tel Aviv in the 1940s. I don't know the *mashpia*, I don't understand the question, but even I can see the pleasure spreading across his face. Within moments we all fly back in time, to Tel Aviv, and make our acquaintance with the figures of his youth – Reb Meishke [Gourary], Reb Nochum [Goldschmidt] and Reb Chaim Moshe [Alperovitz]. With his acute sensitivity to the subtle varieties of *chassidishe avoda*, he distinguishes between the diverse ways in which they experienced their learning, their *davening* and their *farbrengens*. The clock ticks and moves clockwise, but we are moving anticlockwise, as the pioneering luminaries of Lubavitch themselves are now invited to the table – Shilem [Kuratin] and Chatshe [Feigin], Chonye [Morozov] and Itche [Horovitz] *der Masmid*. Swept up in the glory and greatness, for a moment we forget New York 2013.

***When the Torah
teaches us of a
mode of behavior,
its purpose is not
merely to instruct
us in our behavior
but to reveal the
truth of the matter.***

It's time to *bensch*. I know it's now or never. I ask the *chozer* if he will sit with me, for an interview for the English-speaking public. He has been interviewed in Hebrew numerous times, I plead, but the English-speaking Chabad has yet to enjoy a comprehensive interview with the *mashpia*. He smiles, and apologizes: he doesn't speak the language... I assure him that I speak Yiddish, and will translate.

"Nu, so ask... "

"No, no," I say, "it's for a few hours..."

Dozens of wrinkles spread up his ample forehead, and a spark ignites in his eyes. "Fine," he replies. "Make it Sunday."

A *bochur* whispers to him that Sunday he will be busy with editing the new *sefer* on *Tanya*, but Reb Yoel assures me that he will take me to his office when he has some time.

■ ■ ■

Two weeks pass, and time has been found. Accompanied by a student, I go up to his office at 788 Eastern Parkway, the building adjacent to 770. The room is small and messy. Hundreds of *seforim* lie earmarked, open and in piles. As I enter he seems not to notice. He is otherwise occupied. The great *chossid* is sitting by a PC with Microsoft Word, typing furiously.

I later learn that after his eight o'clock shiur to the *bochurim* at 770, he immediately makes his way here, where he will remain the entire day. He works hours that would be back-breaking for a man half his age, on *Sefer HaErchim*, the encyclopedia of *Chabad Chassidus* - the task designated to him by the Rebbe, for "he has been given unique capabilities."

He still has not noticed me, and I take the time to watch. His brow furrowed, he reaches for the delete button, and as I watch, entire pages of intricate notes are erased. The differences between the various drafts would be detected by few, but Reb Yoel's vigilance for precision is immovable. Oh, how some of his students would wish to get their hands on some of the disregarded drafts, and pore over his "mistakes"...



Photo: lubavitcharchives.com

I was already regretting my *chutzpa*. How could I take his time? I turned to go, but it was too late. He had noticed me.

Reb Yoel's white beard is flowing down his chest, and his forehead doesn't end. He turns to me with a kindly smile, his wise eyes twinkling, as if ready for a conversation with an equal. I was at first overwhelmed. I was looking into the eyes that directly faced the Rebbe's for forty years.

But there was something so human about him. Perhaps it was the pencil sticking out of his front shirt pocket, shifting clumsily as he spoke. I could not help but think of what insight has passed through that pencil over sixty years.

I cleared my throat, and began:

As an opening question we would like to ask: What is the point of learning Chassidus? Chassidus introduced a beautiful and vibrant path of avodas HaShem which elevates our day-to-day life – but why is it necessary to study the ideas behind them? Can't we be good chassidim just by following the directives of Chassidus?

Reb Yoel smiles, removes his pencil from his pocket, and begins his shiur:

In order to answer this question we first need to take a look at the nature of the Torah's teachings in general. When the Torah teaches us a mode of behavior, its purpose is not merely to instruct us in our behavior, but to reveal the truth of the matter.

I was once speaking to a Yid who took an interest

in *Chassidus*, but from his questions I gathered that he had an altogether different understanding of what *Chassidus* is about. To him, the ways of *Chassidus* simply added up to guidance on how a person should behave, though in a more elevated manner than otherwise.

I told him: The fact that $2 + 2 = 4$ results in many resolutions and decisions. Would you say that this principle is an instruction on how we should think? Suppose there were no people on the planet, would the principle still stand true? Of course it would! – because this is the true nature which *HaShem*

created in our world. The same is true of *avodas HaShem*: the virtues taught in the Torah are true and are a result of a deeper understanding of the world.

In other words: the first principle we have to understand is that *Chassidus* is not a mere self-help, personality-development manual. *Chassidus* teaches us to realize that the world does not begin and end within ourselves. The truth is beyond us and independent of us.

To explain this practically:

The Torah instructs a person not to follow the desires of his heart, certainly when this would involve an explicit prohibition. Without *Chassidus* this is a tremendous struggle. In front of his eyes he sees all the temptations of this world, and though he wishes

to enjoy them, he is forced to abstain. He employs various tricks to counter his temptation: he will delve into Torah, remember the reward awaiting him in *Gan Eden* or the punishment in *Gehinnom*, or will consider the negative worldly consequences that will result if he succumbs to the temptation.

■ ■ ■

*When discussing
quality of avodas
HaShem, even a
minute difference
is a new world.
A little bit
of authentic
recognition
and emotion is
infinitely greater
than a superficial
belief constituting
repeating words or
thoughts.*

■ ■ ■

In contrast to this approach, *Chassidus* reveals the true nature of things and cancels the conflict from the beginning. When one studies *Chassidus*, he comes to recognize that this very object which he desires is not so desirable after all. When he understands that the pleasure of this item is essentially an expression of Divine energy in a severely concealed form, he is naturally drawn to seek out something that is powered by more Divine energy than this trivial physical temptation.

Furthermore, *Chassidus* explains that everything in the world is created for the purpose of the Torah and the Yidden. It is therefore impossible that there exists anything that is a contradiction to them. This is true both for permissible items and for forbidden ones.

With permissible items the objective is that they be used for G-dly service, that they be raised up to *HaShem*, like a *korbon*. Forbidden things were created for the sole purpose that we overcome our temptation and refrain from indulging in them. They arouse within us a greater love to *HaShem* than there would have been without the challenge, like a rushing river after a dam is opened.

When one recognizes that an enticing object was created to enable him to serve *HaShem* – either by using it for a *mitzva*, or, if it is forbidden, by abstaining from it – the temptation is far weaker, since that object has lost its lure.

In other words: *Chassidus* expresses the truth and reality of the Torah's orders. Of course one can and must observe *mitzvos* even without a deeper understanding, but there is no question that this understanding makes it much easier and more real.

I can now see what the bochurim are raving about when they talk of Reb Yoel's clarity. Even I understood. However, I am not satisfied. I dare to

probe further.

Okay, we know of many chassidim in earlier generations whose lives fully exemplified the ideals of Chassidus. Today, let us be honest,

due to yeridas hadoros, such chassidim are few and far between. What then is the purpose of a comprehensive study of Chassidus for the average person, if it will anyway not produce a genuine chossid? Seemingly one would be better off simply reading inspirational passages and receiving practical advice.

The truth is that having the correct beliefs is in itself a necessity. One cannot say, "As long as I observe all the *mitzvos*, what difference does it make if I believe in the

Thirteen Principles of Faith?" We need to have the right understanding.

To highlight this I will share with you a story, but I must first preface:

When the Frieddiker Rebbe first arrived in America he proclaimed, "*America is nisht andersh!*" – meaning that the very same Torah lifestyle of Europe should now flourish in America. He toiled assiduously, yet fifteen years later there still remained a trace of the American perspective, that one must consider the demands of the modern world. This belief even penetrated, albeit in a more subtle form, some families of chassidim.

For example, in the *cheder* in Europe children were not taught any secular subjects, even basic math. A young child knew nothing other than *HaShem* and his Torah, and the *Chumash* or *Gemara* that he was learning. But in America, in order to attract children from other homes, a small

■ ■ ■

*Thus the study
of Chassidus is
vital to practicing
mitzvaim.
Without the above
understanding one
cannot practice
mitzvaim with full
dedication and
care.*

■ ■ ■

amount of secular studies was included on the side.

The Rebbe spoke several times about how young children, "breath without sin," must be involved only in holiness, in learning *HaShem's* Torah. To those who claimed that it was necessary to teach them a trade, the Rebbe would answer that this could be taught to them much later, when they were closer to that time.

In a fiery *sicha* on Simchas Torah 5715 (1954), the Rebbe said that the only reason for admitting secular subjects was to attract outsiders, but for their own children, chassidim should want the maximum degree of *kedusha* possible, and have them learn only holy subjects.

I remember after that *farbrengen* a number of parents gathered together to discuss the issue. One chossid exclaimed that whatever had been done until then was a mistake and now they must immediately hire a *melamed* to teach their children only *limudei kodesh*.

Another parent countered, "In general, I agree with what you're saying. However the children also

have to learn a bit of math, geography, history, and so on. They can't be completely ignorant about the world." The first parent replied that the children could learn any of these subjects later on, and besides, it wouldn't be so terrible if they wouldn't know about them at all. He argued: "Since in truth the only reality is *HaShem*, what value do these matters have? Aside from Torah and *mitzvos* there is nothing that the children need to know!"

Hearing this, the second parent retorted, "You're speaking so loftily as if you were on the level of Reb Binyomin Kletzker, who lived his entire life in an environment of *HaShem's* unity!"

The first chossid told his colleague, "You're an *apikores!*"

His friend, taken aback, wondered, "If I'm not Reb Binyomin Kletzker, I'm an *apikores?!?*"

The first *chossid* replied, "Surely so! In *belief*, I am no different than Reb Binyomin Kletzker. In fact, if I would perceive the oneness of *HaShem* one iota differently than him, that would smack of *kefira*. The difference between us is in *feeling*: Whatever



Photo: lubavitcharchives.com

Reb Binyomin Kletzker believed in his mind, he felt in his heart, but I struggle with *taivos* of the *yetzer hara*.

"However, when it comes to my children, I have no *yetzer hara*. Every parent wants for his child the best that he can imagine. If so, the thought to educate your child in worldly matters stems from a *belief* that there is something real besides *HaShem*. That is a serious problem. I therefore say to you: if you cannot serve *HaShem* as Reb Binyomin did, that is understood. But if you disagree with him, and this expresses itself if you differ from him while making objective decisions, then indeed you have an outlook of *kefira*."

It's the same with *Chassidus* in general. Although it may not change the entire person, the recognition of *Elokus* itself will certainly leave its impact when he is making major decisions. The objective truth will force him to take the right path in the education of his children, in the basic standards of his home and the like.

Reb Yoel had finished talking, and turned to his *sefer*. I sat there in silence, mulling over his words for a few minutes. Pretty sharp. There's no question about that.

I ask Reb Yoel if I may continue. He doesn't hear. After a few attempts, I catch his attention, and he readily agrees.

Does that mean that in our generation the concepts in Chassidus are purely theoretical, with no practical implications in our daily lives? Isn't the ultimate purpose of studying Chassidus to refine a person's character?

Not at all! That was not my intention at all. Even an average individual in our times is affected by an understanding of *Chassidus*, for the understanding that he recognizes in his mind will have a direct impact on his actions.

Let us begin with the impact of *Chassidus* on the three central elements of creation: *HaShem*, *Yidden*, and the Torah. In each of these areas, *Chassidus* transformed the perspective of a *Yid* to such a degree that it changes his day-to-day behavior. This is true in varying degrees for every individual who learns *Chassidus*.

When discussing the *quality* of a person's *avodas HaShem*, even a minute difference is a whole new world. A little bit of authentic recognition and emotion is infinitely superior to a superficial belief in which one merely repeats words or thoughts.

It should be noted that although everyone can benefit from recognizing the worldview of *Chassidus*, there are different levels with regard to how essential it is to their *avoda*.

Just as *Chassidus* was revealed in recent generations to combat the darkness of *golus* that is increasingly challenging in these later times, whereas in previous generations it wasn't needed to the same extent, so too within each generation: people vary in the extent to which their *neshama* shines in their life, and accordingly how much they need *Chassidus*.

Every individual will grow by learning *Chassidus*; for some it is beneficial, while for others it is crucial.

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■ HASHEM ■

Chassidus explains that the oneness of *HaShem* does not merely mean that there is no other deity besides him, but there is no other true existence at all. Everything that we see is being constantly powered by *HaShem* to exist, and were He to withhold His creative energy for one moment, they would all return to nothingness. This is not only a theoretical possibility, but it proves how even *now* the world doesn't have its own existence.

Though this may seem like an abstract belief, understanding and realizing this concept gives a Yid a new perspective on many happenings in his life.

Imagine the following scenarios:

Reuven is a G-d-fearing *frum* Yid, who spends most of his day doing business. One day, he happens to meet a wealthy entrepreneur who is impressed by him and together they clinch a deal which brings him quite a profit. When Reuven comes home he shares with his wife his excitement over his great success. "I always knew of my special talent," he tells his family, "but today my business mind really served me well. With the right words I managed to win the trust of the entrepreneur. Of course it was *siyata diShmaya* and we have to thank *HaShem*."

Exactly the same scenario occurs with Shimon. He, too, is a successful businessman. Arriving home at night and sharing his story, he concludes, "I always knew that *HaShem* runs the world, but I never saw it as clearly as I did today. It was really a special *hashgacha peratis* that I met that businessman, but the greatest miracle was the wording that came out of my mouth.

HaShem literally placed those words in my mouth."

Both of these Yidden mentioned the help from Above, and both spoke of a business deal in the natural world, yet the difference is clear: For Reuven the perception is that he succeeded thanks to his own ability. Mind you, he won't say that outright, for *chas veshalom* that a Yid should speak like that... On the contrary, he speaks of the *siyata diShmaya* and so on. But the question is, what does he feel inside? In his mind and heart he feels proud of his success. For Shimon, however, the natural feeling is that *HaShem* is guiding him at all times.

Without the perception of *Chassidus*, *davening* to *HaShem* for help and mentioning His help can become a ritual which a person is obligated to carry out; *Chassidus* helps it become the reality of his life.

■ YIDDEN ■

When viewed superficially, the value of a Yid might appear to depend on his observance of Torah and *mitzvos*. This means that a Yid who does not observe all the *mitzvos* is of less value than one who does.

Chassidus teaches that it is not so. The Alter Rebbe explains in *Tanya* that the essence of a Yid is his *neshamah*, which is an actual part of *HaShem*. Therefore, regardless of his conduct, a Yid is holy because of the *neshamah* within him.

This is why the Baal Shem Tov would draw close the simple Yidden, even though they were ignorant in Torah, for each of them had a *neshamah* exactly like the *neshamah* in the greatest of his *talmidim*.

About *bnei Yisroel* it is written, "You are children to *HaShem*, your G-d." The love of a parent to a child is an essential one, not dependent on the child's qualities. When one

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person loves another it is because of their special qualities, and therefore, as time passes, that love can fade. In addition, even when the love exists it is an external one, where one person's emotions are drawn to the qualities of the other, but not to the other person himself. By contrast, the bond of parent and child derives from the essence of the parent to the essence of the child. Similarly, the love of *HaShem* to the Yidden is likened, as in the above *possuk*, to the love of a parent for a child. *HaShem* loves every Yid, not because of his conduct, but because of his essence.

This knowledge affects how we think of Yidden who are distant from *Yiddishkeit*, and consequently it determines the way we relate to them. If the value of a Yid depends on his observance of *mitzvos*, a person who is not frum is unimportant to *HaShem* and there is no value in convincing him to fulfill a *mitzva*. Only after learning *Chassidus* does one appreciate the value of every Yid to *HaShem* and the preciousness of his *mitzvos*.

Thus the study of *Chassidus* is vital to practicing *mitzvo'im*. Without the above understanding one cannot practice *mitzvo'im* with full dedication and care.

This perspective is also relevant to how we perceive ourselves. If *chas veshalom* we stumble in our *avoda*, we are likely to feel distant from *HaShem* and unworthy, and this is likely to push us even further away. Recognizing our essential value as a Yid, we are uplifted to come closer, no matter what state we are in

■ TORAH ■

On the surface, the Torah might appear to be a series of concepts that *HaShem* shared with the Yidden. In this view, the concepts themselves are just like any other wisdom, except that they are more advanced since *HaShem* is of course the smartest Being...

In *Chassidus* one discovers that the Torah is not only wisdom from G-d, but is G-dly wisdom. In fact, *HaShem* invested *Himself* in the Torah, so that when any Yid learns a passage in any part of the Torah, he connects with the essence of *HaShem*. Such an understanding will understandably change the enthusiasm and the dedication a person has for studying Torah.

The same applies to *mitzvos*:

At first glance, *mitzvos* are positive activities that *HaShem* commanded us to do and *aveiros* are negative behaviors that we were told to avoid. And since we on our own do not know which activities are good and which are bad, *HaShem* revealed to us what they are.

Chassidus explains that the opposite is true: *Mitzvos* and *aveiros* have no intrinsic good or evil. *HaShem*, with his pure unrestricted Will, chose these activities, and that is why they now affect a person in the above-mentioned manner.

With this we can understand the significance of what happens when a non-*frum* Yid observes even one *mitzva*. Had a *mitzva* been an expression of a person's elevated state, then a Yid who is not so elevated would accomplish nothing with a quick, one-time *mitzva*. In fact, we would first have to give him an appreciation of the act. (This was indeed

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the misconception of those who opposed the *mivtzo'im* campaigns.) However, because a *mitzva* involves carrying out *HaShem's* will, beyond reason and mortal accomplishment, any *mitzva* fulfilled according to the *halacha* is effective.

■ DAY-TO-DAY LIFE ■

Until now we've discussed the impact of *Chassidus* in the realm of Torah and *mitzvos*. However, even with regard to one's *middos*, *Chassidus* still has an impact in our generation. Although we may not be able to completely transform our negative *middos* as people could do in earlier generations, through a proper understanding of *Chassidus* we can weaken them significantly.

This can be explained with a *mashal*, which, though not so pleasant, highlights the message well.

Both a toddler and an adult discard waste from their body, but there is a difference between them. When an adult has to relieve himself, he enters a bathroom and privately does what he has to do. He understands that relieving oneself is an embarrassing fact of life which should be kept private. A small child, on the other hand, carries out his needs publicly and even gleefully. He doesn't realize that this is anything to be embarrassed about.

Similarly, we all have spiritual "waste." That is a fact of life for anyone less than a *tzaddik*. The question is how we view it: Are we embarrassed about it and try our best to cover it up, or do we expose it publicly with pride?

Take for example the following situation:

Yankel is a fine Yid and a respected member of his community. One day Berl, a less respectable

fellow, publicly insults him, and as a result Yankel is infuriated. The following day he wakes up and remembers what Berl had done to him, and though he isn't as angry as he was the day before, he is now more convinced of Berl's wrongdoing and actually feels hatred towards him. As time goes on, he becomes less heated, but feels more justified at his hatred.

Now suppose Yankel is a Yid who learns *Chassidus* every day and even dedicates some time to contemplate and appreciate the truth of what he has learned. At the moment that Berl insults him, he will be just as upset, burning with anger by the outright embarrassment. However, as he recovers from his rage and reconsiders what happened, he will realize the foolishness of the matter. When he learns *Chassidus* and thinks it over throughout the following days, he will realize how utterly trivial the matter is in comparison to the truth of creation. He will be bothered by his initial anger over such a minor incident, and may even go out of his way to do a favor to the person who wronged him.

While *Chassidus* did not rid Yankel of his instinctive reaction, it did change his perception so that he can make the right choices later on.

Often a person has a desire to do a seemingly holy act, when in truth it is a ploy of the *yetzer hara* for a negative cause. *Chassidus* gives him clarity of mind to differentiate between that which originates from the *nefesh ho'elokis* (and is thus for *HaShem*) and that which originates from the *nefesh habahamis* (and is for his personal gain). He will no longer convince himself that he eats tasty delicacies only to elevate them, that he is embroiled in a *machloikes* solely *l'sheim Shamayim*...

I had already broken all the rules. I now muster all the *chutzpa* I have, and challenge the *mashpia*:

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Is knowing these concepts enough to change a person's behavior? Why do we find many individuals who know these ideas but don't seem to be affected by them?

In order for *Chassidus* to make a change in a person, it must become his reality, and not just a theoretical idea.

To clarify what we mean when we say that *Chassidus* should be felt as a reality, let me share with you the following episode:

Reb Chaim Moshe Alperovitz, a simple *tomim* from Lubavitch, lived in Tel Aviv and worked as an ordinary laborer. Because of his job, he was forced to work during *Chol HaMoed* Sukkos, yet every night of *Chol HaMoed* he would *farbreng* all night. He would repeat a *vort* he heard from Reb Groinem [Esterman], the legendary *mashpia* in Lubavitch, that at *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah* there is a revelation of '*Pnimiyyus Atik*'.

I remember that once, when it was after 1 a.m., one of those present got up to leave since he had a headache and he wanted to go to sleep. Reb Chaim Moshe couldn't understand him. "I think

you're acting foolishly," he told him, and explained himself with a *mashal*: "Suppose someone offered you a million dollars on condition that you pay him a penny, would you hesitate? The same here: Reb Groinem said that at *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah* there is a revelation of '*Pnimiyyus Atik*' and you want to forego that because of a headache?!" Those assembled chuckled, but he insisted, "You don't believe me? I heard it myself from Groinem!"

This statement is a modest degree of "*Elokus bipshitus* – for Reb Chaim Moshe, the truth of *Elokus* was a reality. Now of course we can't expect of ourselves that we should have the same level of perception that Reb Chaim Moshe had, but by understanding *Chassidus* properly we can all reach some level of seeing the world with the reality of *Chassidus*.

In certain areas we see how the Rebbe trained the world to recognize the reality of HaShem.

In the past, when there was a robbery in the house, the poor locks or loose windows were to blame. The Rebbe quoted a well-known passage in Shulchan Aruch that the mezuzah protects the home and those who live in it and if the safety of



the home was compromised it is a sign that the mezuzos are problematic.

The Rebbe was not teaching a *segulah* or a special *zechus* that would bring a special merit, the Rebbe was teaching us that the truth of Torah is the reality. Torah says that with a *mezuzah* HaShem watches over the house, so this is the way it is.

Today it has become common practice to check *mezuzos* for protection. There is some level of recognition that the *hashgacha pratis* is a reality.

You mention that a person will undergo a change by "understanding Chassidus properly." Can you explain what this means? Isn't hisbonenus only for advanced students of Chassidus?

In order that the *Chassidus* that a person learns should impact him, he must internalize it. This is done through thinking it over, which is commonly known as *hisbonenus*. The meaning of *hisbonenus* is simply **understanding** and **internalizing** whatever one has learned.

Say, for example, one is learning about *hashgacha peratis*. The first step is to **understand** the matter: what it means, how it can be, where it applies, why is it so, and so on. One **understands** this exactly as he would understand any other concept that he heard from someone.

One cannot develop a genuine feeling of *kabolas ol malchus shamayim* merely through reciting the words of the beginning of *perek mem-alef* in Tanya. Reciting holy words of Tanya is a wonderful thing and it beneficial for purifying the environment, but to change our perception we need to understand what we are learning.

The next step is to **internalize** it. After all,

one can thoroughly **understand** the concept of *hashgacha peratis*, without actually believing that *HaShem* is guiding every single aspect of his individual life. *Hashgacha peratis* is not a natural phenomenon that causes occurrences to come together in wondrous ways; it means that Someone is actually orchestrating all of these happenings. This type of thinking is different than the previous one, and they are both necessary.

Though one who learns without thinking into what he learns will surely be affected, he is not deriving the full value from what he is learning. He is missing the real experience of *Chassidus*.

[To illustrate: In 5739 (1979) the N'shei Chabad convention took place in Detroit MI. During the convention a severe blizzard brought the city to a standstill and the women were unable to return home. Quite disturbed, they wrote to the Rebbe, bemoaning their unfortunate situation. In a handwritten note the Rebbe responded (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, p. 468):

I was greatly surprised that after so much has been spoken about how everything that happens is a lesson from Above, and even [you yourselves] also lecture about this topic, yet when something actually happens, [you] think of various strange reasons for it, all except for the simple reason – that [you] were detained there in order to further spread *Yiddishkeit*, in addition to whatever was already accomplished through the convention... – ed.]

Oh, how I am so quickly becoming his talmid. If only I would have more direction!

Which areas of Chassidus should one learn in order to acquire this perception?

Learning *Chassidus* does not only mean, as some

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believe, learning profound *maamorim*. *Chassidus* includes sichos of the Rebbe on Torah, mitzvos, HaShem and the Yidden.

In fact, learning Chassidus from those sources has an advantage over the more profound *maamorim*. Since the purpose of the study is that one should internalize them, learning profound *maamorim* can sometimes be unproductive. One should learn tangible concepts in Chassidus that he can truly relate to.

A woman once called and asked me to give a shiur in Chassidus to a women's learning group and I was happy to agree. Curious, I asked her what they usually learned. Her response shocked me – it was one of the most profound *maamorim* of the Mittlerer Rebbe!

Reb Yoel's face darkens, as he expresses his frustration:

Women are surely obligated to have a correct worldview and a feeling of love for HaShem, and for this reason the Rebbe encouraged women to learn and appreciate concepts of Chassidus. But such *maamorim* are far beyond the average chossid, and are clearly not what the Rebbe had in mind.

We must always remember our goal when learning Chassidus – to penetrate our conscious mind with a new perspective on life and with a feeling of love for HaShem. In order to achieve this, it is preferable to learn selected *perokim* of Tanya, and *maamorim* and sichos that discuss the meaning of Yiddishkeit and life. Only once one has internalized these, can he proceed to learn more advanced *maamorim*.

■ HISKASHRUS ■

If there is one topic I would want to broach with Reb Yoel, it would be *hiskashrus*. This is the very essence of his being – his connection to the Rebbe. Indeed, even in times of old, this was a sensitive topic, one that needed much fine-tuning and direction from a *mashpia*. How much more so today.

However, today it is not about fine-tuning. I want to begin from the basics.

What is the purpose of *hiskashrus*? How does one accomplish this today?

Reb Yoel straightens up in his chair. Perhaps he was awaiting the question, perhaps it was a natural reaction to the importance of the issue. His face became serious, and his words measured, as he responded.

Today we are witnessing the amazing dedication of chassidim who are quick to follow the Rebbe's instructions, even when this requires traveling to a distant destination with little hope for money or glory.

However, this is not enough. Chabad Chassidus demands that a chossid recognize and appreciate his Rebbe's values in a real and intellectual manner. For this one needs to learn the Rebbe's *maamorim* and sichos, to internalize the Rebbe's perception of the world.

A bochur once shared with me his schedule of learning Chassidus as follows: For *haskala*, the understanding of the concepts of Chassidus, he learns a *maamar* of the Rebbe Rashab; for *avoda*, an emotional appreciation of Chassidus, he learns a *maamar* of the Frierdiker Rebbe; and for *hiskashrus*, he learns a *maamar* of the Rebbe.

I asked him: If your mind thinks like the Rebbe Rashab, and your heart absorbs the teachings of the Frierdiker Rebbe, what are you offering the Rebbe...? (Of course this should not be understood to mean that out of *hiskashrus* one should not learn the *maamorim* of the previous Rebbeim; this was only said in order to demonstrate the mistaken understanding of *hiskashrus* that this bochur had.)

Hiskashrus means permeating our minds with the Rebbe's understanding of HaShem and the world. This can only be reached through a thorough study of the Rebbe's Torah, and through reflection that will bring it into our reality.

■ CHASSIDUS – G-DLY REVELATION ■

However an important note must be made:

While proper *hiskashrus* raises a person to a higher understanding of HaShem and the world, one should not mistakenly think that he can reach this understanding on his own.

Chassidus is not as it may seem to be – a logical understanding of the inner essence of the Torah as understood by a wise Rebbe. Rather, Chassidus is a revelation of G-dliness as experienced and 'seen' by a tzaddik.

In fact, although throughout the generations various prominent chassidim wrote essays of Chassidus, chassidim always made a point of studying Chassidus from its original source, and used the writings of chassidim for explanation only.

This can be explained with the following mashal:

When an artist draws a portrait, he draws two circles for the eyes, a curved line for the nose and so forth. Now a non-artist may do the very same, but it is nevertheless not identical.

Why the difference?

The explanation is that when the non-artist draws circles and a curve, these are merely symbolic of what should really appear there, but the drawing is dead, lifeless. The artist, however, was blessed with a power to capture the image in his mind and convey it to a canvas, creating a living portrait.

The same is true of Chassidus.

Both the Rebbeim and their chassidim occupied themselves with understanding and teaching Elokus, yet they were far from the same. The

chossid understood the concept with his mind, each to his degree, and explained it accordingly. The Rebbe 'saw' the concept – and that is what he transmitted.

This is what we experience when we hear the Rebbe or learn his writings. We are listening to a first-hand report of the existence of HaShem and His involvement in this world. This is something we can never reach on our own. And that is why HaShem sent us the tzaddikim, to open up our eyes.

This is particularly true of our Rebbe's Chassidus.

The Rebbe in his maamorim and sichos applies the truths of Chassidus to the most worldly subjects, so that there is no area of life that is void of Elokus. Whoever studies the Rebbe's sichos comes to recognize how

even the most mundane occurrences are of great spiritual significance.

Even a sicha discussing "current events" such as MiHu Yehudi, or a moment of silence, expresses the Rebbe's message – the recognition of the oneness of HaShem in the world.

A certain rov who came to the Rebbe's farbrengen for the first time shared with me his astonishment at the number of times the Rebbe mentioned Der Eibershter in the course of the farbrengen.

This is what real *hiskashrus* is about: that to some degree we, too, should be elevated to recognize HaShem in everything.

This once-in-a-lifetime experience, with a man larger than life, has come to a close. My head is spinning, from the hours of heavy discussion. As I thank him for his time, and turn to leave, I see Reb Yoel, as energetic as ever, turning back to his computer, with a Likkutei Torah open on his lap.

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Special thanks to Torat Chabad Libnei HaYeshivot for their help in preparing this article.





The Internet: Heavenly Blessing or Tool of Destruction?

*Rov and Rosh Kolel – 'Kolel Menachem' Crown Heights
From a talk to the Kolel yungeliet*

■ RESPONSIBLE FORESIGHT ■

In general, we always make fences for ourselves to ensure the observance of *mitzvos*, and sometimes even a "fence to a fence". As is brought in Chassidus, "One should avoid one hundred permissible gates to spare oneself from the possibility of entering the one forbidden gate."

When it comes to physical dangers, we take all sorts of precautions to ensure that we do not endanger ourselves unwittingly. Our rationale is that human nature is to drift somewhat from the standard, and thus we preempt this danger by taking another step back. If we do so for physical dangers, then we surely ought to do the same for spiritual dangers.

[The obligation to distance oneself from sin is so mandated that Chazal say that one who is able to avoid walking a busy thoroughfare where he is

likely to encounter immodesty is obligated to do so. In fact, one who takes the immodest route *and closes his eyes* is considered a *rasha*!]

Furthermore, only through adding additional guard can a person anticipate that his children grow up to be upstanding *ehrlliche Yidden*.

Children will inevitably take a step down from their parents' level of observance; hence one cannot observe the bare minimum and then expect his children to stay at that level.

Therefore, even one does not foresee any immediate danger still ought to make additional boundaries, so that his children don't struggle with actual observance of *mitzvos*.

■ THE MODERN QUESTION ■

All of the above of course applies equally to

modern technology. Appropriate precautions must be taken to ensure that it does not lead to any breaches in *shmiras hatorah vehamitzvos* in the immediate future and in the distant future. We must be "*roieh es hanolad*" to see where a certain practice will lead, and abolish it if there is suspicion that it will bring future harm, even if at the moment there is no concern.

We are commanded "not to place a stumbling block before a blind man," which means not to offer something physically or spiritually harmful to an unknowing person. Giving unmonitored access of technology to a child is reckless and is an outright hazard. Every head of household is responsible to see to it that all modes of technology in his home are used in a safe manner.

The above is self-understood and requires no elucidation. The question that needs to be addressed is: What should our general perspective of the Internet be? Should we see it as a good development or a negative one?

■ NO BAD COMES FROM ABOVE ■

There are some who condemn the Internet and refer to it as a "tool of destruction," due to potential for tremendous damage that it contains. This is however misleading and incorrect.

Suppose someone would speak of a tool that is the source of much evil, bringing about murder and thievery, spreads heresy and other horrible *aveiros*. It is called a ... telephone. We would laugh at such a statement. While it is true that the telephone has been used in all these terrible acts, it would be foolish to say that that is what a telephone is about.

The Internet is a tremendous *bracha* given to our generation by Hashem. It has brought us phenomenal good in the area of *parnassa* and health, opening up avenues previously nonexistent.

Of course we must use it for a *bracha* and not *r"l* in a way that will cause us harm. As mentioned above, we must take adequate

Moreover, HaShem created everything in this world for a good purpose. It follows that specifically when we use the internet for a good cause, are we using it for the purpose for which it was created.

■ FORBIDDEN FRUITS ■

Another point to consider:

A person's *yetzer hara* is naturally enticed by that which is forbidden. Therefore, if we tell a child that a computer is an "*aveiros machine*", his *yetzer hara* is enticed to use it in a negative way. At his first opportunity to use the internet unmonitored, he will look for the *aveiros*.

If, however, the child is taught to perceive the computer as a valuable tool which should be used in the correct manner (as a knife or other powerful tool), he will not have that urge when using the computer, and will be more likely to use it properly.

■ PURPOSEFUL USAGE ■

When speaking about the radio, the Rebbe once mentioned the great *bracha* and the personal benefit he had from it. Caught in Nazi occupied France, people did not know which areas were conquered and which were free. It was through the radio that the Yidden knew to where they should escape, and thereby the Rebbe's life was saved.

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On the other hand, the Rebbe chastised those who turned to the radio to find out world news, "What difference does it make to you what is happening in Washington?!" One who is business may need to know this information for his business dealings, a community activist may need to find out the latest laws; but to listen "*stam*" to know what is doing in the world?! "What difference does it make to you?"

Though at times a person needs to relax, exposing oneself unnecessarily to worldly values is harmful to a person's *neshama*. The natural warmth that one has to Torah and mitzvos is weakened by such exposure.

The same is true concerning the Internet. One who needs to access the Internet for business or other significant needs may do so (taking of course the appropriate precautions). However to "surf" online for entertainment purposes is unnecessarily exposing himself to unholy influences.

One who sings the wonder of the Internet and the goodness of HaShem's *bracha*, but then uses it for entertainment purposes, is merely fooling himself.

■ SHOWING AN EXAMPLE ■

Furthermore, when a child sees his parents are particular to use the Internet for important matters only, he will understand that since he has nothing important to arrange online it is not a place for him. However, when he sees his parents browse the Internet for entertainment, even if they only view items of the most *kosher* nature; the child will also want to use it for entertainment and he may drift far without a boundary.

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Children cannot comprehend when they are told, "I am the parent and therefore I can use it properly, but you are only a child." Unlike heavy machinery that only adults can use, the difference between parent and child regarding the internet is not readily apparent. Not accepting this distinction, the child will break the restriction when he has access to the internet and he will use it at his own discretion. Even if the parents are able to control the internet usage in their home, the child may find other venues to follow his innocent desire.

Only through showing a good example of responsible internet usage, will the consistent standard of the home ring true with the child, and he will follow the standard in the home and

elsewhere.

It is therefore reasonable that one who has no significant need for the Internet should keep the Internet entirely out of the home and save himself unnecessary aggravation.

■ THE BENEFIT OF THE CHASSIDISHE APPROACH ■

The *chassidishe* approach of leaving out that which is unnecessary in each individual's life can save a person much difficulty and heartache.

In America it is believed that there are certain material items which one must have regardless of whether one needs it or not. One such example is a car.

The Rebbe mocked the belief in America that "one who does not have a car is not a *mentsch*." The Rebbe pointed out that even knowing how to drive was not an essential quality, as the Frierdiker Rebbe did not look to master it (as he did master

other talents).

The *chassidishe* approach to worldly matters is: that which is necessary – is necessary, but that which isn't will only disturb. One who lives in close proximity to his work and doesn't need a car, is better off without one.

■ CELL-PHONES ■

This issue is even more applicable to Internet on cell-phones.

One who has the Internet at home is limited in its use, and can free himself from it for the rest of the day. By having Internet on the phone, he is always attached to it: while with family, in *shul* and in the *Beis Medrash*.

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In the past, every person made the effort to dedicate some time each day for learning, according to what his schedule allowed him. During this time he would exit the world and enter the environment of the *Beis Medrash* where he would become engrossed in the depths of Torah. Now, with his cell phone at his side, he never detaches from the outside world and therefore never really connects with the Torah he is learning.

Wanting to improve and recognizing that the Internet impedes on our growth and our families, we should all take the appropriate steps to limit its influence on our lives and allow ourselves to dedicate ourselves to the service of Hashem.





Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz



Under-Age Chinuch (II)

A digest on the appropriateness of age in matters of Chinuch.

Adapted from a private talk to parents.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz serves as menahel ruchni and magid shiur in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim of Morristown NJ. Rabbi Gancz has been involved in chinuch years previous, holding various positions in Elementary and Mesivta. He is a sought after lecturer and a shliach in Monsey NY.

■ SETTING BOUNDARIES ■

When setting standards, it is crucial for children to feel that these standards are unwavering and a given. If they sense that it is up for discussion, they will try to find a way out from these "extra" responsibilities.

Children test their boundaries to see how far they can go. This should not faze the parents, who can softly but firmly explain to the child that regarding certain issues, there is no possibility for change. When the child sees the parent's sincerity and consistency, he will accept the standard as a given.

If, however, the parent leaves room for discussion, the child will understandably beg and insist that he be exempt from that responsibility. How much more so if there is a lack of consistency, when at times the parent is strict about it and at

other times not. In such an instance, the child will surely demand the right to be granted his wishes.

Even so, care must be taken not to state our standards too harshly, for then it will become a power struggle, parent vs. child, and make it more difficult for the child to submit.

Chazal say that one must not impose excessive fear in his home, for it can bring to many *aveiros* and tragedies (Gittin 6b). Furthermore, the Gemara teaches that when reminding one's family about lighting candles and other pressing *mitzvos* to be taken care of late afternoon on *erev Shabbos*, it should be done in a pleasant manner. Rav Ashi is quoted: "I had not heard of this instruction and yet I always did so through my own understanding" (Gittin 6b-7a, See Sefer Hasichos 5703 p. 230).

One should not confuse firmness and consistency with harshness. Education must be done with

much warmth and sensitivity, yet the child has to hear that this is something that "is," and is unchangeable.

It would be very helpful to bear in mind, that our role in education is one of responsibility, not of power. Hashem has placed parents in charge for the goodness of the child, that they should make decisions which are best for their children. When it is necessary to instruct a child, it should not be done from the perspective of 'I am superior and therefore insisting that you do this.' Rather, the child should feel these instructions are for his benefit, like he understands regarding eating, drinking and sleeping. This way, besides for reflecting the true approach, it will ensure that no power struggle will erupt between parent and child.

Chazal say (Horayos 10a) that a position of power is not a right of the authority but a responsibility. Even a king, who must display complete power and authority and is forbidden to compromise his dignity in the slightest, must see himself simply as a conduit and fulfilling a duty (Rambam Hilchos Melachim 2:1-6, 4:10).

Similarly, while parents are obligated to keep their dignity so that they can exercise authority when necessary, they must see it as a responsibility towards the child and not as a right that they have.

■ EMPHASIS ON RUCHNIYUS ■

When setting guidelines for *ruchniyus'dike* behavior, it is crucial that the child sense that its importance is at least as significant as the *gashmiyus'dike* rules. When the child sees that our *ruchniyus'dike* standards are of paramount importance to us, they will recognize this as well.

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A man once addressed the crowd in our Chabad House and quoted a noted speaker: "There are ten reasons why I do not shower: Firstly, as a child I was forced to shower, which left a bad taste in my mouth. Secondly, if it is so important, it should be free, without expenses of water, heating, soap and shampoo. Thirdly, what difference does it make in my life? Would I make more money if I showered? ..."

The speaker used this account to make a mockery of those who do not attend shul because of the costs involved and other nonsensical excuses. Concerning showering, it would be a joke to excuse oneself, but about visiting the Chabad House on *Shabbos* morning, people do not hesitate to come up with an

array of excuses.

At times, we too may err this way by regarding *gashmiyus* as being more important than *ruchniyus*.

Regarding *gashmiyus'dike* rules, the child sees how firm we are, not allowing him to run in the street or walk outside in the cold. A child knows that he must eat and sleep, and that regarding these matters there is no room for discussion. Children are raised to observe these rules without needing punishments, for they recognize that these are necessities of life.

When it comes to *ruchniyus'dike* standards, we may be less firm, expressing *rachmonus* for the child who "has to" *daven*, say *brachos* etc. Such an attitude can be sensed immediately by the child who will ask for a "break" from this "burdensome responsibility."

If we feel strongly about *ruchniyus*, and truly believe that it is essential to our life and our identity, our children will recognize this and readily observe the *mitzvos*.

To the child, there is no difference between his bodily needs and the needs of his *neshama*. If they are not accepted at home as standard, they will both be compromised; and if they are considered a matter of fact, they will be accepted.

(See part one for a detailed digest of the appropriate level of *chinuch* for each age, when or when not to enforce.)

■ HOLY ENVIRONMENT ■

Another important element in *Chinuch* is a positive environment infused with the beauty of Yiddishkeit.

On the Gemara concerning the study of Torah in Yerushalayim (Bava Basra 21a), Tosfos points out that the city of Yerushalayim was specifically chosen due to its atmosphere which would influence the child. When entering the Beis Hamikdash and watching the *kohanim* and *leviim* in their holy service, the child would feel the great *kedusha* and would be aroused to serve Hashem and study Torah.

A similar comment is found in the Sifri concerning eating *maaser sheni* in Yerushalayim, which the Torah says will cause one to "fear Hashem all your days." The Sifri explains that just by spending time in Yerushalayim and seeing everyone else occupied in holy work, one would be inspired to want to do the same.

So too, if children see their parents excited about learning Torah and performing a *mitzvah*, they will be drawn to it. Children seek happiness, and if they find their parents joyful about Yiddishkeit, they will desire it too.

■ BEAUTIFUL MITZVOS ■

Special effort should be put into beautifying the *mitzvos* and making them enjoyable for the children.

Take for example: When giving the child a bath, though it is non-negotiable, we nevertheless try to make it pleasant for the child by adding bubbles or toys. Certainly, we would not bathe the child in lukewarm water, which would cause him to abhor this activity.

Similarly, *mitzvos* performed by a child should be adorned and beautified, to help them experience its *kedusha*. We should certainly never present a *mitzvah* in a way that may cause a child to detest it.

Besides, we all have a *mitzvah* of "*Zeh Keili v'anveihu*", to perform *mitzvos* in a beautiful manner. As part of *chinuch*, it too must be imparted to our children.

To use an example: It is a norm for children's *yarmulkas* to be decorated. The reason this was introduced was so that the boys should like their *yarmulkas*.

Another example is the way that children *daven* and *learn* with a sing-song. This too was introduced to make it pleasant and not monotonous.

■ TRULY ENJOYABLE ■

An important provision must be added here:

That external glitter and sugar coating can sometimes have an opposite effect. If we beautify the *mitzvos* just for our children, but not for ourselves, than If we beautify the *mitzvos* just for *our* children, but not for ourselves, then we haven't really beautified the *mitzvos* at all.

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Children have very sensitive antennas. They sense very well when only the children are made to chant "Amen, yehei shmei raba" to receive another ticket from the counselor while the counselor barely says it at all. They can recognize if *davening* is a song for children only, but for *bochurim* and their parents it's a chore. This *ch"v* transmits to the child a message, "Wait until you grow up and you too will be able to relax."

Children have to see that adults are excited for the *mitzvah* and make an equal effort to beatify it, albeit in a more mature way.

Davening should be recited with the song and *geshmake* "shirah v'zimrah" it is meant to be. "Amen, yehei shmei raba" should be chanted "with all our might," with physical strength (as Rashi explains) and with all our *kavana* (Tosfos' explanation – Shulchan Aruch AR 56:2). The child must see how much attention we give to our *yarmulka*, never sleeping without it, and when dressing, removing it last and donning it first. If by mistake it falls off, we

instinctively and instantaneously use our hands as a temporary cover. All this shows our children how much we value the *mitzvos*.

■ ■ ■

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■ ■ ■

■ EDUCATING WITH SENSITIVITY ■

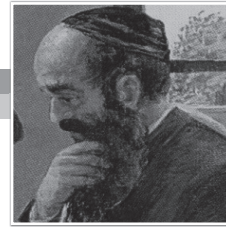
Shaping a child's character is a process, not an immediate effect.

This is especially true for encouraging positive behavior. When preventing a child from doing wrong, it is possible to get immediate results by using force and punishment, but hitting or screaming will never change a child's character. We need to work **with** the child, using soft words and, at times, an extra treat to encourage him in the right direction.

The Rebbe Rashab said, "Much thought must be invested when educating children, and then, with the help of Hashem, we will

succeed in raising them and reaping true Yiddishe, *chassidishe nachas*."





One Size Fits All?

The Torah Perspective on Individualized Education – Part 2

In the previous article we discussed "*al pi darko*" as it relates to various stages in the development of a child and the importance of catering to each stage appropriately. In this article we will discuss "*al pi darko*" concerning the differences between people and how it affects their life's *shlichus*.

■ UNIQUE QUALITIES ■

Chazal say, "*ksheim she'ein partzufeihein shavos, kach ein deioseihen shavos*", just as no two people look exactly alike, so too, no two people think exactly alike.

As Chassidus emphasizes, nothing in this world just is. HaShem created everything in this world for His glory¹, and since He created different people with different strengths and leanings, it is clear that He intended that they have different missions².

Chassidus describes *klal Yisroel* as a complete body. A human body is comprised of many different limbs, a head, a heart, hands and feet, each of

which has a unique purpose which no other limb can replace. No amount of brain power can cross the street and no amount of physical strength can work out a problem. All parts are necessary³.

Similarly, HaShem gave *klal Yisroel* a collective mission to reveal *Elokus* in this world. There are many parts to this mission which must be carried out by many *diverse* individuals. While the laws of Shulchan Aruch are binding to all Yidden; paths in *avodas HaShem* are as plentiful as there are Yidden⁴.

As Reb Zusha of Anipoli would famously say, "When I come above they will not ask me why I had not been like the Avos, Moshe Rabbeinu or my Rebbe the Maggid, rather they will ask me, 'Why weren't you Zusha?'"⁵

■ CHOOSING CORRECTLY ■

It follows, that when one sets out to choose his life's *shlichus*, it is crucial that he (and his

1. Pirkei Avos 6:11.

2. In fact the qualities that one has are themselves an indication of what one's specific *avoda* is.

3. See Likutei Torah Nitzavim 44a, Likutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1141 – that there are various types of *neshamos* each with their own *avoda*. See Igeres Hakodesh 7 – that each *neshama* is connected to a specific *mitzvah* to which they should dedicate extra care ("*zahir tfei*").

4. Similarly there are significant differences in *avoda* between generations. In the generations after *Matan Torah*, the Yidden recognized *Elokus* like the 'head'; today, during '*ikvesa dimeshicha*' (the 'heels' of Moshiach) we lack that appreciation but have greater ability for *mesiras nefesh* (Toras Menachem vol.20 p. 45).

5. Toras Menachem vol. 32 p. 104, Sichos Kodosh 5729 vol. 1 p. 274. As Chazal say (Avos 6:6) that a wise person must recognize his correct place ("*makir es mekomo*").

mechanech) make a balanced evaluation to ensure that he is choosing his own mission, and not imitating a mission of another.

Devoting oneself to a *shlichus* for which one is not cut out, will result in the chosen task not fully accomplished (since this person has not been given the *koichois* for that task) and his assigned task unfulfilled.

The Rebbe highlighted this idea with the following story⁶:

A well-to-do businessman and his wagon-driver arrived in a small town early Friday afternoon. Each one, after having chosen appropriate lodgings in different areas of town, headed for the bathhouse in preparation for Shabbos.

Dressed in his fine shabbos *kapota*, the wealthy businessman began walking back to his lodgings, when he noticed a wagon stuck in the mud. Wanting to help the unfortunate travelers, he attempted to schlep the wagon

out, but only succeeded in tearing his *kapota* and dirtying himself entirely with mud. The hour was late, and our ill-fated businessman hurried to *shul* in his sorry garb.

The wagon-driver, who had taken a different route, arrived in shul early ready for Shabbos. Being the first one there, he invited the hungry travelers to join him for his meager Shabbos *seudah*.

At the end of their respective lifetimes, they each arrived in the Beis Din Shel Mailah, and were told that they had been "*neshamos hato'os*," drifting souls, who did not merit to fulfill their designated task and unknowingly had tried to accomplish what the other should have done.

The Rebbe drew a lesson, that we must each choose the *avoda* designated for us and not consciously send ourselves wandering⁷. In fact, it is a ploy of the *yetzer hara* to encourage us to take on an alternative

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6. Toras Menachem vol. 14 p. 197.

7. In a letter to Mrs. Shifrah Morozov-Golobowitz, the lead activist in reaching out to the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers in Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe guides her in the ways of community service. "I will add ... that each and every Yid has qualities and shortcomings, and only HaShem is perfect. Therefore, every person has a position that is suited for him and a position that is not suited to him at all, while his fellow may be of the exact opposite disposition." The Rebbe continues with practical examples related to the leadership of TZACH and that each person must be assigned to the appropriate position. (Igros Kodesh vol. 26 p. 148)

This is contrary to a common notion that everyone is suitable for every activity, for "when the Rebbe commands, *afilu a bezzem ken shissen* (even a 'broom' can shoot)." This is surely true for trying situations when the options are limited (one only has a 'broom'), as we have seen in communist Russia and with many *shluchim* around the world. However, one who has a gun would be foolish to use a broom instead, and depend on a special miracle.

8. Some classic examples offered by the Rebbe: One who is financially successful and can earn money to support *yeshivos* will

be inspired to dedicate himself to Torah study and davening all day... (Likutei Sichos vol. 3 p. 851). Or the contrary: A *yeshivah bochur*, who should be totally engrossed in the world of Torah, will have an urge to dedicate his time to bring others closer to *yiddishkeit* which is such a tremendous *mitzvah*... (Toras Menachem vol. 20 p. 61).

On various occasions the Rebbe pointed to holy movements and endeavors of the time as originating from the *yetzer hara* for the mere purpose of distracting those individuals from their true task.

This theme is also found in earlier *seforim*:

The Minchas Elazar of Munkatch quotes his father, the Darkei Teshuvah, who pointed to two types of enemies bemoaned by Dovid Hamelech in Tehillim: those who fight him, and those who advise him to take on tasks greater than he can accomplish. (Chamisha Maamaros, Maamar Halekutos, Ois 5)

Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta writes how at the beginning of *avoda* one must keep to a simple service of fulfilling HaShem's wishes, and the thought to hurry to greater levels is perpetrated by the *yetzer hara*. (Nesiv Mitzvosecha , Nesiv Emunah, Shvil 1, Ois 7)

avoda in order to distract us from carrying out our true *shlichus*⁸.

■ DANGEROUS GAMBLE

Moreover, the need to follow one's designated mission is crucial in order to maintain the Yiddishkeit of the individual. A person carrying out an *avoda* not meant for him will feel spiritually unsatisfied (having attempted to eat food he cannot digest) and thus risks falling and failing completely.

The Baal Shem Tov clearly warns that one should not try to follow the footsteps of a fellow in *avodas Hashem*. For one who attempts to raise himself to a level not attainable for him – will fall from the *avoda* he attempted to reach, and even from the lower *avoda* appropriate for him⁹.

In Tanya, the Alter Rebbe emphasizes the need to recognize one's true place in *avoda*. Failing to assess oneself properly will result in disappointment, followed by despair¹⁰.

In an eye-opening letter on the cause of *machshavos zaros*, the Tzemach Tzedek blames

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people's aspiration to reach levels which they are not capable of. A Yid must always be happy with his *ruchniyus'dike* lot and aspire to reach further levels that are within reach¹¹.

Because of its importance I quote fully:

"It is a general rule in Torah (*klal gadol batorah*) that one must be satisfied with his lot (*sameiach b'chelko*) also in Torah and *avoda*, whether small or great, and take pleasure in it. For if one does not take pleasure and rejoice

[in his *avoda*], his soul wishing to enjoy will choose *taivah* and *machshavos zaros*. This is all because he is not satisfied with his *avoda*, and aspires to reach levels much loftier than he can reach. One who attempts to enter a realm where he does not belong, is pushed out to 'external thoughts.'

"Listen my beloved, my brothers, each one of you recognizes his true level, and so why then should you choose great levels to which you did not merit. Though one should surely ask himself 'When will my actions compare to the actions of my forefathers?' yet one must rejoice with his current state, and specifically through this joy, he will reach

9. Keser Shem Tov paragraph 4. With this he explains what the Gemara says, "Many attempted to follow Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (in his total dedication to Torah study) and they failed," since they were not capable of this great level.

10. In *perek* 27 the Alter Rebbe discusses the disappointment of a *beinoni* at having to struggle with negative thoughts during davening and his gloom over his lowly state. The Alter Rebbe explains that this *avoda* to struggle with evil will bring HaShem tremendous pleasure, like a spicy dish whose pungent sharpness brings delight to its eater.

11. This unsigned letter is attributed to the Tzemach Tzedek or possibly the Alter Rebbe, and is printed in *Igros Kodesh* of the first three Rebbeim vol. 1 p. 374.

12. Hayom Yom 23 Sivan, from *Igros Kodesh* of the Friediker Rebbe vol. 4 p. 67. Sefer Hasichos 5696 p. 295. See also Halekach

VeHalivuv vol. 2 p. 205: The *chossid* Reb Avremkeh Zhebner would not eat *shmurah matzah* all of Pesach since he felt that he was not "holding there," and there are countless such stories.

13. See Brachos 17a: The Rabanan of Yavneh would say, "I am a being and he is a being, I work in the city while he works in the field... Perhaps you may say that I do more and he does less, we have learned 'No matter if one does more or less – as long as his intention is for Heaven.'"

14. Likutei Torah Nitzavim 44a: "זהו כלל גדול דכל דאתי דקדושה" הוא בבחי' נעוץ סופן בתחלתן שאין לו בחינת ראש וסוף והוא בחי' עגולים שנמשך מבחי' טובה – "This is a major principle that all that stems from the side of kedusha is a manner of 'the end rooted in the beginning' that there is no [absolute] beginning and end, and it is the level of *igulim* (spheres) which is drawn from the level of *sovev kol almin*." See there at length.

greater heights..."

The Frierdiker Rebbe, in many *sichos*, speaks of the astuteness of old-time Chassidim who would thoroughly self-aware, and were not foolish to delve in lofty *avoda* or extra *hiddurim* to which they were not suited¹².

■ NOT BETTER OR WORSE: DIFFERENT! ■

It is important to note that the differences in *avoda* should not be mistaken as levels of superiority; rather these are *different and equally important positions*. This is not apologetics or 'political-correctness,' but a fact in Yiddishkeit¹³.

The Alter Rebbe explains that whereas in worldly matters one can find one person who is superior to his fellow (in intelligence, talent, money etc.), in the realm of *kedusha* this is never so; every *madreigah-neshama* is more advanced in his field!¹⁴

For example: While the *neshama* that is rooted in the spiritual 'foot' does not have the appreciation of *Elokus* that the *neshama* stemming from the 'head' has, the *neshama* from the 'foot' will be quicker to carry out the will of HaShem even when it is painful and requires *mesiras nefesh*.

■ YISSACHAR AND ZEVULUN ■

While each individual has their unique *shlichus* in this world, there are two general roles in *avodas HaShem*: Yissachar and Zevulun.

Some dedicate the majority of their life to Torah learning ("*yoshvei ohel*" – Yissachar), while others

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■■■

go out in the world and work ("*baalei eisek*" – Zevulun). Both of these paths are appropriate for those suited to them, and they are both necessary to create a *dirah b'tachtonim*¹⁵.

Though on the surface it would seem that only Yissachar is occupied in the service of Hashem, while Zevulun is *forced* to go earn a living ("*someone* has to bring in money"); Chassidus teaches us to look deeper. HaShem arranged that many Yidden must spend the large (often very large) part of their day involved in physical matters so that those things too should be incorporated in the realm of *kedusha*.

In fact, the work of Zevulun is so important that the Torah lists Zevulun before Yissachar. This is because they are the ones who actualize the *dirah betachtonim*¹⁶. On the other hand, Yissachar's *avoda* is superior since only they reach a complete unity with HaShem similar to the times of Moshiach¹⁷.

We see that each level is greater than the other in its own right. Thus, each person must feel proud of the special task given to him, without feeling the need to follow the other path or to degrade it.

■ IT'S NOT ABOUT US ■

On a deeper note:

The desire of a person to acquire a specific *avoda* is an expression of arrogance. *He* wants to be a Rosh Yeshivah, *askan*, *shliach*, *baal tzedakah* and so forth, and *he* is upset when he cannot reach it. If he would recognize that his job is only to carry

15. See Likutei Sichos vol. 8 p. 189 that the 'drawing down' of HaShem is accomplished through Zevulun and the 'revelation' of HaShem is accomplished through Yissachar.

16. Likutei Sichos vol. 30 p. 134.

17. Likutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1243.

out the task designated to him from above, he would not want to leave his current field to seek out another *shlichus*.

The Rebbe would often quote the statement of Chazal, "*ani lo nivreisi ela l'shameish es koni*," I have not been created for any other purpose than to serve my Master. The Rebbe explained that this expression ("*ani lo nivreisi ela...*") implies that one's entire life is a means to serve HaShem, and there is nothing else in life besides that. A *chossid* who internalizes this message will not be concerned by his status or position; whatever it is, he will fulfill it with joy.

A story is told of the holy brothers, Reb Elimelech and Reb Zusha, who were once thrown in prison. It was time to daven *mincha*, but the waste bucket in the center of the room prevented them from being able to do so. Noticing his brother's distress Reb Zusha asked, "Why are you sad? The same *Eibershter* Who commanded us to daven *mincha*, placed us in this room." Realizing this, they began a joyful dance around the bucket. [The story continues that the prison guard heard the ruckus and when he was told that the bucket was the cause of the noise, he quickly removed the bucket...]

Rabbi Shabsai Slaviticki of Antwerp Belgium relates the following story:

When I learned in Yeshivas Kol Torah in Yerushalayim, I had a friend who learned diligently but due to his intellectual capacity it took him much time and effort to grasp subject matter. My friend was very distraught by this and sought counsel by some of his Roshei Yeshivah.

His Roshei Yeshivah told him that if he would exert himself enough, he too would reach great heights in Torah. In fact, he was told, many great *geonim* were not born with superior capabilities, but with tireless toiling they became exceptional *talmidei chachomim*. My friend was not satisfied with this response, bothered that he had to toil so much while others had it so much easier. Eventually, I convinced him to write a letter to the Rebbe.

In the response, the Rebbe wrote that a person was not created to be a *lamdan* or successful person; man's purpose is to serve HaShem. Each person must serve HaShem according to the capabilities he was given. One who does not have superior capabilities, yet learns diligently, fulfills *mitzvos b'hiddur* and davens according to his level is greater than his genius friend who does not utilize his capabilities to the utmost. The genius may know more, but in his primary mission of serving HaShem, he falls short.

The Rebbe's response transformed the bochur

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The desire of a person to acquire a specific avoda is an expression of arrogance. If he would recognize that his job is only to carry out the task designated to him from above, he would not leave that field to seek out another area of activity.

■ ■ ■

18. During the mid 5730's Rabbi Chodokov called in a distinguished member of *anash* and told him that the Rebbe would like to establish courses for married men in diamond-cutting and computer-programming. However, due to some difficulties it did not materialize.

19. The Rebbe spoke highly of his grandfather, Reb Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, who after his chassunah joined the "*yoshvim*" learning in Lubavitch by the Rebbe Maharash (Likutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 386).

completely. From then on, he served HaShem joyfully, with no concern of where it would bring him.

■ PRACTICAL EXAMPLES ■

Though this general concept may be familiar word order should be changed, but I not sure how, I would like to point out some areas where this concept should be applied.

(1) Life Shlichus

To educate that "Everyone must do XYZ" is misleading and harmful. The child attempting something for which he is not cut out, will either do it nonetheless and live a difficult unsatisfactory *yiddishkeit* (with inevitable side effects), or he will drop out of the race entirely.

For instance, a child who is raised with the belief that to be a good *Yid* one must spend his entire life learning in *kolel*, when in truth he is not suited for it, will either stick it out and be miserable (causing his children to resent *Yiddishkeit* in general), or will lose all interest in serious learning since he anyways cannot 'make it'.

Similarly, a child who is led to believe that one cannot be a good *chossid* and join the workforce, will often go to work and see himself (and thus behave) as less of a *chossid*. Having been badgered for years by irresponsible *mechanchim* that anything less than total dedication to *shlichus* is traitorous to the Rebbe, he can never become a dedicated working *chossid*.

The legendary "*chassidishe baalabus*," who would daven and learn with feeling, dedicate himself to help a fellow *Yid*, and labor in business to support his family and to contribute to *tzedakah*, has become an endangered species.

In fact, the Rebbe made efforts to assist certain *anash* in acquiring a trade. The Rebbe sought to establish trade classes in Crown Heights for *yungeliet* who would not be traveling on *shlichus*¹⁸.

[This trend is strikingly similar to the *kolel* crisis in some communities today. In previous generations, some young couples would live a more lofty lifestyle by allowing the husband to study Torah¹⁹. This would often require a material sacrifice on their part, having to forego certain conveniences that others had, yet they made this choice out of their love for Torah.

While this may be suitable for many inspired young people, it is not suitable for everyone. Today we are witness to many families who feel compelled to live this life, though they are not suitable for it. This results in unsatisfied parents and irritated children, who are jealous of the 'better life' that others have (whether they

dare to admit it out loud or not).]

(2) Middos

Another illustration:

Throughout their education, children are taught about the importance of various *avodos* and *middos*.

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utmost.*

■ ■ ■

20. Eve of Tu BiShvat 5739.

21. Likutei Sichos vol. 24 p. 540.

They hear stories of great *tzaddikim* and *chassidim* who would learn all night, *daven* all day, give all their money to *tzedakah*, and love every Yid as themselves.

However, they often do not appreciate the individualism of each of these *chassidim*. Reb Eizel Homiler was known for his greatness in Torah but not for his warm *ahavas Yisroel*, and Reb Hendel was known for his warm *ahavas Yisroel* and not for his greatness in Torah. There is of course no lacking on the part of these *chassidim*, for they each dedicated themselves to Torah and *ahavas Yisroel* according to their abilities.

However, a child who hears all these, without proper guidance, will expect to combine all of these qualities together in to one perfect *chossid*. The child is unable to develop his unique character and often feels unworthy that he does have all the qualities he notices in his peers. He expects himself to have the same *chayus* as the friend to his right, and the same diligence as the friend to his left.

Such a *chinuch* produces many mediocre, monotonous, monochrome *chassidim* who do not excel in any particular field.

Even values extolled in Chassidus should not be applied across the board, since they were often intended for implementation by select individuals only, while the rest were meant to simply appreciate it.

To illustrate, the following is a story the Rebbe related at a *farbrengen*²⁰:

■ ■ ■

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■ ■ ■

"When Reb Anshel Aharonovitz prepared the Likutei Torah for a reprint, he corrected over three thousand mistakes existent in the previous print. After receiving the approval of the Rebbe Rashab, he showed it to the venerable *chossid* Reb Dovid Tzvi Chein (Radatz) for his opinion. Radatz was hesitant to express displeasure after the Rebbe had given his approval but he nevertheless shared the following thought: 'Until now when one would learn Chassidus, he would come upon a difficult passage and break his head to figure out its meaning. Only after many long hours of deep thought would he come to the conclusion that it was merely a mistake. Now that these mistakes would be fixed, the *maamar* will be able to be understood at first glance and those hours of contemplation will be lost.'"

A short while later, in response to an individual inquiry, the Rebbe clarified that this story should not be misunderstood as a lesson for the common *chossid*. This was suitable for Radatz who was so dedicated to Chassidus; however, the average individual needs the corrected mistakes...²¹

Thus, even a value praised *by the Rebbe in public* must be carefully applied. It is the responsibility of the *mashpiim* to guide the young student on which values and directives are meant for him and which

22. See Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 3:4 (Sm"eh 13, Nesivos Hamishpat 8) that the perspective of the world is always assumed to be diametrically opposed the perspective of Torah. In

fact, the Tzemach Tzeddek would say that when one is doubtful how to do something, he should consult with worldly people and do exactly the opposite (L'sheima Oizen p. 62).

are not.

(3) Torah Learning

Another field (more obvious, yet still under-addressed) is the differences amongst students in academics. While some attempts have been made to introduce multi-level learning, they have failed to address the fundamental issue.

The challenge for many of these children is not the *level* of the learning, but the *style* and *subject* of the learning. Some minds are designed to learn Gemara in a self-contained analytical manner, while others are meant to learn it through comparison to other *sugyos*, and yet others will learn the Gemara to draw out the opinions, reasons and *halacha*. Some are altogether incapable of learning Gemara at and are better off delving into Mishna in-depth (being spared the lengthy *shakla v'tarya* and multiple *machlokes* in Gemara which many find difficult to follow).

Indeed, before the Yeshivah system began (a mere 200 years ago in Russia and up until the second world war in Poland and Galicia), a *bochur* would learn in a local Beis Medrash with a *chavrusa* or a small group, and he would pose his questions to a more learned Yid sitting in the Beis Medrash. He would learn whichever *sefer* he or his mentor would choose: Chumash (with Rashi or without, with *meforshim* or without), Mishna (basic or *b'iyun*) or Gemara (in one of the many different ways) etc. Even those who worked part time would find their place in the Beis Medrash for the remainder of the day.

In recent times, in order to perpetuate Torah learning, mass *yeshivos* were established. These

institutions of learning protected their students against the howling winds of *haskala* and modernity that swept the masses. Yet, it came with a price: conformity.

[As it has been said by many, *yeshivos* are like the infamous beds of Sedom: When a guest too tall would lie in them, the people of Sedom would cut off his protruding feet, and when the guest was too short, they would forcefully stretch him...]

Today, there are so many attending *yeshivah*, that the student body can be divided into different types of classes. The biggest challenge to this solution is the parents who do not want their child going to the "*mishnayos* class"...

While I cannot offer a solution to those who have to deal with such parents, it must be clear that the issue can only be addressed after recognizing the true problem. As Chazal say, "The knowledge of the illness is half the cure."

[Part of the challenge is also the prevalence of the secular perspective that *yeshivah* attendance constitutes "completing the educational system." This perspective leads to two negative conclusions: (1) Every student must study the same texts and complete the same system. (2) Once one has "completed the system" he has graduated and no longer needs to learn.

From a Torah perspective, Torah learning is a lifelong pursuit that engages every Yid at every available opportunity ("*ki heim chayeinu v'orech yomeinu*"). The reason they attend yeshivah at a young age is to prepare them for learning for the rest of their life. Thus, there is no "formal system" that must be followed, and the learning may vary from child to child

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(according to the guidelines of Hilchos Talmud Torah).

Though some choose to correct this malady by following the Montessori Method, it should be noted that it too is an expression of secular values (albeit in the opposite direction), however space constraints do not allow us to elaborate on this aspect²².

■ PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ■

(1) General Message

Students should be encouraged to serve *HaShem* by being *ehrlliche Yidden* and *chassidim*, learning *Torah*, earning a *kosher* living and heeding the Rebbe's call to reach out to other Yidden at every available opportunity.

Our children should not be limited to any one particular field, but should be encouraged to pursue the field that suites them best. They should be taught to recognize their individual talents and desires, and guided as how to utilize them for *avodas HaShem*.

(2) Individual Flexibility

Systems in *chinuch* (especially character development) do not work.

We must ourselves be aware of the various differences in children or students, and guide them appropriately. When they reach a junction and are unsure of the proper direction, it is our responsibility to assess their character and help them decide what it is appropriate for them. At

times we must even discourage children for taking upon themselves otherwise laudable activities, only for the fact that it is not suitable for them.

If we notice a child who displays intolerance to

a particular food, we evaluate the cause and eliminate it from his menu, since it can harm his body. Similarly, if a child expresses *excessive difficulty* with a particular conduct (e.g. cannot comprehend Gemara, cannot sit in shul, etc.), we must evaluate the cause, for perhaps this activity (at least to the degree being practiced) is not suited for him.

(3) Guidance and Assistance

Many children are underdeveloped due to lack of direction in how to use their abilities for a beneficial cause. Students should be encouraged and guided to uncover their natural leanings and utilize them properly.

If a child is drawn to a particular area of learning (e.g. Chumash, Nach, Mishna, *halacha*, *agadda*, etc.) he should be encouraged and assisted in pursuing it.

Children must be taught to ignore social norms and choose what is best for *them*, regardless of what "everyone" is doing. This is the key to a healthy and (therefore) happy *avoda*.

■ ■ ■

In the next article we will *iy"H* discuss "*al pi darko*" as it applies to men and women – the differences in the home, school and beyond.





Rabbi Yecheskel Lebovic



My Child Is Not a "Learner"

Rabbi Lebovic has been in chinuch for 25 years, both on the elementary and Yeshivah Gedolah levels, and is thoroughly familiar with the situation he describes in this article. He is currently the rov in Cong. Ahavath Zion Maplewood NJ and directs the Likrat Shiduch Shadchanut Service.

The following article was submitted to Perspectives by the author in connection with the subject of individualized education discussed in the previous issue.

This article was first published 23 years ago, #107 of Di Yiddishe Heim, Summer 5750--in those days the articles of Di Yiddishe Heim were looked over by the Rebbe.

to certain attitudinal factors within the "frum" community that need to be re-evaluated in order to solve some problems.

■ YESHIVA EDUCATION ON THE RISE ■

Over the past four decades Torah-true Judaism has made tremendous strides in America and elsewhere. Jewish schools are flourishing, some of them bursting at the seams. Jewish life is vibrant and pulsating. The Torah community keeps growing in an exponential progression, aided by the fact that observant Jews are the ones having the most children. The *yeshiva* system of education is becoming the norm for more and more families. As with any other state of expansion and development, there are birth pangs and labor pains. I would like to address this article

■ HOW IT USED TO BE ■

Throughout the centuries, *yeshiva* higher education was reserved for those who possessed the intellectual capacity for intense learning. It was they who followed the eventual path to *kollel*. Where post-elementary cheder education was not mandatory, young boys would (ideally) get a good general cheder education, become fluent with *Chumash*, many sections of the *Mishnah*, and perhaps a few *masechtos* and selected chapters of *Gemara*. At a certain age they would then enter various fields of work, eventually marry and set up exemplary Jewish homes.

If they were not especially gifted, or perhaps simply didn't have enough *"zitz-fleish"* and perseverance to join the ranks of Yissochor, the learners, they'd join with Zevulun to become supporters of Torah institutions and Torah scholars. Their own learning meant keeping a *seder* with which they were comfortable. Such has been the Jewish way for hundreds of years, each individual recognizing his place in Jewish society. Those who did not learn full-time did not usually feel inferior. Of course, there was always the temptation for Talmidei Chachomim to give way to feelings of conceit--but that is a human weakness and not necessarily a direct result of the Torah-learning system.

■ THE PROBLEM ■

The novelty of our contemporary situation is two-fold: a) in terms of the educational system b) in terms of prevalent attitudes in the Jewish frum community.

As we live today in a society where secondary education is mandatory, by the time the Jewish child (especially a boy) reaches high school age, he may already find himself in a problematic situation.

In most schools, students are not separated according to intellectual capacity. Very bright students study in the same classes with those who may be average or less capable. Students are directed along one track, with the result that some of them fall by the wayside, unable to keep up with the learning. They often have difficulty especially with the fast-paced

analytical process of *Gemara*, for which not everyone is readily suited. This can engender a feeling of inferiority and a lessened self-image in the child.

As the years go by, the problem increases; such teenagers often get "turned off" and sometimes leave *Yiddishkeit* altogether. Such is human nature; people like to do that at which they succeed, and avoid activities that demonstrate

their mediocrity. They will certainly avoid that in which they fail. Why is this so? The situation is generated not only because of lack of funds. (This is sometimes an excuse given for the scarcity of *yeshiva* trade schools.) It is a result of general trends in the attitudes of Jewish parents: we are the "People of the Book", with a definite scholarly bent. Why should my Yankel be deprived of the best that *yeshiva* education has to offer? Also, they exclaim, if Yankel doesn't learn together with everyone else (despite the fact that he

is admittedly of lesser academic ability), he might not get a good *shidduch*!

We must realize that just as an army has its different regiments, each with a separate, specific and valuable function, so it is with students. There are those who are gifted and/or have great perseverance to till in Torah study, who should be encouraged in every way and put in an academic environment that will tap and develop their full potential. And there are those whose have neither perseverance nor ability, who ought to be put on a different track (with the possibility to switch track at a later stage if the situation warrants it). As a

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result of the prevailing system many young men in their twenties stay on within the *yeshiva* walls only because it is a stigma for them to be outside of them and in the hope that doing so might land them a "better" *shidduch*.

Now of course, there is something to be said in favor of remaining within the *yeshiva* atmosphere even if the young man is goofing off and not truly learning. Such an atmosphere is very important in this day and age of materialism. These young men, though, grow listless for lack of accomplishment, for the reasons mentioned above.

■ WHAT IS THE SOLUTION? ■

The educational approach must have the flexibility to treat certain students differently than mainstream (if indeed there is such a main stream). Those children (normal in every respect) who find it difficult to keep up with the rigorous demands of the *yeshiva* learning schedule should be put on a different track.

A general pedagogic rule of thumb is that the goals and standards set for the student must be slightly beyond his immediate reach, so that he have both the challenge and the ability to eventually reach them. If they are too easily within reach, the challenge isn't there, and if they are totally beyond his reach, he will sooner or later give up and stop trying. These children must have a less demanding academic schedule and standards, so that they can feel a sense of accomplishment and not

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■■■

give up on themselves. They can easily sense that others have "given up" on them and they will easily comply in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

There are now so many *yeshiva* students who fit this description that we can no longer ignore the problem and pretend it doesn't exist. Furthermore we mustn't forget that the main function of early education is of a preparatory nature. We want to prepare the child for life, with good learning skills and habits. But it is not half as important what and how he learns during his formative years as to what effect this education will have on the rest of his life. What is the benefit of a learning experience that leaves him confused, lacking self

confidence, unproductive and disillusioned? The learning process has to be gradual and a special schedule of studies has to be established for such students.

I once heard about a young *yeshiva* boy who had difficulty learning *Gemara* with the commentary of *Tosfos* (usually quite complex), and try as he would he just couldn't get into it. An elderly *chossid* encouraged him to keep on learning just with the simpler commentary of Rashi. The student did so for many years, and eventually became a great Talmid Chacham.

In education there are short-range and long-range goals. The short range goals are limited to the scholastic years, while the long-range goals must be projected into the decades ahead. This is reflected in the verse "train the young so

that he not depart (from this training) even as he grows old." (Mishlei 22:6) The words "as he grows old" can be understood "as he grows older" into adolescence and adulthood, but it also means that it will last well into his ripe-old age. This is the barometer of good *chinuch*: how long and far reaching will be its results?

Thus our *yeshivos* and day schools have to cater to the individual needs of each student, and certainly to the needs of a sizable percentage of their student population, who share the common denominators stated above. They cannot and should not be geared solely to an elitist small segment who excel scholastically (unless they are specifically designed as such).

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabah chap.2) states that only ten out of a thousand students grows to be fully proficient in *Gemara*, and one out of a thousand in *halacha* (Jewish law) decision rendering. This doesn't mean that the educational system was geared mainly for these few. On the contrary, every single child

was educated properly and thoroughly, "*al pi darko*" – each according to his particular needs.

■ WHAT IS THE RIGHT SYSTEM OF TORAH EDUCATION? ■

The sequence in the above-mentioned midrashic statement also gives an insight into how the educational system ought to be set up. The statement reads : "It is the norm that 1000 people enter into the study of *Tanach*, from whom 100 enter into the study of *Mishnah*, from whom 10 enter into the study of *Gemara*, from whom one enters into halachic decisions; this is the meaning of : "one man from among a thousand I have found" (Koheles 7:28)".

This statement can be aligned with the statement in Pirkei Avos 5:22 : "At 5 years of age (a child is brought) into the study of *Chumash* and *Tanach*, at age 10 into the study of *Mishnah*, at 13 into the full observance of Mitzvos, and at 15 into the study of *Gemara*."



We see that this system of study had all students study *Tanach* to proficiency for 5 years, followed by another 5 years of intense *Mishnah* study (those who did not have the ability to fit in the *Mishnah* program must have been directed to the trades and agricultural endeavors at an early age) and only at age 15, after being fully knowledgeable of all of *Mishnayos*, did those suited for it engage vigorously in the life long study of *Gemara*.

In most of today's yeshivos, *Gemara* study is started at an early age without the benefit of extensive knowledge and overview of *Mishnah*. While *Gemara* skills are thus gained at an early age, they are not built on the firm foundation of a systematic and gradual educational progression. This is comparable to first studying the secondary and tertiary roads of a map without being first fully conversant with the main arteries.

The great *gaon* of Lublin, author of *Toras Chessed* responsa, was a *chossid* of the Tzemach Tzeddek, and whenever he would come to the Rebbe, he would present him some of his recent *chidushim* (new thoughts) in Torah study. This would be his "gift" to the Rebbe. On one such occasion, the Rebbe told him that, though his new ideas were well thought out, they ran counter a certain *Mishnah*. The *Toras Chessed* was taken aback and started to run through all of the *Mishnah* in his mind, but without discovering his error. He asked the Rebbe to give him a "hint" and tell him in which "*seder*" this *mishnah* was to be

found. The Rebbe told him it was in the order of "*Kodshim*" (which deals with sacrificial offerings), but still to no avail. The Rebbe then expounded on that particular *mishnah* and demonstrated by analysis wherein lay his mistake. The *Toras Chessed* was certainly "*bokee*" (expertly knowledgeable) with all of *Shas*; but if even he was able to make an error for lack of insight in a certain *mishnah*, how great is the lack of so many today who not only lack the insight, but do not even know well so much of the *Mishnah*.

In the educational system of old, most students were able to do well, at least passably well, in the study of *Mishnah* until age 15. They would commit that knowledge to memory and retain it for the rest of their lives. Today new *masechtos* of *Gemara* are learned every year but not easily retained, for the reasons spelled out above. Only the bright students who can easily relate to *Gemara* study do well, while many others fall by the wayside with the negative symptoms described above. I am not advocating necessarily that these students postpone *Gemara* study until age 15, but that, in general, their study load be commensurate with their current ability. Open-minded educational experts can easily formulate an appropriate program of studies.

What about the *shiduchim* syndrome? It pales in comparison to the immediate needs of the child and teenager, who are at an intolerable detriment if they are pushed beyond their level and ability. With Hashem's help, they will get their right *bashert shiduch* at

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■ IN CONCLUSION ■

It is suggested that the present educational system requires adjustment in order to accomodate what is now a good percentage of the student population. This can be done by developing dual tracks within the same school and/or establishing schools that specialize in educating the type of students described in this article.

There is a Yiddish saying: "*a guest oif a vile zet oif a mile*" (a guest for a while sees for a mile). A guest who comes to town will often assess a local problem better than the inhabitants who are in the thick of it. The reason is that those close to the situation lack the objectivity to

properly assess it.

This is especially so when a situation warrants a change. There is psychological inertia which would rather go on with the status quo rather than make waves: if it has worked fairly well till now, let us continue with it.

In its own time 70 years ago, the innovative idea to have girls receive a thorough formal Jewish education was not readily accepted in all quarters as there was resistance to change. Today it has become such a norm that one wonders if and how it could ever have been different. Just because any system has worked fairly well for some length of time does not mean that it is beyond periodical reassessment.

Let us have nachas from *all* our children.





Mrs. Rachel Altein

Generations

Mrs. Rachel Altein was raised by her parents Rabbi Yisroel and Rebbetzin Shaina Jacobson in Brownsville NY. In 1944 she married Rabbi Mottel Altein and together, for many years, they led the Jewish community in Bronx NY. She was from the founders of Neshei Chabad and at the direct request of the Rebbe she served as the Lubavitch kalah teacher for many years.

In 1960 she was appointed as editor of Di Yiddishe Heim English section which she managed throughout its forty years. Every article of the Di Yiddishe Heim was submitted to the Rebbe for approval, who would comment freely on the text. In the Summer of 5751, the Rebbe returned the articles with a note that he now entrusted her with editing the articles on her own.

The following is an article that appeared in Di Yiddishe Heim #94, from Winter 5745 (1985).

The generations regress; if our ancestors were like angels, then we are but human. If they were human, we are like donkeys.”

In our heart of hearts, how many of us really agree with that famous Talmudic statement? I am not speaking here about “reformers” of whatever ilk, whose entire philosophy is that today’s “modern, progressive” people understand so much better what is proper and suitable for the advanced, technological society of the 20th century (or 19th or 21st) than their predecessors who had no access to their superior education, modern research, et. al.

No; it is my experience that even those who are quite familiar with the many places in our holy writings which praise the wisdom of previous

generations, and exhort the older generation to pass on that wisdom and knowledge to the next, feel that “we are really different”. How many times has this middle-aged lady been told “You don’t understand. It’s a new generation; they see things differently. They live in a different world; the old answers, the old ways are not for them.”

When one loses a parent, one perforce muses about the old and the new generations. Since my dear mother *a”h* passed away, I have thought a lot about my parents and what they stood for, especially when I read the notices of various Neshei Chabad groups announcing seminars and lectures about “A Chassidishe Home”; “Raising a Chassidishe Child”, etc., terminology I never heard in my youth. Yet, whoever knew, or knows of, my parents, knows of course that they were living

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examples of what *chassidism* is all about, but never did I hear in my childhood home the expression “*chassidishe*” home or child.

Let me share with you what I did see and hear.

■ TORAH ■

Torah scholarship was one of the prime values in our home; it permeated every part of our lives. My father [Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson *a”h* – Ed.] who was always busy with dozens of community needs, always, always had a *sefer* open before him. He rose at 6 a.m. and went to bed late, so he could learn. And one of my fondest memories is the hoarse voice of *his* father, learning out loud with that wonderful *Gemara nigun* that woke me up in the dawn hours when I would spend a Shabbos with my grandparents. I remember an aunt of mine from a well-known Chabad family, telling me how shocked she was when she came to America in the 1930’s, because she had never before seen a religious man or boy sitting around just talking rather than learning in a *sefer*.

My grandfather, after his retirement from being a *schochet*, happily sat learning from morning to night. In the fourteen years following he made two lavish family parties celebrating a “*siyum*” on *all* of *Shas* (the Talmud) and he was on a third cycle when he passed away.

It was clear in my home that *Torah scholarship* was what distinguished Chabad *chassidim*. My father often told me that the “*Tmimim*” — students of the Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Russia and later Poland, who came to America in the 1920’s and 30’s, all served as Rabbis, Roshei Yeshivah, Shochtim, etc. Far more than I heard the term “*chosid*”, I remember the term “*a tomim*”, spoken with a special inflection, clearly implying a special kind of person.

■ ■ ■

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■ ■ ■

My father also often referred to the “Nusach HoAri” Jews, not scholars, but wonderful people who had lived in Chassidic towns in Russia and were close to Chabad. They, too, learned Torah regularly, but an altogether different standard of scholarship was the assumption for a Lubavitcher Yeshivah student.

■ PIETY ■

Coupled with the emphasis on Torah learning was “*frumkeit*” — an absolute, uncompromising, devoted observance of all the *mitzvos* on the highest possible level.

Both my parents adhered to this standard, but they were not at all rigid or self-righteous. It was a most natural and happy way of life.

My mother, who often deplored her lack of holy learning, was very knowledgeable about many *dinim*. When she was too weak to go to the *shmurah matzah* bakery to “take *challah*”, my father insisted on bringing the whole day’s baking to our house, at great inconvenience, because he knew how much the *mitzvah* meant to her. And he smilingly indulged her and gave both my mother and her older sister her own *esrog*, because my mother knew that whoever “*bentches*” *esrog* first establishes possession (one of the *mitzvos* relating to *esrog*), and it was hard for her to resolve the conflict between two *mitzvos*, benching *esrog* first and honoring an older sister.

My mother wore a wig from the day she was married, even in America where there was so little demand for “*shaitels*” that there was only *one* wig-dealer in all of New York City, and she wasn’t kept that busy either. Although we were far from affluent, my mother cared about her appearance. She was not “fashionable”, but she had good taste and a natural flair for what was becoming. Yet much as she made sure that her dresses suited her well, and

fit just so, she did not hesitate to add material to her sleeves when necessary. (There were no shops catering to the “*frum*” trade before W.W.II). The humblest housedress and the best Shabbos outfit—all had to have a proper-length sleeve. If the added material was not such a good match and spoiled the looks of the otherwise “perfect” outfit, so be it. No compromises, ever.

Only years later did I appreciate the fact that many of my parents’ peers did not live up to their high standards of mitzvah observance. Never did a word cross their lips about what others their friends and relatives — did or did not do. The one exception I remember vividly was when one “*tomim*”, at the height of the depression, shaved off his beard in the hopes that that would make it easier for him to find employment and feed his hungry family. My father was beside himself with aggravation. “How could a *tomim* do that?!”

My father drank only *cholov yisroel* and ate only *glatt kosher* meat (when his father put it aside for him in the slaughter-house; otherwise he ate chicken) long before these foods were generally introduced in the U.S.A. But he never discussed this, or any other “*hiddur mitzvah*” that he practiced.

This was our ordinary, matter-of-fact way of life, and we never got the feeling we were remarkable or superior, or deprived and repressed either. Just lucky.

■ LUBAVITCHER ■

I should say that we never got the feeling that we were different and better because we had such a high standard of learning Torah and observance of mitzvos. Our parents, however, definitely gave us a

feeling that we were a special breed because we were religious Jews, and Lubavitcher. We grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in a neighborhood about 95% Jewish, mostly first generation immigrants. Most ate *kosher* food, were familiar with, and observed many traditions, but were not really *frum* as we understand the term. I attended public schools, since there were no Yeshivos for girls then. If not for the fierce pride in being *frum* that my parents instilled in me, even if it meant being different from most of my Jewish classmates, neighbors and friends, I wonder if I could have “made it” with my faith intact.

My grandparents, too, shared this concern: that their children must, despite the time and place — “*treife*” America

in the 1920’s and 30’s, remain religious. They encouraged their bright and talented children to learn a trade, rather than go to college and learn a profession like their peers. The attrition rate from Yiddishkeit for college students was at least 90% at the time; it was almost impossible to observe Shabbos properly. A tradesman had a fighting chance — he could be his own boss. But always, the emphasis was on being *frum*; “*chassidish*” was not the term used.

Lubavitcher — that was a term that *was used*. It meant, in addition to Torah scholarship and uncompromising *frumkeit*, two other things to us.

One, of course, was devotion to the Rebbe. My parents were exceptional people blessed with unusual talents and abilities; this is not the place to enumerate their contributions to Chabad. But the spirit of their dedication — that was an everlasting lesson to us. I don’t think it ever occurred to my parents that they should use their talents and abilities for their own material benefit — to get

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money, or pleasure or whatever. Although all their time and talent, their very lives, were spent in involvement with projects of the former Rebbe and, may he live and be well, the present Rebbe Shlite, my parents would have considered the idea that *they* were doing something *for* the Rebbeim absurd.

Every time I hear the expression “Do this or that so the Rebbe should have *nachas*,” I wince. My parents devoted their lives to the Rebbeim, but rarely if ever did they talk about them. My father served three Rebbeim; he had to work closely with them on some of the projects they assigned him, yet even within the family he rarely spoke about it.

It was clearly understood that to discuss the Rebbeim in any way, even their greatness, was presumptuous and not in the spirit of proper respect. Implicit in their every action, and at times explicitly explained to us, was the belief that it was the greatest privilege and honor to be involved in *anything* related to the Rebbeim, an honor beyond price that we are all unworthy of.

The giving was 100% one-sided: *from* a Rebbe *to* a chosid. The reverse was ridiculous, contrary to the basic concepts of Rebbe *chossid* relationship.

One important part of our “*chassidishe*” lives does seem a little different nowadays: the celebration of Yud-Tes Kislev. That was a real Yom-Tov. We proudly exchanged “good *yom-tov*” greetings throughout the day. Besides Purim and Simchas Torah, it was the day my parents made a tremendous feast and *farbrengen* in our house. It was not just one of the *chassidic* *farbrengen* days; it was Rosh Hashanah for Chassidus, *the* most important day in the Chabad calendar. (A misnagid, thinking he was making a barbed joke, once sent a New Year’s greeting card to us on Yud Tes Kislev. My father thought it a great idea.)

My grandmother once told me that she remembered *her* grandmother gathering all the children, distributing sweets to them and telling them, “Kinderlach, today is a big *yom-tov*. Today they freed the great Rebbe from prison.” If I remember correctly, my grandmother said her grandmother remembered from her early childhood the actual original day of Yud-Tes Kislev! It just doesn’t seem the same nowadays.

■ SERVICE TO OTHERS ■

My father would often tell me that one of the distinctions of Lubavitcher Rebbeim is, in addition to their exceptional Torah erudition, their concern for the entire Jewish community, not just their own *chassidim*. It followed, naturally, that Lubavitcher *chassidim* must share that universal concern and spend their lives in service to the community, helping institutions, groups and individuals. This communal responsibility superseded all personal considerations. No “Let George do it; it’s too hard, why should I kill myself?” There was no saying “No — I can’t”, to anyone who asked for help — ever. Home and heart always open and involved in helping others — that was their whole life.

I could go on; one unforgettable incident from my childhood says a lot.

As we were sitting down to the seder one Pesach, someone knocked at the door. It was a horrible-looking beggar, who sometimes came to our house for a meal. We children were afraid of him. With hindsight I realize he must have been an alcoholic or addict; he wore filthy, tattered garments, his nose and eyes ran, his hands twitched, strange noises emanated from him. A fleeting look of repulsion crossed my father’s face, then his face softened and he asked the man to join our seder: “O.K. — go wash up and join us.”

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And to us, horror-stricken, he said, “After all, when we say, “*Kol dichfin* — whoever is needy, come and join us” we are supposed to mean it.” By the end of the seder we realized he was just a pathetic, pitiful figure; we never feared him again.

“*Chassidishe*” there was no talk of, but there were countless remarks and expressions and little stories that breathed *chassidic* thought and feeling. In my ears still cling, “Don’t be a *chitzon* (superficial)”; “You have too big an *ich* (ego) to be a true *chassidiste*”; “The world is *batul b’mtzius*” (untranslatable) — all in Yiddish, of course.

One favorite, oft-repeated tale: the classic remark of one Rebbe to his *gabbai*: “I am heavy because anxiety makes you thin; and I have yet to find one single thing on this lowly earth that is worth a deep sigh.” The world and what most people think of as its pleasures did not occupy a very important part

in our lives.

My parents, as said, were very frum, yet they loved to tell another tale if, say, for some reason a particular traditional dish was not served on Shabbos or Yom Toy, or when discussing other’s priorities: A Rebbe once said in such a situation: “I am not afraid of the punishment I will receive in the next world for not being punctilious about these mitzvos which give the body material enjoyment.”

■ ■ ■

The way of life of that generation — its Torah scholarship, unpretentious piety, dedication to working for the good of the community, concern for every individual Jew, lifelong bond to the Rebbeim, its every moment replete with Torah principles and precepts — does it tell us anything, or does a new generation know it all — better?!





In the World of Anash

Chabad Scholars Discuss Contributions of the Movement's Founding Father

Eli Rubin - Chabad.org

This past Sunday marked the 200th anniversary since Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement passed away. A day-long event was organized in Crown Heights by Merkaz Anash—an organization that caters to the global community of Chabad Chassidim—focusing on Rabbi Schneur Zalman's scholarly works. Known in Chabad as the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman is best known for his authorship of the Tanya—a Chassidic guide to the service of G-d, and the Shulchan Aruch—a code of Jewish law.

As Rabbi Shimon Hellinger—director of Merkaz Anash—explains, “It is easy to appreciate his contribution to Chassidism, but it is more difficult to appreciate how important and innovative his halachic contribution is. Even less known or understood is the immense significance of his work on the prayer liturgy.” This daylong series of presentations and panel discussions was planned precisely to address this deficiency. “Merkaz Anash,” says Hellinger, “is an organization that focuses inwards; Chabad caters to the whole world, but in order for the movement's arms and legs to function properly we must make sure the beating

heart is alive and well.”

“The Alter Rebbe is actually personified by his double contribution—to mysticism on the one hand, and Jewish law on the other.”

Hellinger says that even within the Chabad community itself, not everyone truly understands and appreciates the full weight of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's contribution. “There is always more to learn, and when you grow up with something you



sometimes study it with a degree of superficiality,” says Hellinger. “We organised this event because

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we want people to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of what we have.”

The day began with a presentation by preeminent Chassidic thinker Rabbi Yoel Kahn—chief transcriber and editor of the teachings of



the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory, and editor of the *Encyclopedia of Chabad Thought* (*Sefer Ha'erschim Chabad*). Rabbi Kahn focused on a talk in which the late Lubavitcher Rebbe discussed the significance of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's name. Schneur can be read as *shnei ohr*, which means two luminaries. “Accordingly,” explained Rabbi Kahn, “the Alter Rebbe is actually personified by his double contribution—to mysticism on the one hand, and Jewish law on the other.” Rabbi Schneur Zalman's purpose was to combine these two poles,



making the most esoteric secrets as accessible and practical as a straightforward legal ruling, and permeating dry legalities and rituals with affective depth and meaning.

A panel discussion focused on Rabbi Schneur Zalman's oral teachings. Rabbi Eliyahu Matusof—a senior editor at *Otzer Hachasidim* (a branch of Kehot Publication Society, the publishing arm of Chabad-Lubavitch) and the scholar who oversaw the recently completed publication of all extant transcripts of these teachings—was joined by Rabbi Yehonasan Dovid Reinitz, who also worked on the transcripts, and Rabbi Nachum Grunwald—editor of the *Heichel Habesht Journal*. Much of the discussion focused on what these transcripts tell us about the expansion of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's leadership in the early 1790s. Previously he had attempted to guide his disciples on a more individual basis, and the *Tanya* is actually based on the personal advice that he offered during the earlier period of his leadership. But as his fame spread and his popularity grew the public discourse became the chief method of communication and guidance.



In a session devoted to Rabbi Schneur Zalman's monumental work of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Aruch Ha-rav*, Rabbi Yukusiel Farkash—a recognised halachic authority from Jerusalem—used numerous textual examples to illustrate the depth and precision invested in Rabbi Schneur Zalman's lucid phraseology. “The more you study his words,” he explained, “the more depth and novelty you uncover. Due to the simplicity and the clarity of his prose, that depth is only recognizable to one who studies his words in context of the wider halachic discourse, the opinions and arguments set forth by the great authorities of earlier generations.” In several instances he made comparative readings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's *Shulchan Aruch* alongside *Mishnah Berurah*—the

popular halachic work of the famed Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan—highlighting the many important details that can be missed if you do not scrutinize Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s words with due precision.

Rabbi Shalom DovBer Levine followed up with



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Rabbi Shalom DovBer Levine—head librarian at the Central Library of Agudat Chasidei Chabad in New York—followed up with a bibliographical survey, demonstrating that Rabbi Schneur Zalman actually composed many varied and distinct works of halacha, and that three different genres can be identified within the larger edifice of the Shulchan Aruch Ha-rav, Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s code of Jewish law. “The first and largest section of Shulchan Aruch Ha-rav,” explained Levine, “is a standalone work incorporating a comprehensive survey of all relevant laws, along with their reasons and sources.” This section deals with the common functions and obligations of Jewish life (Orach Chaim), and among scholars and laymen alike it is this section that is usually referred to when Shulchan Ha-rav is mentioned. Rabbi Levine pointed out that the other sections of this work actually include halachic texts of a different type altogether.

According to Rabbi Levine, the second section (Yoreh De’ah), which covers issues of ritual law, is really a satellite to the great legal codes authored by Rabbi Yosef Karo (Beit Yosef and Shulchan Aruch).

“It is designed,” he said, “to offer innovative insight to proficient scholars as they delve deeply into the earlier codes and their attendant commentaries.”

The third genre of halachic works by Rabbi Schneur Zalman includes no less than twenty three shorter works offering brief overviews of a diverse array of legal issues likely to be encountered on a regular basis. Most of them are devoted to elements of fiscal law, including inheritance law, damages and business law. Other are devoted to the laws of Torah study, synagogues, modesty, charity, and aspects of marriage and family law. Interestingly, there are eight works in this category whose existence can be documented, but no extant copy has yet been discovered.

This session was followed by a panel discussion on the Tanya, the best known of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s works. Rabbi Nosson Gurary—a veteran Chabad Emissary, and a noted scholar and author—began by pointing to the counterintuitive and often overlooked idea that for Rabbi Schneur Zalman, religious life is actually focused primarily on the individual’s baser side, rather than the



divine soul. “In chapter thirty-seven he writes that the soul achieves nothing for itself; its sole purpose in inhabiting the body and the physical realm is to elevate the animal soul.” Rabbi Pinchos Korf—a senior faculty member at Yeshiva Oholei Torah in New York—argued that ultimately the divine soul plays a more important role. A lively debate ensued, with R. Gurary arguing that in Tanya Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s central goal is to provide a method for the animal soul itself to come to love G-d. R. Korf disagreed, saying that this is only

possible for truly righteous individuals. “A regular person,” he argued, “can never transform their baser side entirely. What you can do is outshine it and overcome it by bringing the divine soul to the fore, making it master of all your thoughts, words and actions. Tanya teaches you how.”

Rabbi Gedalia Oberlander concluded the day with a presentation on Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s liturgical contribution. While Rabbi Schneur



Zalman’s prayerbook is used daily by tens of thousands, very few appreciate the beauty and precision that make his liturgical phraseology unique. Rabbi Oberlander explained that this prayer liturgy conforms with great exactitude to both halachic and grammatical considerations on the one hand, and the kabbalistic intentions taught by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria—the great Arizal—on the other. Providing many textual examples along with comparative readings with other versions of the liturgy, Rabbi Oberlander explained the various halachic and mystical considerations relevant to



each case. In at least one instance Rabbi Schneur Zalman simply moves a period one word over in order to endow a passage with new life and meaning.

This session was perhaps the most enlightening one of the day, but the numerous technicalities involved prevent me from doing it justice in the present report. The publication of the first Chassidic prayer book is the most underestimated of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s achievements. There are many prayer books, and it is difficult to see what is special about this one. But Rabbi Oberlander demonstrated that it is actually here that we are best exposed to Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s unique ability to combine and balance halachic legalities with chasidic and mystical considerations. “We all know of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s esoteric and exoteric contributions,” said Rabbi Oberlander, “the Shulchan Aruch Ha-rav and the Tanya are two great pillars; the prayer book is the third pillar, which seamlessly fuses the esoteric and the exoteric into a single edifice.”



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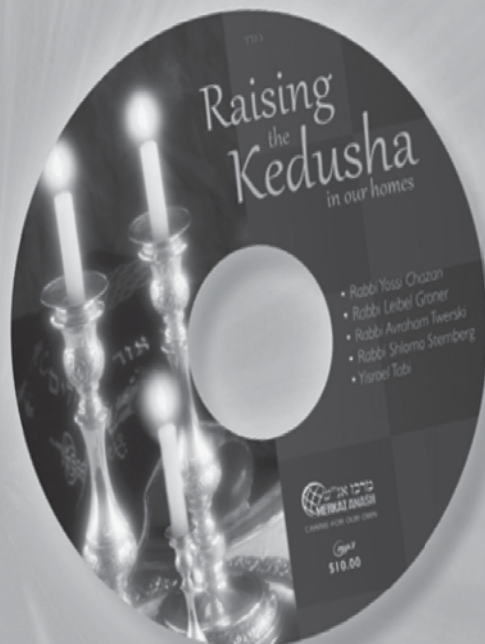
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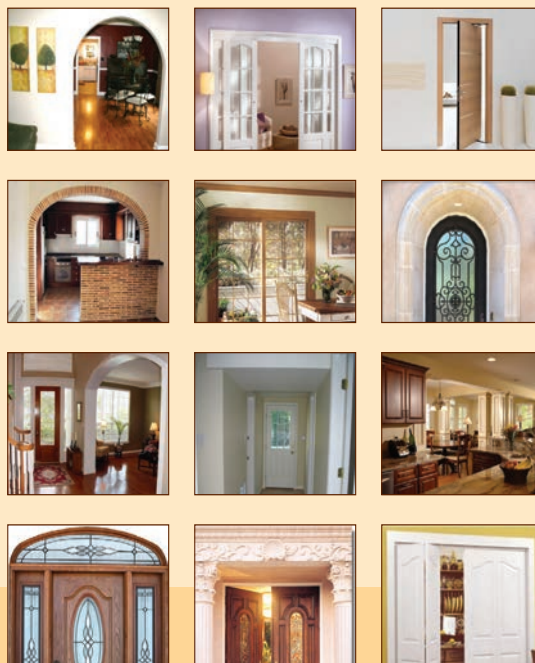
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