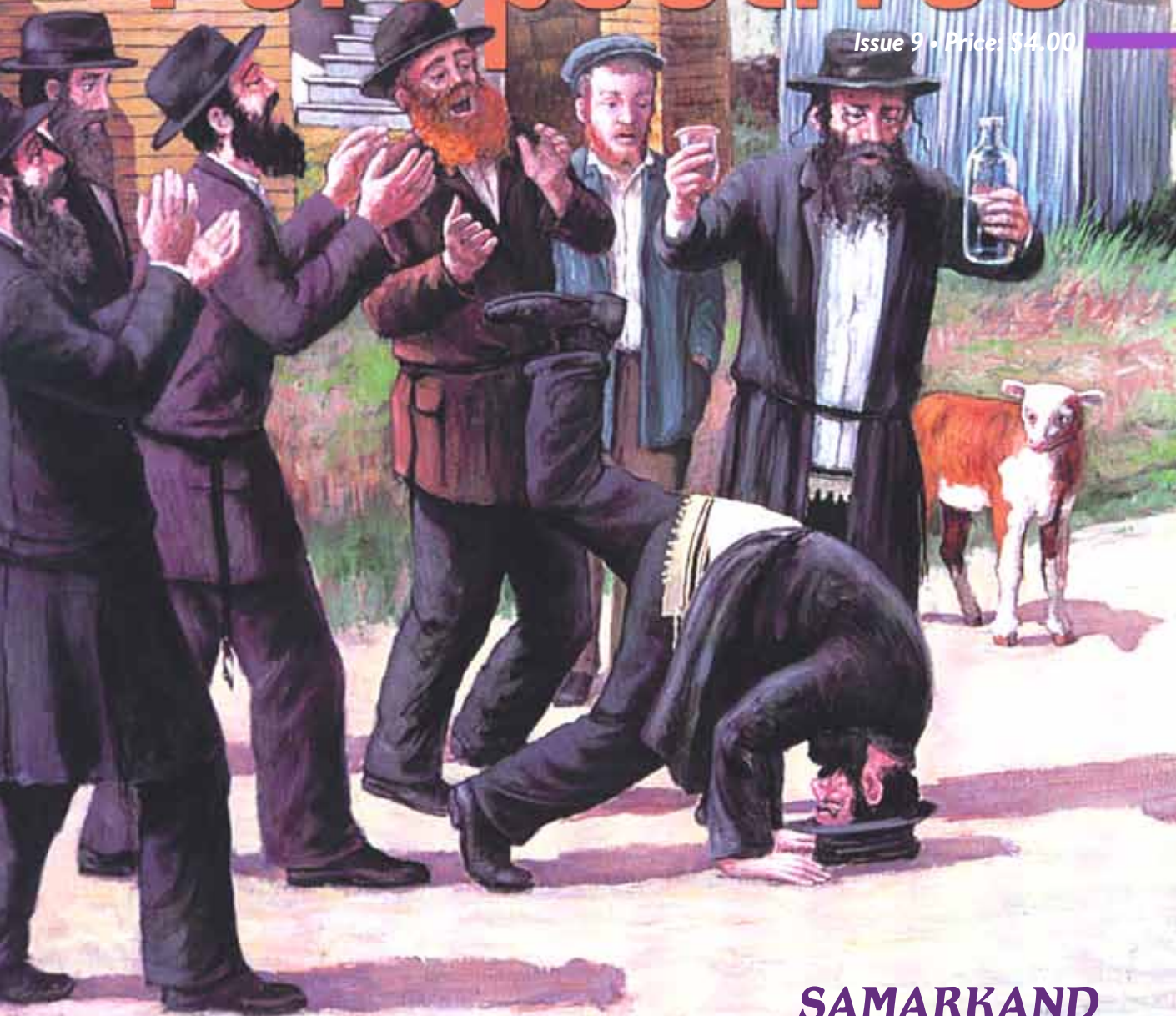


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# Perspectives

Issue 9 • Price: \$4.00



## DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

*Reb Avraham Chaim Rosenbaum a"h*

## FOUR FANATICS

*Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Kagan a"h*

## SAMARKAND "SHPITZ CHABAD"

*Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman*

## THE DIVINE NATURE OF THE MOREH NEVUCHIM

*Rabbi Eli Matusof*

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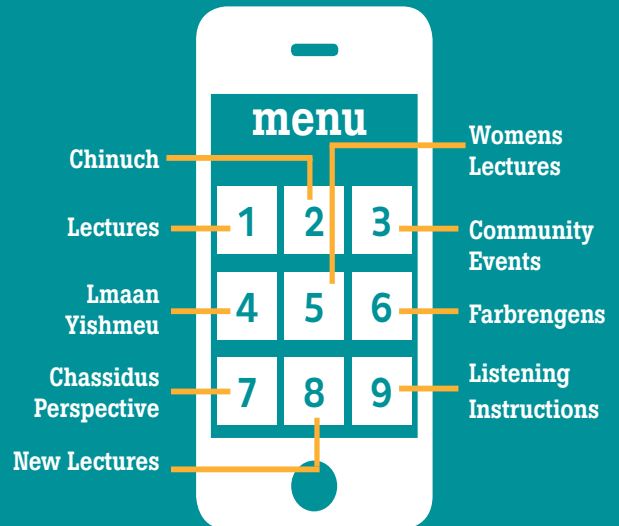
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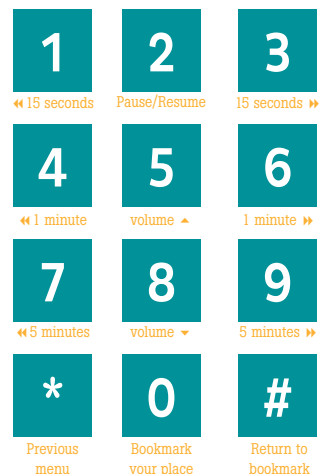
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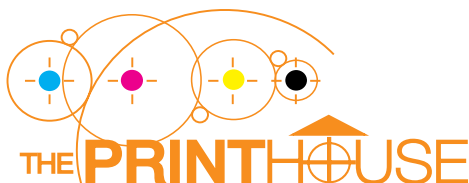
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MY PERSPECTIVE

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# - FOREWORD -

Reb Hillel Particher was once *farbrenging* with a group of chassidim. The wine was running low, and the chassidim sent a chossid to the cellar to bring some more. As he descended into the cellar, he was struck by the absolute darkness, and exclaimed, "It's dark in here!" The response came back, "Don't worry, that's only in the beginning. You get used to it and it becomes brighter."

Reb Hillel commented, "That's the problem! When you get used to the darkness you start to mistaken the darkness for light..."<sup>1</sup>

■ ■ ■

At the turn of the twentieth century, a wave of modernity and enlightenment swept Eastern Europe, and hordes of youth from upstanding *frum* and *chassidische* families fell away. The Rebbe Rashab penned a series of letters in which he outlined the necessary steps to preserve the future of *Yiddishkeit*. He makes a critical observation that the spiritual decline affected everybody; not only those who left *Yiddishkeit*, but even those who adhered to it.

The Rebbe Rashab describes how *frum Yidden* used to come to *shul* throughout the day to learn Torah. They were scrupulous about the *kashrus* of flour for *matza*, about the authenticity of *daled minim* for Sukkos and not their external beauty. They bought *tefillin* only from a *sofer yerei Shomayim*, and they ensured that the *mikvaos* were under proper *hashgacha*. All in all, the minds of *frum Yidden* were preoccupied with Torah and *mitzvos*.

"Now," writes the Rebbe Rashab, "it has almost all passed. The *batei medrash* are empty and people buy [these items] from anyone who claims to have a *bechsher*. It is not that the people are spiritually impaired, it is only that they have become weak, and their G-dly sensitivity is sleeping..." He adds that if people would be resolute in their own *Yiddishkeit*, they would have the emotional stamina to stand up against the *maskilim* who were slowly overcoming the masses, and not fall into oblivion, apathy and despair.<sup>2</sup>

We may not always realize how we change, especially in our *varemkheit* and sensitivities.<sup>3</sup> By recalling the rich life of yesteryear, the lost beauty becomes more apparent, and the drive to implement it resurges.

We hope that Perspective magazine contributes to this important end.

**Rabbi Shimon Hellinger**  
General Editor

1. *Sefer HaSichos* 5701 p. 139.

2. See *Igros Kodesh* of the Rebbe Rashab, Vol. 1, p. 266 and onward. Letters were collected in a booklet titled "*Ma Efsbar Laasos?*" and is available online at: [www.merkazanash.com/hebrew-publications](http://www.merkazanash.com/hebrew-publications)

3. The Tzemach Tzedek once shared the following episode to illustrate that a person may not notice as he himself digresses: Someone asked his friend the following question, "It is written in *seforim* that one should not walk four *amos* before washing *negel vasser* since then the spirit of *tumah* can rest upon the person. Now, I walked plenty before *negel vasser* and I don't feel any spirit of *tumah?*" To which his friend replied, "That's exactly the spirit of *tumah*, it is what drives you to ask that very question..." (*Lma'an Yeid'u* p. 297)



## THE REBBE'S PERSPECTIVE

Prepared by Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

### WHY DO CHILDREN GO TO CHEDER? WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION? TO WHOM IS A TEACHER ACCOUNTABLE?

In this *sicha* from Yud Shvat, 5715<sup>1</sup> (1955) the Rebbe addressed these questions:

#### YESTERYEAR AND TODAY

As in all areas of life, the first step in *chinuch* must be to connect the children to Hashem. After that we must draw *kedusha* down upon them through the fulfillment of *mitzvos*. Only then can they be made complete with knowledge of Torah.

In past generations most of this work was accomplished at home, so there wasn't a need for it in *yeshiva* or *cheder*. The constitution of every Jewish home was Jewish. At every step, one encountered G-dliness – by either a *mitzvah* or a word of Torah – and it was understood that one behaves according to *Shulchan Aruch*. The only responsibility the *yeshivos* had, was to teach *halacha* and broaden knowledge in Torah.

Nowadays however, when a child comes to *cheder* not only is he incomplete in Torah knowledge, but he also lacks the fulfillment of *mitzvos*, even the most important principle: the recognition that *Yiddishkeit* is essential to being a Jew and life cannot exist without it.

#### FOUNDATIONS FIRST!

The *yeshiva* must now build the student from the foundation up. It must instill within him a recognition that Hashem is not in some foreign place, to Whom the student only connects sporadically for a short talk since Hashem is in the Seventh Heaven while the child is in the United States of America... The *yeshiva* must uproot this destructive attitude by making the child realize that this way of thinking (that there can be an existence without Hashem) places his life in danger – not only his spiritual life, but even his physical life.

---

1. Unedited – printed in *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 13, p. 227 and onwards.



It is impossible to build a structure without a foundation. If the foundation is weak, then adding an additional floor can bring the whole building down. Thus, the first step in “building” a child is to awaken his *nesbama* which is hidden inside him.

Then comes the second step of drawing *kedusha* down upon him. We must teach the child that *Yiddishkeit* is not expressed by being a proud Jew, or even by participating in pro-Jewish rallies; rather his daily life must not transgress Hashem’s commandments in thought, speech or action, and he must do all those things which Hashem commanded us to do...

When these matters are not addressed, it is possible that his Torah learning will serve as “riches kept by their owner [for his own harm].” Though Torah learning is considered to be true “riches,” it can nevertheless be detrimental when regarded unscrupulously. Though the Torah itself cannot contract impurity, the one who learns it inappropriately “throws a stone to the idol *Markulis*,” and swells his own ego.

It should be added that since in this country it is common for much of the child’s day to be spent with matters other than Torah and *mitzvos*, the few hours dedicated for *chinuch* should be fully utilized for building the **foundation**, and only during spare time should “floors” be added.

## ARE YOU DOING YOUR JOB?

Sadly, although *yeshivos* know that the children are in their care for a limited amount of time, they still spend it creating holy “embellishments” instead of focusing on the essential base. The parents have placed their children — fresh and unformed — in the hands of the institution, and the teachers busy them with lofty concepts, such as a *pilpul* on Rambam. They argue that they are involved with holy matters, but they are forgetting their responsibility, the Heavenly work, they have taken upon themselves. These concepts may be very holy, but the educator having accepted this responsibility is in charge of the *nesbama*, and has to work on making the child into a proper *Yid*...

It is time for teachers to stop fooling themselves, claiming that they are being paid for a certain number of hours which they spend teaching their students, and that more cannot be expected from them. However, the claimant is not the school board but the student who came to *yeshiva* with hope to be made complete and not into an impaired vessel who will oppose Torah and *mitzvos*.

## IN SUMMARY

- Unlike previous generations, schools nowadays must provide even the basics of *Yiddishkeit*. Without the proper foundations, any seemingly good information which is piled on is likely to affect the opposite and mar the child.
- The foundation of *chinuch* is to connect the child to Hashem and to make the child realize that without realizing Hashem’s omnipresence his life is in spiritual and physical danger. The next step is to teach practical observance of *mitzvos*.
- Teachers cannot excuse themselves with clocking hours and imparting information. It is their responsibility to the students to make each child into a complete *Yid*.





# *The* **MINDEL ARCHIVES**

## **RESISTING HELLENISTIC TRENDS**

We are privileged to present a letter of the Rebbe, from the archives of the Rebbe's personal secretary for over forty years, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel. These precious archives were entrusted by Rabbi Mindel to his son-in-law Rabbi Shalom Ber Schapiro, whom he appointed to preserve, promote and spread Chassidus with this rich material. May Rabbi Schapiro continue to benefit the many with his work as director of Nissan Mindel Publications ([www.NissanMindelPublications.com](http://www.NissanMindelPublications.com)).

21st of Kislev, 5730

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter with the enclosed *tzedakah* contributed by your group of girls. Enclosed are the receipts.

May G-d grant that the *zechus* of the *tzedakah* should stand each and every one of you individually and all together in good stead for the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good in all your needs.

I hope you will have an inspiring Chanukah, especially in light of the fact that Jewish women had a significant role in the miracle of Chanukah, as you surely know. The women's contribution began with their self-sacrificing determination to observe the laws of *tznius* and extended to the whole area of Torah and *mitzvos*. Be it remembered that in these days they were confronted with a trend which had swept not only non-Jewish nations, but unfortunately also a substantial part of the Jewish people - who called themselves "Hellenists," faithfully following the customs and fashions of the day as set by the Greek culture prevailing at that time.

An event in Jewish history, particularly one that has been eternalized by a *mitzvah*, especially for eight consecutive days, surely must provide food for thought, not only as an important historic event, but also and especially, as one that has a pertinent and timely significance for our own day and age. This should also make it easier to overcome whatever difficulties there may be, whether real or imaginary, to do so with confidence, joy and gladness of heart.

The message of Chanukah for Jewish girls and women is that they should not allow themselves to be influenced by the environment, even though they are "few" and "weak" (as mentioned in Al Hanissim). Victory will be theirs if they assume a strong and determined posture, the benefit of it will be not only for them but for the entire Jewish people, indeed for all future generations, as was the case with Chanukah.

**This is not a personal matter where a Jewish girl can think it is a matter of her own to do as she pleases, but it has far-reaching implications.**

Surely it is unnecessary to elaborate to you at length as to the cult of the ancient Greeks, which was to worship physical strength and beauty, discarding all modesty. So shameless they became in their conduct, that they ascribed the same obscenities and vulgarity to their pagan gods, as is well known from their mythology.

In light of the above, the issue insofar as Jewish girls are concerned, is not merely the length of a dress, whether it be longer or shorter, but the fact that following the trend of the non-Jewish cult means subservience to it all along the line.

Secondly, this is not a personal matter where a Jewish girl can think it is a matter of her own to do as she pleases, but it has far-reaching implications involving other girls and is indeed a matter of concern for all our Jewish people.

Thirdly, there is no basis to think that what can a girl do in the face of such a majority and a trend, etc. The message of Chanukah provides the answer in regard to all three mentioned points.

I hope and pray that those girls who have shown strength and independence in the matter of *tznius*, will continue to do so even with greater strength while those who have not seen the matter in the true light of the Torah until now, will begin to do so from now on and will continue in the right direction, going from strength to strength in accordance with the teachings of the Chanukah lights, which are kindled in growing numbers from day to day.

Although this letter has been addressed to you in reply to your letter, both your letter as well as the reply are, of course, intended in behalf of the entire group. I hope, therefore, that you will bring it to the attention of each and every one of the group and that it will help you and them in your determination to show a living example to other girls and groups as to what the proper thinking and conduct of a Jewish girl should be. In this way we may be certain in the eventual victory of light over darkness and the realization of Al Hanissim in our own time, to its very conclusion, "to give thanks and praise to Your great Name."

Wishing you and all your friends a happy and inspiring Chanukah,

# CHASSIDIC WRITINGS



## DEALING WITH DEPRESSION



Reb Avraham Chaim Rosenbaum of Pleshnitz was an esteemed chossid of the *Tzemach Tzedek*, the Rebbe Maharash and Rebbe Rashab. He was a *chossid* with multifaceted talents: a phenomenal *gaon* in *nigleh*, *Chassidus* and Kabbalah, a wise and mellow *chossid*, an outstanding *baal middos tovos*, an eloquent speaker and writer, a master of many languages, and at the same time, a successful businessman and activist.

He lived the last 20 years of his life (1894-1914) in America and passed away on the first day of Chanukah 5675 (1914) [as indicated on his recently discovered *matzeiva* in the Mt. Zion cemetery in Queens, NY].

For a complete biography and other chassidic writings of his, see Perspectives magazine issue 5.



Please note: The original letters contain numerous references to and quotations from Zohar, Midrash, and Chassidus. To allow for smoother reading, many of those references have been omitted, and explanations have been added in brackets where necessary. The letters in their complete format are printed in *Toldos Avrohom Chaim* pp. 103 ff.

Prepared by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Altein

### Justifying Depression

The following is an excerpt from a letter to the famed Chossid and Mashpia Reb Hendel Kugel.

You are merely formulating excuses with which to blame your state of depression. It's a fact that a depressed or emotionally-charged individual will not even attempt to listen to honest and logical challenges to his complaints. Even if these challenges are for his own benefit, he will

stubbornly insist on standing by his complaints, preferring to listen to people who support his attitude and add yet more complaints to his existing ones, because this is where his energy presently lies.

# 100 YEARS SINCE HIS PASSING

The first day of Chanukah this year, marked one hundred years since the passing of Reb Avraham Chaim *a"b*. A visit to his gravesite in Queens shows his *matzeiva* upright and complete, though the engraved lettering has begun to fade.



All the information we have on this special chossid is from *Toldos Avraham Chaim*, prepared by Rabbi Shalom Ber Levin, Chief Librarian of the Rebbe's library. Published in 5758 (1998), the book is a collection of memories, historical tidbits, and the writings of Reb Avraham Chaim Rosenbaum, in *nigla* and *chassidus*, from the library archives. These were preserved by his nephew Reb Shmuel Rosenbaum and Reb Dovid Shifrin, a chossid from Pleshnitz who later lived near Reb Avraham Chaim in New York. They sent the writings and their recollections of Reb Avraham Chaim to the Frierdiker Rebbe, who much appreciated them.

We are still missing much information on his twenty years in America: Where did he daven and with whom did he associate in New York and New Haven? What kind of influence did he have on American Jews? And what happened to his descendants?



However, when such an individual will uplift himself and better his character, he will actually appreciate their refutations. Indeed, deep down he would rather that his claims be refuted, but his depression clouds his view and he prefers the sweet taste of excuses that offer temporary respite. Anyone who is honest with himself cannot deny this observable fact.

This serves as unmistakable evidence that the excuses themselves are not the cause for the depression; to the contrary, the depression brings about the excuses. In his heart he relishes them, for he is enwrapped in the depression that engulfs him. This can be seen in the expression used by Chazal to describe a suffering individual, "*sharuy be'tzaar*—one who *resides* in pain," because the pain resides upon him and surrounds him.

This is not to be compared to a person who is experiencing a specific distress, for in that case it is easy to disprove his despair by providing strong proofs that he is mistaken. [But in a case where the depression is all-encompassing, he is unable to accept such evidence.]

Such an attitude is especially unbefitting for a man such as yourself, who has toiled in *avodas Hashem* for many years and presently has the great merit to bask in the shade of wisdom and drink from the source of living water [in Lubavitch near the Rebbe Rashab]. A man such as you should surely be able to find the inner strength and develop a strategy to wage war against the internal enemy [the *yetzer*].

At the very least, we need to strengthen and instill positivity within ourselves by distancing all forms of depression and sadness, following the advice of Chazal and the teachings of our Rebbeim. They have provided us with guidance that enables us to refresh our souls, enabling each individual according to his level to gladden his soul in the service of Hashem its Creator. This will differentiate us from [the wicked], whom [are not considered alive even] during their lifetime. ■





# Depression Vs. Frivolity: Which is Better?

The following are letters that Reb Avraham Chaim wrote to his brother Reb Schneur Zalman.

In an earlier letter, Reb Avraham Chaim wrote that *atzvus*, depression, is worse than *leitzanus*, frivolity. Reb Schneur Zalman wrote back arguing that despite the deficiencies of *atzvus*, it is (1) a method of *avodas Hashem*, since one is then a "broken vessel" with a broken heart, and (2) *leitzanus* is worse since it is committed actively, as opposed to depression which is passive.

In this letter Reb Avraham Chaim clarifies his stance, explaining that *atzvus* is a result of haughtiness and is not a method of *avodas Hashem* at all. This is unrelated to a broken heart where one is humble. Furthermore, depression is linked with the desire to receive from others and the inability to give, whereas frivolity can and does result in giving to others.

Reb Avraham Chaim also explains why *atzvus* is not listed explicitly in the Torah as an *aveirah* and addresses the difference between various forms of *leitzanus*.

## DEPRESSION: HUMILITY OR HAUGHTINESS?

In your letter you somehow associate the concepts of depression and melancholy with the commendable state of being compared to a "broken vessel." I simply cannot agree with you on this.

You have ascribed two opposites to one idea: ultimate arrogance [depression and melancholy] and a lowly spirit ["broken vessel"]. You have placed two "students" into one group, the former—a student of the wicked Bilaam, and the latter—a student of Avraham Avinu [see Pirkei Avos 5:19]. About the first Hashem declares "I cannot dwell together with him," and about the second Hashem says "I dwell with the oppressed and lowly of spirit."

It is well-known that the state of being depressed and melancholy stems from the notion that one is lacking something... As such, he believes that he is entitled to everything and that the desires he lacks are of great significance.

When I say "the **ultimate** arrogance," I also mean the *lowest* end of haughtiness, meaning that the person is then a mere recipient (*mekabel*) of arrogance, and is therefore even lower than it.

It is well-known that the state of being depressed and melancholy stems from the notion that one is lacking something, which is the result of a strong sense of self and a feeling of separation [from Hashem]. As such, he believes that he is entitled to everything and that the desires he lacks are of great significance.

This is in direct contrast to one who possesses a lowly spirit and is compared to a "broken vessel." Such a person will always give to others, like Avraham who said "I am dust and ashes" [and excelled in performing acts of kindness]. Indeed, according to the Zohar (1:170) there is a level of "dust" in *kedushah* which produces fruits, just as the earth produces

sustenance [although it is trodden upon]. This is what we are asking for when we say “*venafshi ke’afar lakol tihiyeh*—Let my soul be as dust before all,” just as dust is trampled upon by all.

This is what it means to be a “broken vessel” and to possess a broken and contrite heart, the equivalents of humility and lowliness. This is the very opposite of haughtiness, and is not at all to be identified with depression and melancholy.

## GIVING AND TAKING

I will attempt to explain the matter, according to my humble opinion, based on foundations passed down from earlier generations of *seforim* and *tzaddikim*.

Chazal state that as a rule, the One Above gives but does not take. This means to say that in the realm of *kedushah*, giving is what is of ultimate importance. Although the concept of receiving exists in *kedushah* as well, the receiving is only a means to an end, the end being to pass on what has been received to others. The recipient is thus a *mashpia*, and what was initially an *alul*, an effect, becomes an *ilah*, a cause, to the *alul* below it in rank.

The approach of *kelipah* is quite the opposite. As the *possuk* says in Mishlei, “The grave . . . [says] ‘Give me, give me’ . . . it is never satisfied.” The expression used for “grave” in this *possuk* is “leech”; the nature of a leech is to draw blood into its body and nothing more.

Whatever giving we do find in *kelipah* is also a means to an end, but here the end is to receive, namely, to derive pleasure from giving. This is the

idea that lies in the *possuk* “the kindness of the nations is sin,” and as Chazal explain that “the kindness and charity performed by the nations is merely for the sake of self-glorification” and that “all good performed [by the nations] is done out of selfish motives.”

The *nefesh habahamis* of a Jew derives from the good within [*kelipas*] *noga*, as quoted in Tanya. Therefore, although a Jew can also obtain pleasure from providing for others, his ultimate goal is the actual act of kindness, and his desire lies in fulfilling what is good for the *recipient*. Chazal state that “One who [not only] gives [himself but also] desires that others give is a

virtuous individual”; his desire for others to give too shows that his own giving is done [not for reasons of self-gratification, but rather] to meet the needs of the recipient.

Accordingly, if a Jew provides others with pleasures that are forbidden, *rachamana litzlan*, the act of giving is sourced in *shalosh kelipos batme’ios*, and it must be that he is doing so

only for reasons of personal enjoyment.

## TRUE GIVING

True giving is when the giver has the receiver’s best interests in mind. The same can be said of the recipient in *kedusha*; he, too, has only the giver’s best interests in mind. This idea is reflected in the statement of Chazal, “I have gained more from my students than from them all,” [i.e., the students have the ability to enhance the understanding of the teacher].

However, when both parties are only interested in their own pleasure, then the giver is actually

When both parties are only interested in their own pleasure, then the giver is actually a recipient as well. It follows that in *kelipah* there also exists some element of giving [albeit for the sake of receiving].

However, there is also a level of earth which is the epitome of all the *kelipos*; this level of *kelipah* doesn't give at all [not even for the sake of receiving pleasure]. This can be compared to desert earth which does not grow any vegetation at all.

above, even receiving must be done with the intent of giving, or “paying.”] This payment must be done “immediately,” as exemplified by Hillel: Due to his great humility and *bittul*, even when he would eat he would say that he is going to perform kindness with the disgraceful one,” i.e., the body. This means that even while he ate he was 'giving' and not 'receiving' at all, as explained in Tanya ch. 29.

Rav, however, viewed himself as being on a lower level (similar to Raba who mistakenly thought that he was a *beinoni* and not a *tzaddik*). Although Rav surely ate *l'sheim shomayim*—to learn and *daven* with the energy produced by the food he

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consumed, he felt that the “payment” was not immediate [i.e., he ate so that he could *later* serve Hashem], whereas Hillel was not a recipient of the food in the first place, and his only intent was to perform kindness with his body.)

It is this lower level of earth that is the source of depression. This is why the *chachmei ho’emes* [the masters of *kaballah*] refer to depression as “a threshold trampled by the feet of the external forces,” because the threshold is the lowest of the low, the bottom of all levels of *kelipah*.

Indeed, Chazal strongly disapprove of the traits of miserliness and frugality, as the *possuk* states [Yeshayahu 32:7], “the miser’s tools are evil.” The reason for this is because [*kedushah* is associated with giving, while] the miser does not provide for others. According to some versions, miserliness is one of the twenty-four negative conducts that hold a person back from *teshuvah*. Indeed, this version seems to be correct, as we can clearly see [that this is so].

#### DEPRESSION AND FRIVOLITY: WHICH IS WORSE?

[While people plagued with depression and melancholy are typically tight-fisted,] jokers and people who are cheerful and merry tend to splurge their money.

Now, my intent is not to praise them *chalilah*, for they, too, have biased reasons for giving, such as self-aggrandizement and honor. However, when comparing the depravities of depression and frivolity, the above can help us determine the worst of both evils. [Being that failure to give is

viewed so negatively, it can be concluded that depression is worse than frivolity.]

You argue that frivolity is active while depression is passive, [thus frivolity should be worse.] To the contrary! For that exact reason [depression is worse], as is known that the higher, male element [of *kelipah*] is active while the lower, female element is passive. The Maharal of Prague writes that these two elements are the *chomer* and *tzurah* (form and matter) of *kelipah*.

The above sheds light on a vision experienced by the Ohr HaChaim Hakodosh which he records in his commentary to the Torah. (I do not recall

the exact location in his commentary or his exact wording, but I remember reading his description of the vision, and one tends to remember things that catch the eye.) [Editor’s note: See commentary to Parshas Vayechi 49:11]. The Ohr HaChaim writes that he envisioned that he was battling the male *samach-mem* and his female counterpart, and he succeeded in

overcoming the male but not the female, as her powers of impurity were superior.

This passiveness is characterized by Amalek who, as the *possuk* says, “cooled off” the Jewish nation. Amalek, “the first of nations,” is the antithesis of *daas*—connecting one’s intellect to Hashem; Amalek represents a strong bond to worldly matters to the extent that one is unable to open his heart to the love and fear of Hashem. [Editor’s note: See Maamorei Admur HoEmtzoit Kuntreisim pp. 241 ff. at length.]





## BEYOND A COMMANDMENT

You may counter that frivolity is specifically prohibited by the Torah (see Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos Asei 4), whereas depression is not counted as one of the 613 *mitzvos* and is merely derived indirectly from the *possuk* “since you didn’t serve Hashem with joy.” How can it be that depression is worse than frivolity?

We actually find a similar concept in other areas, such as with regard to anger, which the Zohar condemns in several places, particularly in Parshas Tetzaveh (p. 182) where it states that “association with or talking to someone who expresses anger is like association with actual idolatry. It is forbidden to look at his face, for no other sin is actual idolatry as is anger.” [Yet, anger is not counted as one of the 613 *mitzvos*.] Similarly, Chazal state that “arrogance is like

idol worship,” yet it is not listed as a negative commandment.

The reason these traits are not listed is because they inflict so much spiritual harm on one’s soul that the boundaries of a concrete negative commandment are not sufficient to contain them.

Thus it comes as no surprise that depression is not listed as a negative commandment, because as explained above it is more harmful to one’s soul than frivolity, which can be listed as a commandment.

## TACKLING DEPRESSION

How can one avoid depression, an emotional state seemingly beyond his control?

Indeed, there are several *mitzvos* – both positive and negative – which consist of emotions. How



can one be commanded [to develop or circumvent certain emotions]? Examples of positive commandments include belief in Hashem, love of Him, and love of a fellow Jew. Likewise, negative commandments in this category include hatred of another, fear of a false prophet, and coveting (the injunction of "*lo sis'aveh*." "*Lo sachmod*," however, refers to taking action to obtain the coveted item, as explained in Mechilta).

The answer to this question is that the Torah obligates a person to attain or avoid these emotions by contemplating on the advice of Chazal, such as their directive [Brachos 5a], "A person should rile his *yetzer tov* against his *yetzer hara*. If he succeeds, good; if not, he should [learn Torah, recite Shema, and] remind him of the day of death." [Heeding such advice will assist a person in circumventing depression.]

My brother, don't question me by saying that bringing to mind the day of death will lead to depression, *chalilah*. To the contrary: when a person realizes that he is destined to die, he will recognize that his body, *nefesh habahamis*, and all the material things he feels he is lacking are utterly worthless, because one cannot ascribe reality to an entity that is doomed to end, even when it is still present.

It follows that Chazal have given us sound advice by telling us [to remember the day of death], as this will allow a person to rejoice in Hashem and not feel distressed over the worldly vanities and bodily pleasures he lacks which are of no value whatsoever. Chazal were exact in their wording, stating that "*He should remind him [of the day of death],*" meaning that the *yetzer tov* should

tell this to the *yetzer hara* who pursues bodily pleasures, impressing upon him that they are all temporary and short-lived.

In my humble opinion, the various pieces of advice outlined by Chazal in the above-mentioned directive [i.e., studying Torah, reciting Shema, and pondering on one's future] are extremely effective in combating depression and melancholy.



## EXAMINING FRIVOLITY

After some deliberation, I have reached the conclusion that there are two categories of frivolity.

The first category [which is not as degrading as the second] consists of being in a nonsensical state, in which one wastes his time in useless joking with no intent *l'shem shomayim*.

To be sure, this type of frivolity is extremely demeaning as well, as the Mittlerer Rebbe describes at length in *Derech Chaim*. It represents the epitome of *perikas ol*, and his heart is empty of G-dly light and *kedushah*. This type of frivolity is

known as the *kelipah* of Pelishtim (as Chazal say [Avoda Zara 19a] that the Pelishtim were jesters). [The word *Pelishtim* can mean to be open,] as in a *mavoi mefulash*, an open alley (*pust* in Yiddish), [signifying that frivolity is associated with emptiness.] When a person is accustomed to acting in a frivolous manner, he will eventually suffer from *timtum halev* and depression, as alluded to by the fact that the Pelishtim clogged up Avraham's wells with dirt.

There are two categories of frivolity. The first category consists of being in a nonsensical state, in which one wastes his time in useless joking with no intent *l'shem shomayim*.

Nonetheless, we see that it isn't that difficult for a person [acting in a frivolous manner] to turn his heart back to the service of Hashem. As soon as he remembers [that he is acting inappropriately], or as soon as others remind him, he can stop in the middle of an enjoyable conversation he had begun due to lack of focus, and he can direct his awareness toward the fear of Hashem. As the Rambam writes in Moreh Nevuchim (quoted roughly in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim §1), "When a person takes to heart that Hashem

At times, one sees that Amalek [depression and lethargy] has obscured his vision and he cannot get rid of him just then ... it might be acceptable to temporarily seek help from the Pelishtim to battle against Amalek, [i.e., to rid himself of depression by] clearing his mind with humor and jesting.

is standing over him and watching his actions, he will immediately be affected by awe of Hashem and embarrassment before Him." Note that the wording used is *immediately*.

This is not the case, however, when one is experiencing depression and melancholy. These sentiments plug his heart to the extent that it is almost impossible to revert back to the right path, and much effort is needed to succeed in doing so. [So again we see how depression is worse than frivolity.]



## BATTLING DEPRESSION WITH HUMOR

In light of the above, I believe I am correct in the following assumption: At times, one sees that Amalek [depression and lethargy] has obscured his vision and he cannot get rid of him just then, since the solutions exclusive to dealing with depression require much time and an opportune moment. In such a case, it might be acceptable to temporarily seek help from the Pelishtim to battle against Amalek, [i.e., to rid himself of depression by] clearing his mind with humor and jesting. Once a commotion has been raised between the two [Amalek and Pelishtim], he can extricate himself from both enemies at once.

Although frivolity stems from *kelipah* and *sitra achra* as well, [it can still be utilized for positive purposes.] We find a similar concept in the physical realm regarding drugs. Although a drug can inflict harm on a healthy individual, to the extent that excessive exposure to certain drugs can result in severe damage or even death, it can actually be employed

as a medicine if the person is ill. We can also see this idea in the statement of Chazal [Baba Basra 16b] regarding a doe whose womb is narrow and cannot give birth. Hashem then sends a snake to bite her, and the fright causes her womb to expand, allowing her to give birth; thus, a deadly snake can serve as a source of life.

(I once heard a story [that underscores this idea]. A *chossid* who suffered from *timtum halev* asked the advice of the Mitteler Rebbe. The Mitteler Rebbe instructed him to drink a bit of *mashkeh* [to open his heart]. The *chossid* asked, “Rebbe, in your *sefer* *Poke’ach Ivrim* you take to task those who indulge in drinking *mashkeh*, writing that it consumes both body and soul!” The Mitteler Rebbe

replied, “Indeed, drinking *mashkeh* is extremely detrimental. But at times, a cure can be achieved by employing a harmful substance, as Chazal say regarding a doe.”)

## THE MALICE OF MOCKERY

A second and much worse category of *leitzonus* is when one mocks the words of the *chachomim* and *nevi'im*, saying, “Who needs the *rabbonim*, and what have they accomplished for us?”

This type of *leitzonus* is illustrated by Yeshayahu (22:12–14): “And [Hashem] called on that day for

crying [as *teshuvah* for their *aveiros*] . . . and behold there was rejoicing . . . [saying], ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.’ ” Targum Yonasan explains that they said, “Once we die we will not live again,” meaning that they did not believe in *techiyas hameisim*. Alternatively, Rashi explains that they scoffed at the *nevi'im* who said they would have no share in *olam*

*haba*, saying, “If so, let’s go ahead and enjoy life.” Their derision was deserving of Hashem’s response: “This sin will never be atoned for you until you die.”

It is they [the scoffers] to whom Chazal are referring when they stated, “A camp of scoffers is unable to receive the Divine presence.” This can also be understood as referring to those who act frivolously, stemming from *perikas ol* [the first category of *leitzonus* described above], as they are unable to accept the intimate level of G-dly light. However, the term “camp” seems to imply that the latter category is the subject of the discussion, [as scoffers will typically group together.] As Chazal say, “One act of *leitzonus* can do away with a hundred reproofs.” ■

A second and much worse category of *leitzonus* is when one mocks the words of the *chachomim* and *nevi'im*, saying, “Who needs the *rabbonim*, and what have they accomplished for us?”





# THE DIVINE NATURE OF THE MOREH NEVUCHIM

Rabbi Eli Matusof was born in 5714 (1954) in Casablanca, Morocco to Rabbi Shlomo Matusof, *shliach* of the Rebbe and director of Chabad in Morocco.

After learning in Brunoy, France, for seven years under the guidance of R' Nissan Nemenov and R' Yosef Goldberg, he transferred to Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in 770. While there, Rabbi Matusof published the *yeshiva's* Torah journal, and developed it into a steady publication with a broad selection of writers.

In 5740 (1980) Rabbi Matusof joined Kehos Publishing House, under which he has since prepared over one hundred volumes. The Rebbe praised his work as exemplary to other editors. His articles in *halacha* and Chassidus have been published both independently and in prestigious Torah journals including: Ohr Yisroel, Heichal HaBaal Shem Tov, Kerem Chabad, and Pardes Chabad.

## THE RAMBAM'S THREE WORKS

The Rambam wrote a vast range of *seforim* that left their imprint on all of Torah literature and on Jewish lifestyle throughout the ages. However, there are three works in particular that represent his major accomplishments:

1. Pirush Hamishnayos. This was one of the Rambam's first works, and consists of an explanation of the Mishnah, and essentially of the entire Talmud. The Rambam completed this work in the year 1168, when he was 30 years old.



מאמר דברי מיימוני

2. Mishneh Torah, also known as the Yad Hachazakah or simply as the Sefer Hayad, and sometimes just as "the Rambam." This *sefer* serves as the basis of any authentic halachic discussion or decision in subsequent generations. Following its completion in 1177, the Rambam wrote the Sefer Hamitzvos, which serves as a sort of introduction to the Mishneh Torah.
3. Moreh Nevuchim, often referred to as Sefer Hamoreh in short, which is the subject of this article. This *sefer* was written in 1190 when the Rambam was over 50 years old, approximately 15 years before his passing.

# THE ALTER REBBE AND THE RAMBAM

The Alter Rebbe refers to the allegations against the Rambam in a letter written in 1796. The letter was written to the Chassidim in Vilna, who were subject at the time to unbearable persecution by certain Vilna



community leaders who opposed Chassidism, and the Alter Rebbe viewed this as reminiscent of the opposition to the Rambam in his time.

The Alter Rebbe describes the Rambam's greatness in his native country of Spain, to the extent that his name was added to the *nusach of kaddish*. However, people in far-off lands who were unaware of his true greatness suspected that he was a heretic, until they actually burnt his books. The Ramban and Radak demonstrated that this erroneous perspective was the result of their lack of understanding of the Rambam's true intent, and as the years passed and the enmity dissipated, all came to realize that "Moshe and his Torah are true."

The Alter Rebbe emphasizes that the same is true with regard to the opposition to Chassidism, and as was the case with the Rambam, the truth would eventually prevail.

(In *The Rambam's True Identity* pp. 146 ff. this letter is accompanied by bibliographical sources and explanatory notes. In these notes the author highlights the many comparisons between these two conflicts, on an ideological plane as well as in relation to the progression of events.)

Although it was completed after the Pirush Hamishnah and Mishneh Torah, the Rambam began developing several of the ideas elaborated upon in the *Moreh Nevuchim* early on. Indeed, the Rambam makes mention of this future *sefer* in his Pirush Hamishnah (Rosh Hashanah 2:6. Sanhedrin 10:1), albeit under a different name (Sefer Hanevuah—the Book of Prophecy) and carrying a different structure.

## A BOOK FOR THE PERPLEXED

The target audience of the *Moreh Nevuchim* is different than that of the Rambam's other works. While his two earlier books were geared for the general population, the *Moreh Nevuchim* was written "for the believer who has learned the wisdom of Torah and fully understands the Torah and Talmud, and is complete in his religion and *middos*. However, he has also ventured to explore philosophical wisdom, and he is struggling with the ideas his mind has absorbed, thoughts that cause him fear, anxiety, and great confusion" (Introduction to Sefer Hamoreh.)

It was for such individuals that the Rambam authored the Sefer Hamoreh; men within whom a war is waged between faith and philosophy, belief and intellect, as they presume there is a contradiction between the two. (Philosophy in this context refers to the ancient Greek philosophy that was popular in those days.)

Throughout the chapters of the Sefer Hamoreh, the Rambam discusses at length topics such as G-d's existence, His Oneness, and belief in prophecy and the words of Chazal, proving that faith in Torah and religious practice dwell harmoniously with the wisdom of philosophy.

Throughout the Sefer Hamoreh the Rambam remains consistent with the view he espouses in all of his works, namely, that pure belief, religious observance, and philosophical understanding founded on G-dly underpinnings all join as one and derive from a single source, and that no

element will be successful in separating between them.

## TOPICS DISCUSSED IN SEFER HAMOREH

The Sefer Hamoreh is divided into three sections, each containing numerous chapters. In these chapters the Rambam delves into the details of faith and philosophy, addressing (among others) the following themes:

1. The existence of the Creator and His absolute unity.
2. The rejection of divine corporality.
3. Angels and spiritual worlds and their influence on our world.
4. The creation of the world *yesh mei'ayin* and the refutation of Aristotle's view that the world is primordial.
5. The fundamental nature of prophecy and its diverse levels.
6. *Hashgachah pratis* and the concept of divine knowledge versus freewill.
7. The eternity of the Torah.
8. The purpose of the Torah and *mitzvos* as a means to perfect the body and soul.
9. The various categories of *mitzvos* and their reasons.
10. What constitutes a perfect person: someone who strives to grasp divine wisdom, cleaves to Hashem, and follows in His ways.

Additionally, a number of chapters in the first section of the *sefer* are devoted to explaining the various descriptions by which Hashem is portrayed in Tanach, aiming to guide the perplexed student

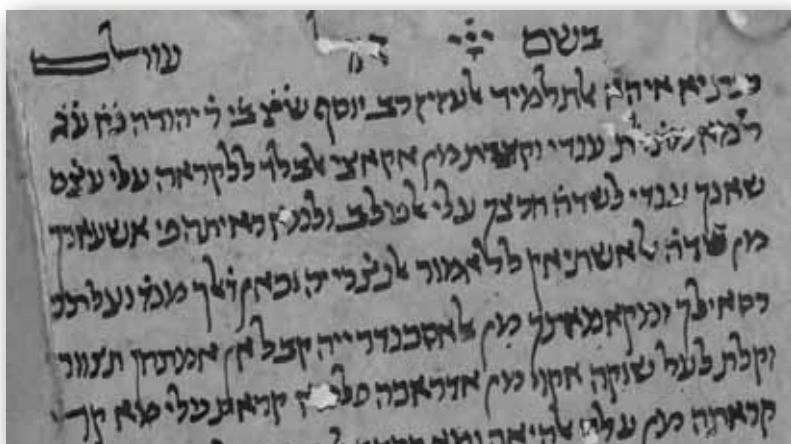
who is disturbed by these seemingly corporal depictions.

## OPPOSITION TO THE SEFER HAMOREH

Opposition to the Rambam began already during his own lifetime. The Rambam's opponents challenged (among others) his refutation of divine corporality and what they understood to be his dismissal of *techiyas hameisim*. The Rambam addressed several of the allegations against him in his epistle *Igeres Techiyas Hameisim* and in other letters.

Not long after his passing, another controversy erupted when certain Torah giants of the time sought to ban the Sefer Hamoreh. Similar controversies reignited from time to time in later generations as well. The principal concern of these *gedolei yisrael* was that delving into philosophy, no matter how it is done, is detrimental to and weakens the pure faith of simple individuals.

In contrast, many great Torah scholars of the time (such as the Ramban, the Radak, and others) championed the Rambam and his works. On their side stood the masses who joined forces with these prominent individuals, valiantly protecting the dignity of the Rambam from his detractors.



A manuscript of Moreh Nevuchim, from Yemen, dated 13-14th century



**"Before someone begins developing far-reaching conclusions, he must be faithful to the author's principles that he established about his own work."**

(Several discussions and letters related to these controversies have been published as addenda to certain editions of *Igros Harembam*, in *Teshuvos Harashba*, and in other *seforim*. Some of these documents—including the Rambam's brilliant epistle justifying the Rambam's position—are also printed in *The Rambam's True Identity* by this author [pp.111–145], accompanied by bibliographical sources and explanatory notes.)

#### THE RAMBAM AND ARISTOTLE

Concerning many of the teachings expounded upon in *Sefer Hamoreh*, the Rambam writes that they are founded upon the philosophy of

Aristotle, one of the great philosophers of ancient Greece. But nonetheless, the Rambam clearly states that whatever he relied upon and agreed with him does not contradict anything mentioned in the Torah (see *Sefer Hamoreh* 2:11). Elsewhere in the *sefer* the Rambam writes that he quotes Aristotle's views only in order to select from them what corresponds to the Torah and the words of Chazal (*ibid.* 2:2).

In other places, the Rambam greatly limits the knowledge achieved by scholars of ancient nations. In one place in the *Sefer Hamoreh* (2:22) the Rambam writes that Aristotle's positions are only true regarding what is within the lunar sphere (the *galgal hayarei'ach*) and below; his theories pertaining to what is beyond that sphere, however, are mere hypotheses. Furthermore, his theories regarding G-dly topics contain many obvious eccentricities, and he is at fault for many erroneous beliefs that exist among the masses. (See also *ibid.* 2:24.)

The Rambam's steadfastness to the views of the Torah is clear in the abovementioned chapter, where he refutes Aristotle's opinion that the world is primordial (not only on logical grounds, but also) because it is against "the view of Avraham our forefather and our prophet Moshe," and the stance espoused by these great men surely overrides that of Aristotle, one that is built on shaky foundations. The Rambam refers there (2:23) to the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 116a): "Let our perfect Torah not be compared to their idle talk!"

With these statements, the Rambam is loyal to his view reiterated throughout the *sefer* that the source of his philosophical views are the scriptures of *Torah Shebichsav* and the words of Chazal in *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (see for example *Sefer Hamoreh* 1:71. See also *The Rambam's True Identity* pp. 84 ff.).

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN INTELLECT

Some of the leading philosophers of ancient times gave primary importance and exclusive



authority to the human intellect, allowing rational thought process to shape all of their views. The Rambam, however, adopted the exact opposite approach, greatly limiting the capacity of the human mind.

In one place in the Sefer Hamoreh (1:31) the Rambam describes three types of subject matters. One category consists of concepts that the human mind has the ability to grasp. Other ideas are not within the capacity of human intellect at all, and yet a third group lies in the middle: they can be understood partially, while the true depth of the idea is beyond the sphere of human intellect. The Rambam concludes that this contention is not associated with religion or with a specific world view but has been accepted as fact by the philosophers themselves, as they, too, recognize the limitations of human intellect.

The Rambam reiterates his position in several other places as well, adding that prophecy constitutes a superior form of perception in which there is no room for arguments or debate, as opposed to philosophy which is subject to such phenomena (see Sefer Hamoreh 2:24; 2:38. See also the introduction to the commentary *Moreh Hamoreh* [authored by R. Shem Tov ibn Palquera], and repeated frequently throughout the *sefer*).

## DIVINE REVELATIONS IN SEFER HAMOREH

The Rambam refers to the supra-rational nature of the Sefer Hamoreh in numerous locations throughout the *sefer*. In one place (2:2) the Rambam writes an introduction which serves as a “light that will illuminate all the

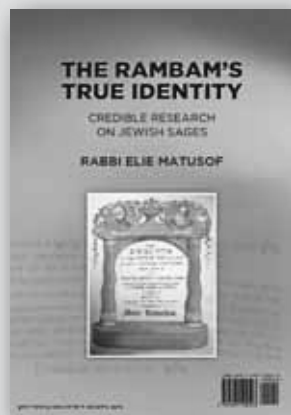
# THE RAMBAM'S TRUE IDENTITY

The Rambam undoubtedly ranks as one of the most meticulously studied figures in Jewish history and literature; indeed, many books have been published in recent times alone dedicated to portraying this luminous figure and attempting to uncover the depth contained within his numerous works.

Several writers, primarily contemporary researchers, have attributed two conflicting identities to the Rambam, that of the rational philosopher and that of the *posek* and *halachic* master. This book dispels this assumption by presenting overwhelming evidence from the Rambam's own writings that the Rambam's persona as a *posek* and divinely inspired philosopher composed a single extraordinary personality wherein both aspects complemented one another. A unique approach has been presented to those areas of the Rambam's writings that have contributed towards the above misunderstanding.

The Hebrew section of *The Rambam's True Identity* contains several articles and notes that describe how certain great Jewish leaders and scholars throughout the generations have been misrepresented and distorted by some historians. In addition to the Rambam, the book includes discussions clarifying the true personalities of the great sages Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and Rabbi Moshe, the son of the Baal HaTanya, accompanied by historical documents that substantiate the author's perspective.

The book also makes mention of the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, whom some have attributed with a harsh opposition to Chassidus in a manner that does not conform with his giant Torah personality. The author cites historical documents that demonstrate how the Gaon – who was wholly absorbed in Torah and *halachah* – was uninvolved in this dispute that stood in utter contrast to true Torah values. (The only opposition endorsed by the Gaon of Vilna was his initial ideological disagreement with his understanding of the philosophy of Chassidus.) Documents published during the Gaon's lifetime – including letters penned by the Gaon's own children and trustworthy disciples – indicate that certain deceitful individuals transmitted information in the name of the Gaon, when he did not utter nor write those statements at all.



# WHO CAN STUDY THE RAMBAM?

One who researches a given author must do so in keeping with the principles that the author, himself, established. In light of the above words quoted from the Rambam, excessive caution must be exercised when writing books about the Rambam and his *Moreh Nevuchim* to assure that they follow the necessary criteria that the Rambam himself established in order to understand what he wrote in *Moreh Nevuchim*.

Certain scholars, when writing books analyzing the *Moreh Nevuchim* and the Rambam in general, follow the path of gentile scholars who wrote according to their understanding of the *Moreh Nevuchim* and the Rambam. Spinoza, Leibnitz, and others like him — whom the writers of these books glorify in writing about the *Moreh Nevuchim* and whom they cite in their introductions and sources—were indeed distinguished scholars of Christianity, of atheism, and the like, but their entire approach could not be further from the true opinions and beliefs of the Rambam, which he states and restates in all of his writings. Surely, their personal conduct did not agree in the slightest with the conduct that the Rambam deemed as a crucial preface in obtaining the prophetic depths of the *Moreh Nevuchim*.

The tremendous Geonim, the Tzafnas Pa'aneiach, the Or Someiach, the Lubavitcher Rebbe and other scholars of similar stature, individuals aware of the philosophical and Talmudic underpinnings of the Rambam's writings and close to his world view, viewed the *Moreh Nevuchim* also as a halachic work that ranked together with his other fundamental writings.

All individuals, scholars and laypersons alike, are equally obligated to study and ponder the Rambam's works and teachings. But before someone begins developing far-reaching conclusions, he must be faithful to the author's principles that he established about his own work. He should also possess the necessary humility to examine the explanations of the *geonim* and Jewish sages who preceded him, scholars who were intimately familiar with the Rambam's works and their sources.

secrets" found in the Sefer Hamoreh. His intent in writing the *sefer*, states the Rambam, was not to write a scientific or philosophical work, but to uncover the secrets of the Torah that lie beyond the grasp of the masses, and to resolve the difficulties that may arise regarding prophecy and other G-dly topics. It is self-understood that such topics were not dealt with at all in the philosophical works that preceded him.

Elsewhere the Rambam writes that the Sefer Hamoreh was authored with "G-dly assistance" (Introduction to Section 3) and that the ideas discussed in the *sefer* "were perceived in a semi-prophetic manner" (3:22). (See also 3:52.)

## PREREQUISITE FOR STUDYING THE SEFER HAMOREH

In addition to designating superiority to prophetic knowledge over human intellect, the Rambam clearly asserts that achieving a higher spiritual state is an essential prerequisite to understanding the arguments presented in the Sefer Hamoreh. Already in the introduction to the *sefer* the Rambam finds it necessary to state this point, and he reiterates this condition throughout the *sefer*.

The Rambam writes that it is unbecoming to delve into the G-dly topics discussed in the Sefer Hamoreh without first purifying his character traits and overcoming his passions and desires (1:5). According to the Rambam, bodily lusts impede one's ability to ascend in G-dly comprehension. The Rambam compares this to Hashem's command to the *kobanim* to sanctify themselves before nearing Har Sinai (Shemos 19:22).

Among the causes that prevent a person from understanding G-dly concepts, the Rambam lists the involvement in bodily needs, all the more so if one is "occupied in eating excessive food." Even if such a person is a "perfect individual," his desire to engage in intellectual pursuits is destined to die out. He will be

unable to grasp what is within his ability to grasp, or alternatively, his comprehension will be confused and chaotic (1:34).

## RESEARCHING THE SEFER HAMOREH

Unfortunately, there are certain researchers who choose not to view the Rambam's works as based on the words of Chazal. The conduct of these individuals is plainly inconsistent with the criteria laid out by the Rambam himself as an essential prerequisite to understanding the Sefer Hamoreh. Nonetheless, they single out specific phrases of the Sefer Hamoreh which they failed to comprehend and attempt to explain these statements based on their personal atheistic beliefs. Besides for not suiting these very phrases, their speculations are at complete odds with the words of the Rambam himself throughout the Sefer Hamoreh and in his other *seforim*, and they stand in utter conflict with his outstanding character.

As several contemporary researchers have already pointed out, even the academic world has recently begun to withdraw from this mindset, an outlook which can be traced to academics who lived in a manner totally foreign to Torah and *yiddishkeit*. These "progressive" thinkers upheld the notion that the Rambam's attitude in the Sefer Hamoreh differed from his approach in his other *seforim*. However, the majority of scholars—who have focused on the Rambam's works in their entirety—have demonstrated without a doubt that the Rambam is loyal to his view throughout

his *seforim*, and that a picture immerses of an individual who was a *posek* and halachist as well as a divinely-inspired philosopher.



**The Rebbe emphasized that difficulties or discrepancies in the Sefer Hamoreh are usually the result of the student's inadequate mental capacities, and that if one examines the subject matter carefully one will discover that there is no problem whatsoever.**

one must continue studying and investigating the matter until the difficulty is resolved.

## THE REBBE'S APPROACH TO QUESTIONS ON THE SEFER HAMOREH

The Rebbe discussed the mistake of these researchers in a number of *sichos* as well, asserting that it is out of the question to view the Rambam as possessing a split personality, G-d forbid. The Rebbe emphasized that difficulties or discrepancies in the Sefer Hamoreh are usually the result of the student's inadequate mental capacities, and that if one examines the subject matter carefully one will discover that there is no problem whatsoever (see Toras Menachem 5745 Vol. 2 p. 1028. 5748 Vol. 2 p. 253).

The above can serve as an example to everyone, and especially to us Chassidim. When one encounters what appears to be a difficulty in a *sefer* or in the conduct of a certain *tzaddik*, one should not immediately presume that the author has erred or contradicted himself, rather

## THE RAMBAM AND CHASSIDUS CHABAD

It should be noted that much of the teachings of Chassidus Chabad, beginning with the *maamorim* of the Alter Rebbe, can somewhat

serve as a supplement to the *Moreh Nevuchim*, providing additional explanations and clarification to the ideas discussed in the *sefer*. Unfortunately, an initiative has not yet been undertaken to research and compile the relevant sources in an organized fashion and following the order of the *Sefer Hamoreh*. Such a project would undoubtedly illuminate the chapters of the *Sefer Hamoreh* to the modern-day student, and it is the author's hope that this great undertaking will someday be completed.

(For more on the relation between Chassidus and the *Sefer Hamoreh*, see the article by the author first printed in *Kerem Chabad* Issue 1.)

#### CHASSIDUS AS AN AID TO UNDERSTANDING THE SEFER HAMOREH

The Frieddiker Rebbe writes in *Kuntres Toras Hachassidus* (p. 5):

Chassidus Chabad is a G-dly philosophy which opens the portals of wisdom and understanding. [It enables one] to know and recognize He who has created the world using one's intellectual capacities, and it demonstrates how every individual can draw near and serve Hashem with his heart and mind, each according to his level.

Despite being a G-dly philosophy with tremendous depth, Chassidus Chabad explains each subject matter at length, utilizing examples and analogies that are easy to comprehend. It elucidates the material until it can be understood even by those who possess poor mental abilities.

Indeed, through studying the *seforim* and *maamorim* of Chassidus Chabad, any individual can grasp the G-dly subjects discussed in the *Sefer Hamoreh* and in other philosophical works written by true *gedolei yisrael* with prophetic inspiration and *ruach hakodesh*. ■

*Rabbi Eli Matusof during his research.*







# SAMARKAND

## “SHPITZ CHABAD”

The ‘*Chabadsker*’ Samarkand was born during the Second World War. As the Nazis pressed into Russia, throngs of Jews fled to Central Asia, far from the front lines of battle. ‘*Chabadskers*’—my family included—along with other religiously observant Jews, settled primarily in the cities of Samarkand and Tashkent, located in present-day Uzbekistan. As the Communist government dealt with the war, the Chassidim of Samarkand focused on their Jewish survival, forming secret *minyanim*, *chaddorim*, and *yeshivos*.

The sublime, impassioned style of religious devotion that set the Chabad Chassidim apart—their Torah study, *davening*, and their inspirational, song-filled, more informal, chassidic ‘*farbrengens*’ made a strong impression upon the youth there. In that era, the Chabad community in Samarkand was known among the Chassidim of the Soviet Union as the ‘Israel of the USSR,’ or in the Chassidic dialect: Samarkand, ‘*shpitz*—the height of—Chabad’.

Even outside Russia, the Chabad community in Samarkand was regarded with great admiration, and the Rebbe expressed special affection towards the Chassidim there. This was evidenced by the Rebbe’s one-time directive to a group of yeshiva students newly arrived in New York from Russia, by way of Brunoy, France; among them Rabbis. Dovid Raskin, Berel Junik and Sholom Morozov, later to become prominent members of

the Chabad community: “See to it that the good customs of Samarkand are instituted here.”

Although all of our Jewish-related activities, especially those associated with the yeshiva, were clandestine, and guarded with the utmost secrecy, the chassidic spirit penetrated all veils of secrecy. Although it was unintentional, the spirit of Samarkand was felt far and wide. Religious Jews throughout the Soviet Union longed to be in the presence of the Chassidim of Samarkand, to join in with their *farbrengens* and their warm, spiritual atmosphere. Whoever visited Samarkand would secretly transmit his impressions of the place to his own community and to other Jews in his surroundings, in turn inspiring them.

I had always felt that the atmosphere of Samarkand had a spiritually uplifting effect on those who lived there. Once, soon after the legendary Chabad *mashpia* R. Mendel Futerfas arrived in Samarkand, I shared my sentiments with him. “Nu, nu,” he shrugged, “everyone is uplifted in your Samarkand.” R. Mendel was unconvinced by this comment of mine.

When R. Mendel finally received his long-awaited exit visa, I sensed that it was difficult for him to leave us. At that time, he turned to me and said, “Hil’ke, do you remember what you said to me when I first arrived in Samarkand?” I didn’t. “You told me that just by being in Samarkand, one is

# RABBI HILLEL ZALTZMAN

Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman was born in 5699 (1939) in Kharkov, Ukrain, to his father, Reb Avraham (a *tomim* from Lubavitch) and his mother Bracha (sister of Reb Avraham Baruch Pevzner, the mashpia of *anash* in Minsk).

During World War II, when the Nazis drew close to Kharkov, the family fled to Samarkand, Uzbekistan. During his childhood he was educated in the underground *chadorim*, by the renowned teacher Reb Zusha "the *shamash*" (Paz) and Reb Avraham Yosef Antin, secretary of the "Chafetz Chaim." His main *chinuch* he received from the *melamed* Reb Ben Zion Maroz, a *tomim* from Lubavitch, who imbued in his students the fire of *mesiras nefesh*. Later on, he received an advanced *chassidishe chinuch* from his uncle the *shochet* Reb Baruch Duchman, Reb Berke Chein (who for six years hid in their home from the authorities), and Reb Mendel Futerfas. In 5724 (1964) he married his wife Mussia, daughter of Reb Efraim Fishel Dimichovsky, a *tomim* from Lubavitch and a nephew of the Rogochover Gaon.

At sixteen years of age Reb Moshe Nissilevitch introduced him to work for Chama, the underground organization to disseminate Torah and Chassidus. Since then, he is involved in the development and management of Chama, which has become an international organization for Russian Jews.

In 5773 (2013), Rabbi Zaltzman published a Hebrew book **Samarkand** describing the city of his youth, the *chassidishe* life there, and his experiences after leaving Russia. The book, written in a warm and informal style, draws the reader into a world where Torah and Chassidus were staples of life.

**Samarkand**, now in its second printing in Hebrew, is being translated into English for English readers. We thank Rabbi Zaltzman for providing us with a chapter from the forthcoming book.



uplifted. Now I see there's some truth in your words."

## THE "SHPITZ CHABAD MINYAN"

The foundations of the Chabad community in Samarkand were laid in 1941, when refugees began to flee from the Nazi front to cities in the Russian East, including Samarkand. Among the refugees were tens of thousands of Jews from Poland and other countries, as well as hundreds of illustrious and renowned Chassidic families. Despite the severe starvation and prevailing epidemics in which hundreds of Jews, including Chabad Chassidim, perished, the Chassidim nonetheless founded schools, a *Tomchei Temimim* yeshiva, and synagogues—few, perhaps, in quantity, but great in quality.

For decades the Chabad community in Samarkand was known as a particularly chassidic community, keenly adherent of the highest religious standards and ideals. The Chassidim in Russia used to say, "Samarkand *shpitz* Chabad"—*shpitz* meaning the "peak," or "ultimate." The Chabad community was infused with a rich inner world of chassidic vitality; its members performed every *biddur mitzvah* with warmth and devotion.

Although the Chabad community in nearby Tashkent was larger, and of a similar composition, it was Samarkand that acquired a special name in Chabad folklore. I had the impression that since the Jewish residents of Tashkent were spread out over several areas of the city, they didn't share the same intimacy we felt in Samarkand: We all lived in the Old City in a small area, less than a square mile, and even after we moved to the New City, the distance between us was not too great. But beyond the geography of the community, it was the extraordinary collection of Chabad

Chassidim that had gathered there, as well as its schools and *Tomchei Tmimim* yeshiva active during the war, that set Samarkand apart.

Young Chassidim learned in these yeshivas with great diligence. Scholars emerged who were suffused with the warm spirit of Chassidus and an ardent *yiras Shmoayim*. The students of the yeshiva, emulating the older Chassidim, would spend lengthy periods of time in *davening*, and in contemplating Chassidus beforehand.

A unique *minyan* was held regularly in the residence of Reb Yisrael Noach Belinitzky (known as “Yisrael Noach the Great”), called the “*Shpitz Chabad Minyan*.” I lack the ability to aptly describe this *minyan*. Even during the weekdays, its congregants would spend hours *davening* daily, and all the more so on Shabbos, when *davening* continued until the late afternoon hours. The local yeshiva-aged boys would visit the *minyan* on Shabbos with the specific purpose of listening to the sweet, heartfelt *davening* of its attendees.

Chassidic gatherings—*farbrengens*—in Samarkand at that time were full of tremendous warmth and fervor. The appointed Chassidic mentor leading the *farbrengen* demanded and effected improvement of his listeners’ character. They could be deeply and harshly introspective, and would pour out their hearts, crying for not being what they understood to be genuine Chassidim.

I heard that one time, some Chassidim *farbrenged* until late at night, discussing

how they defined themselves. “Who are we?” they asked. “Are we Chassidim as the Rebbe wants? How can we lie to ourselves, claiming that we have really reached such a standard? Are we *Misnagdim*, then—opponents of Chassidus? G-d forbid! So then who are we?” By the end of the *farbrengen* they came to the conclusion that “we are people who *want* to be Chassidim.”

During World War II, the famous Chassidic artist Reb Hendel Lieberman, brother of the well-known *mashpia* R. Mendel Futerfas, arrived in Samarkand. He had studied art in Moscow and spent some time on its dazzling art circuit. Tragically, he had lost his family in the war. He once stayed up late through the night in intimate discussion with R. Yisrael Noach, their faces lit by a faint light that flickered from a kerosene lamp. When their *farbrengen* concluded towards morning, he said in wonderment, “Ah!

I have been in Moscow, at soirées held for the aristocracy in beautiful halls lit up with magnificent electric lights. Still, it wasn’t as clear and illuminating there as it was in the dimly-lit *farbrengen* with R. Yisrael Noach.” These were the kind of *farbrengens* that took place then in Samarkand.

As much as I will write about the *farbrengens* that took place in those years in Samarkand, I won’t be able to describe the depth, sincerity and the emotions felt at every moment of those *farbrengens*.

In 1946, many of the Chabad Chassidim who had sheltered in Samarkand throughout the war managed to flee the Soviet Union, traveling via Lvov in Western Ukraine, and



Reb Yisrael Noach Belinitzky *davening*

then on to the free countries. It was in this five year period—from 1941 until 1946—that Samarkand acquired its Lubavitcher reputation. Although the atmosphere changed abruptly with this flight, the few Lubavitcher families that remained in Samarkand for the next twenty-five years preserved the unique chassidic environment and managed, to a great extent, to be deserving of the title “*shpitz Chabad*.”

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE YOUTH

In 1946 a new period began in Samarkand, and for those of us who stayed, a far more difficult one, both physically and spiritually. The city, and country, had just been emptied out of a great number of Chasidim, and the Soviet police, preoccupied until then with fighting the war, re-intensified their persecution against religion. We were left to contend with the constant battles waged against us.

The Chabad community remaining in Samarkand mostly comprised families who were afraid to take the risk of crossing the border. Among them was our family, the Mishulovin, Goldshmidt, Shif and Lerner families, my uncle R. Boruch Duchman, R. Eliyahu Paritcher (Levin) and a number of others. There were also some Lubavitcher families who had tried crossing the border but were unsuccessful, forced to return to Samarkand broken-hearted.

Included in the latter category were the brothers Dovid and Eli Mishulovin, both in their late teens at the time, who had decided to depart on their own in the hopes of joining a Polish family with permission to cross the border. They were unsuccessful and returned home dejectedly.



*The Mishulovin brothers*



*Reb Moshe Nissilevitch*

Despondent as they were about their failure to escape, they were relieved that they had escaped the clutches of the KGB and had not been arrested.

Dovid and Eliyahu had learnt in *Tomchei Temimim* in Samarkand during the war. Their father, R. Eliezer, was busy supporting his family, but R. Mendel Futerfas noted that these two boys were capable of grasping the light of Chassidus. He ensured that they were taken into the *yeshiva*, and educated in the spirit of Chassidus.

The Mishulovin brothers grew in Torah and piety just from being within the walls of *Tomchei Temimim*. Thinking of them calls to mind the

Rebbe's remark to R. Moshe Herson, who had just opened a yeshiva in Morristown, New Jersey: “You should know that there are certain students who don't need special attention from the faculty. The very fact that they are found within the walls of the *yeshiva* is sufficient for them to develop along the proper path.”

They were meticulous regarding *halacha* and Chabad customs, and Eliyahu in particular was known to be quite an intellectual, as well as a person of great integrity and a *yerei Shomayim*. Even upon returning from their unsuccessful escape attempt, they continued to follow the *Tomchei Temimim* study regimen, studying secretly in the home of R. Eliyahu Paritcher.

The two Meshulovin boys also devoted themselves to the chassidic education of their younger brothers Yitzchok and Michoel. Dovid focused his attention on Yitzchok, the youngest, while Eliyahu directed his energy towards Michoel.

Shortly afterwards, another young man by the name of Moshe Nissilevitch, who was a little older than the two brothers, returned to Samarkand after his own unsuccessful attempt to cross the



border. While he was known to his close friends as Maishke *der geller*—"the yellow," a reference to his hair color—to everyone else he was Maishke Friedman. He had changed his legal name to avoid trouble with the authorities for his "sin" of trying to leave the Soviet Union, and the name stuck.

A relative of the Mishulovins from Tashkent, R. Aharon Zubrovsky, would come to visit Samarkand often, in order to spend time in the company of the Mishulovin brothers and Moshe Nissilevitch. Although R. Aharon was older than the Mishulovin brothers, these four *bochurim*—young men—formed a single group. R. Aharon, or "Arke," as he was known, was a tremendous *yerei Shomayim* and *medakdek b'mitzvos*. He would spend a considerable amount of time learning Chassidus before *davening*, after which he would lay *tefillin* and pace the room in deep contemplation. He would then *daven* at great length with his face creased in concentration, sometimes snapping his fingers to the beat of a heartfelt Chassidic melody.

One day, I saw another older *bochur* in the Mishulovin home, who would also go on to become part of this same group for a time. At first, the Mishulovins didn't tell me who he was, since he was there in hiding, and it was only later that I found out that he was R. Yaakov Notik, who, being blond-haired like R. Moshe, was known as Yankel *der geller*.

Aside from our fortune that we all lived together in Samarkand's Old City, I think it was especially fortunate that our little school with R. Benzion Maroz was in the Mishulovin home. Being in that home enabled us to experience first-hand its special chassidic atmosphere, and to witness the admirable conduct of the people who lived in it. These impressions would affect us deeply.

Of course, there were other Lubavitcher families in Samarkand—as well as R. Shlomo Leib Eliezerov and R. Simcha Gorodetzky's Bukharian students, but as youngsters we had little to do with them. This small group, on the other hand,

## UNDER HARDSHIPS

Our Chassidic upbringing gave us the strength to endure the Communist propaganda machine that railed so furiously and systematically against religion. I was once part of a contingent of Russian Lubavitchers who met with the Bobover Rebbe Reb Shlomo, of blessed memory, and spoke about life in the Soviet Union. After hearing our experiences, he exclaimed, "We barely survived those couple of years under the Nazis, but the Lubavitchers raised generations of devout Jews under the watch of the Communists!"

For Tishrei 5732 (1971), a large group of emigrants fresh from the community in Samarkand Soviet Union arrived in New York, and visited the great *gaon* Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory. During their conversation about the difficult conditions of life in the USSR, and the continual risks they took there to maintain Jewish life, Rabbi Feinstein asked them: "How could you survive under these conditions?!"

"Did we have a choice?" they answered, and the sage burst into tears.

contributed immensely to the development of the chassidic character of Samarkand. Through their behavior, conversations, and *farbrengens*, they had a tremendous influence on the younger boys, and indirectly, on the adults of the local community as well. It can be said that they were the ones who created the "*shpitz* Chabad" atmosphere.

### NETILLAS YADAYIM FROM START TO FINISH

In order to illustrate the great care this group took in their religious observance, I will try to describe the manner in which they washed their hands for *netillas yadayim* before eating bread. For them, this simple task became an undertaking that was

# ACURATE STORYTELLING

It's appropriate to mention the general state of neglect and carelessness that the collection of Chassidic stories, sayings and proverbs has fallen into. It's well known how meticulous the Chabad Rebbes were regarding the source and accuracy of a story, and how when the chassidim of old would recall a story, that they would do so exactly as they themselves had heard, without adding or leaving out any details.

I recall that when my uncles, R. Boruch and R. Chaim Avrohom Duchman, both of whom had a phenomenal memory, would tell the stories that they heard from their grandfather, the chassid R. Mordechai Yoel Duchman (a student of R. Isaac of Homil, himself one of the most revered chassidim in Chabad history), we would occasionally ask them to explain the particulars of a story we didn't understand. Their answer was always the same: "I don't know. That's what I heard from my grandfather." They wouldn't dare to explain the story following their own understanding of it.

Today, unfortunately, many storytellers lack respect for a story's authenticity. They believe that they should "improve" the story and add interpretation. Since these "improvements" are their own conjecture, they are, more often than not, bending the truth and ultimately distort the story. Once the storyteller is one with a gift for capturing the audience with his oration, he feels as comfortable with the story as a fish in water, and he makes the story into whatever his heart desires. I, meanwhile, listen, and think to myself: the "original" was great—why try to make improvements?!

fully permeated by their fear of Heaven; it was one that made an enormous and unforgettable impression on me.

Netillas Yadayim is much more than an astute hygienic measure. The many conditions associated with the ritual suggest as much: Only a whole, unblemished, evenly-pouring cup is to be used; the hands must be physically clean beforehand; the water from the cup must cover the entire hand in the first pour for the procedure to be effective; and so on. Its main objective is the *spiritual* cleanliness of the hands, which goes to explain the awesome care the *bochurim* of Samarkand took with their *netillas yadayim*:

First, they would wash their hands of any dirt or residue and then dry them well, blowing on them to make sure that there wasn't a trace of moisture left. Then they would examine their hands, especially beneath their fingernails, to ensure that left any dirt behind, so that their hands would be properly exposed to the purifying water. Next, they would inspect the cup by running a finger over the edge to make sure there weren't any flaws that might invalidate it. After that, they would dry

the handle of the cup as well as the inside of the cup and even the outside. Their reasoning was that if someone had touched the cup with impure hands, the water in the cup would become impure, thus disqualifying any water added to the cup.

After all these preparations, they would take a towel, inspect it to make sure that it was completely dry, fill the cup with water and pour it on the first hand. If it appeared to them that the water had not covered the entire hand at once, they would dry their hands and start again. This was how Arke Zubrovsky, Dovid and Eliyahu Mishulovin, and Moshe Nissilevitch would wash their hands for bread. (Actually, for Moshe, who was by nature an extreme person, refused to trust himself even after all these precautions. Instead, he would eat with rubber gloves on his hands, and continued to do so his entire life.)

Despite the many years that have passed since, whenever I see someone washing for bread without care; without checking to see if his hands or the cup handle are dry, and then quickly splashing water over the hands three times; I

cringe, and I recall longingly the *netillas yadayim* of those young Chassidim.

## NO NEED TO COMPLETE THE MAAMAR!

Learning Chassidus, *davening* at length, the extra care in all aspects of *halacha* and *minbagim*—all these were things they did out of an inner conviction and without a hint of pretense. Their conversations always centered around Halacha, Chassidus, and sayings of the Rebbeim they had heard from the great Chassidim who were in Samarkand during the war. Us boys who saw this Chassidic conduct and the excitement over everything holy could not help but to be influenced, and we tried to copy them.

I remember that when they would sit down to study a *maamar*, be it during the week or on Shabbos, they preferred to take the time to thoroughly understand what they were learning rather than finishing the piece. They would say: “Why rush to finish? The topic on hand is good as well; why hurry on to the next? And who says one must complete an entire *maamar*? The main thing is to understand what is being learnt so that one will have some inspiration to *daven* with!”

## DESCRIBING CHASSIDIM OF OLD

When they *farbrenge*d with us, they would describe the Chassidim who left Russia after the war. We were still young at the time, under ten years old, and did not remember much. They would depict that period with great nostalgia, particularly so, the *farbrengens* of the senior Chassidim. When they wanted to sum up that era in one sentence, they would say, “*Es hot zich gigosin Elokus mamosh*,” “G-dliness literally overflowed.”

They would vividly describe to us the way the Chassidim prayed in those days. R. Asher Sossonkin (Batumer) would be totally absorbed in his *davening*, enunciating each word evenly and precisely. Then he would suddenly be roused from his rapture and cry some of the words aloud.



They also spoke a lot about the intense *davening* of R. Nissan Nemenov, or R. Nissan *der geller*, as he was known, and R. Yisrael Noach Blinitzky, as well as of many others. We were able to see that in their retelling, they were re-experiencing the legendary conduct of these great Chassidim.

Mentioning as I am R. Yisrael Noach, I will relate something remarkable he once let slip about himself. For a time, he worked as a cashier in a factory, and one of his tasks was to pay a daily visit to the bank. At a *farbrengen* he spent urging his listeners to be constantly occupied with thoughts of Chassidus, and after having said *lchaim*, he declared of those daily walks to the bank: “You should know that there is not one rock between that bank and the factory where I work, upon which I have trodden without thinking Chassidus!”

The older boys would relate these stories to us to foster within us the dedication to learn Chassidus no matter the circumstance. They didn’t just repeat pretty proverbs and clever aphorisms at

our *farbrengens*, but demanded substantial effort from us in improving our character, overcoming our coarser instincts and the like. After a *farbrengen* like that, we came out differently than the way we were when we came in. We might have not changed entirely, but a certain change was apparent in every one of us, in thought, speech, or action.

It sometimes pains my heart when *bochurim* and *chassidishe yungeleit* sit at a *farbrengen* and repeat *chassidishe* stories and aphorisms of the Rebbeim, but when someone raises a point that needs fixing they respond, “Chassidim don’t speak *mussar*.”

This reminds me of a story I once heard: People once told the *gaon* Reb Chaim of Volozhin that *bochurim* in his *yeshiva* were discussing amongst themselves the cunning tactics of the *yetzer hara*. Reb Chaim replied, “Ah! The *yetzer hara* is very cunning, he would rather that people talk about him all day and not learn Torah...” When the Alter Rebbe heard of this he said, “The exact opposite is true! The *yetzer hara* is very cunning, he says ‘Learn as much Torah as you want, just leave me alone’...”

In the 1960s, R. Michel Vishedsky lived in Tashkent in the home of his brother-in-law R. Mordechai Gorodetzky and his father R. Simcha. R. Michel told me that one Shabbos, he participated in a monthly community *farbrengen* that R. Simcha had been unable to attend since his wife was unwell, and he had to come home immediately after *davening*. When he returned, R. Simcha asked him to share what they had discussed at the *farbrengen*. R. Michel reported that they had spoken about a certain matter that they felt needed more attention.

Two months went by, and R. Michel faltered in the particular area discussed. “How can that be?” R. Simcha said to him. “You yourself told me that Chassidim resolved together to fix the matter!”

That was what a Chassid was about—after he heard that Chassidim, even those younger than himself, had *farbrenge*d and spoken about correcting something, it was a given for him that it would be corrected.

## SENSIBILITIES THAT BECAME UNSPOKEN RULES

The extraordinary devotion of the Chassidim of Samarkand extended far beyond that which was mandated by *halacha* or prevailing *minhag Chabad*. Oftentimes a certain Chassidic sensibility, or a feeling about a particular matter, would quickly turn into a custom or Chassidic rule.

Drying yourself with a towel after immersing in the *mikva*, for example, was out of the question for the Chassidim of Samarkand, and even looked down upon. Apart from understanding the *mikva* water to be holy, and not wanting to remove them from one’s body, there was a larger issue at hand: For them, being unable to just throw one’s clothes back on after the *mikva* was just altogether too fussy. They were even more critical of anyone so finicky that he had to circumvent

the prohibition against carrying on Shabbos by wearing a towel around his neck on the way to the *mikva*. To us, this behavior was the product of a self-indulgent materialism, and came from the type of person who feels that he deserves to be thanked for the very fact that he goes to the *mikva* altogether.

The stigma of drying oneself after the *mikva* was so great that even Eliyahu Mishulovin, who had a weak heart and needed to take extra care preventing his body from getting chilled, was ashamed to be seen doing so. He was worried that an onlooker, and especially a younger *bochur*, might not realize that his health required him to dry himself, and would thus become a “negative” influence for some impressionable youth.



Reb Eliyahu Mishulovin



# EARLY CHABAD PRESENCE IN BUKHARA

The original Jews of Samarkand were Sefardic Bukharian Jews, named as such after the city of Bukhara that was once the regional capital. According to the locals, they are descended from Persian Jews who arrived in the region at the start of the second millennium CE. Indeed, for generations, they have spoken a language similar to that of the Persian Jews. Even further back into the past, tradition has their origins with the Ten Tribes banished from the Land of Israel by the Assyrians. The fact that the Jews of ancient Persia and Medea, the purported ancestors of the Bukharians, are believed to have absorbed some of the Jews from the Assyrian exile lends support to this tradition.

The earliest Chabad presence in that region was in the year 1890, when Reb Shlomo Leib Eliezrov, a Chassid of the Rebbe Rashab and the Rov of Chevron arrived in Bukhara. The purpose of his trip was to collect money for the Jewish community in Chevron. While there, he worked on repairing the *mikvaos* as well as organizing the provision of kosher meat in Samarkand, Tashkent, and the surrounding cities and towns. The local Jews requested that he accept a temporary rabbinical position in Samarkand, which he did, and for the next thirty years he would return periodically to strengthen Jewish life in the area. When the Communist government came to power, he was forced to flee and return to Eretz Yisroel.



Reb Shlomo Leib Eliezrov

The brilliant Halachist and Chassid Reb Avraham Chaim Noeh contributed to the revival of Bukharian Jewry as well. In the year 1911, while still a young man of twenty-one, he left Eretz Yisroel with the mission of bolstering Jewish life in Bukhara. His efforts were primarily focused on Samarkand, where he served as its Rov. During his stay in Samarkand, he wrote a treatise in Bukharian entitled *Chanoch LaNaar* detailing the laws of *tefillin* for Bar Mitzvah age boys. He would wear the customary Bukharian garb, and was known by the local Jews as “Avraham Chaim Mendelov Noeh,” the “Mendelov” being a Bukharian reference to his father R. Mendel Noeh.



Reb Avraham Chaim Noeh

In the year 1925, the Frieddiker Rebbe sent a young Chassid by the name of Reb Simcha Gorodetzky to Samarkand. R. Simcha worked vigorously, teaching Torah classes for the adults and organizing schools for hundreds of Bukharian children. In time, he succeeded in sending a group of gifted young men to the *Tomchei Temimim* yeshiva in Poltava, who in turn later served as beacons of light in their respective communities.

R. Simcha’s activities entailed genuine self-sacrifice. He was arrested by the secret police on several occasions, as related at length in the books *Lubavitch VaChayaleha* and *Yahadus HaDemama*, as well as in a separate chapter in this book. In 1944, he was arrested and sentenced to death, Heaven forefend.

Just then, by divine providence, Stalin released a statement declaring all death sentences commuted to twenty-five years of hard labor in Siberia. R. Simcha was saved. After a few years, R. Simcha was joined in Siberia by R. Chizkiyahu Kayikov, one of the students he had sent off to *Tomchei Temimim* years earlier. R. Chizkiyahu has since been serving as the rabbi of the Bukharian Jews in Samarkand, until his arrest in 1950. They were both released from Siberia after Stalin’s sudden death in 1953.

Despite R. Simcha’s extensive work for 19 years in this area of the Soviet Union, Samarkand was yet to become known as a Lubavitcher city, and certainly not “*shpitz* Chabad,” until the mass migration of refugees in 1941.

It once happened that a *bochur* came to the *mikva* while R. Eliyahu was there drying himself with a towel. R. Eliyahu was mortified and didn't know how to justify his actions. He apologized and explained that he was sick and the doctor had warned him to be extra careful not to get chilled, and therefore he needed to dry his body.

I recently went to the *mikva* on Shabbos and heard some men talking about not using a towel after going to the *mikva*. One said in a tone of amazement, "I knew two older Chassidim—R. Yisrael Jacobson and R. Shmuel Levitin—who never used a towel after immersing!" I told him that in Samarkand, I didn't know *anyone* who did.

In a *sicha*, the Rebbe once said that although it is recorded in *Kisvei HaArizal* that the Arizal did not dry himself after *mikva* before Shabbos, we are careful to dry ourselves. The Rebbe continued that whoever wants to conduct himself in the manner spoken about in *Kisvei HaArizal* should leave a certain area of the body wet, and by so doing, will allow the sanctity of the water of Shabbos to spread to the rest of the body.

In light of this development, using a towel after the *mikva* is actually not a negative conduct. Still, I describe our behavior in Samarkand since it stemmed from our reverence for the holy waters of the *mikva*. Even though we weren't aware of what was written in the *Kisvei HaArizal*, it was a given for us that this was the proper chassidic conduct, and we didn't have the audacity to dry ourselves of the *mikva* water.

A number of years ago, a Lubavitcher man innocently told me that he showers after the *mikva*. It was the first time I had heard of such a thing, and I was shocked. I said, "How could you do that?" Trying to justify himself, he said that if he would not shower after the *mikva* his body

would itch, from the chlorine, I supposed. I said, "At least go home and shower there, but don't shower with soap right after *mikva*!"

Some years later we met and had a friendly chat. I had already forgotten our conversation, but he reminded me and said, "You should know that since then I haven't showered after the *mikva*." I immediately recalled our conversation and I asked, "Well, how do you feel?" He didn't understand what I meant and I said, "Don't you itch afterwards?" He gave a dismissive wave with his hand and laughed.

Today, there are sadly some *bochurim* or *yungeleit* who outright disgrace the purifying waters of the *mikva*, to the extent that they shower specifically after the *mikva*. Some are even "*mehader*" to shower with soap and shampoo.

I remember that when someone would complain to R. Berke Chein that the *mikva* water was dirty, smelly or cold, he would always answer, "Yes. But we are also 'dirty, smelly and cold'..."

I once asked HaRav Yosef Heller, Rov in Crown Heights, whether I am acting properly by telling off

those who shower after *mikva*, and by not giving an *aliya* to those who are not wearing a jacket. He told me, "You are doing the right thing. It is important to stem these breaches to tradition."



R. Berke Chein

## REB BERKE'S INFLUENCE

With R. Berke Chein's arrival in Samarkand the group became even stronger in *yiras Shomayim* and *biddur mitzvah*. The *bochurim* were young and receptive, and R. Berke's behavior had a great impact on them. Although he was forced to stay in hiding and was unable to *farbreng* publicly, his place of hiding was in our house and in the Mishulovin home, so we were privy to his conduct and it influenced us greatly.

At his secret *farbrengens*, R. Berke would demand of himself and others to work on their *avodas hatefilah*, *biddur mitzvah*, and the study of Chassidus.

His focus on personal character and conduct was insistent, and relentless. He would say jokingly, “Mind your *madam*,” a title reserved for Russian noblewomen, which he used as an acronym of the faculties of *Machshava*, *Dibbur* and *Maiseh* (thought, speech, and action).

“When a *bochur* or a *yungerman* walks down the street, there is no need for him to look at his surroundings,” he would state emphatically. “He needs only to look at the space he takes up. Beyond that is not his to view!”

Another oft statement: “Speech is like a tossed salad. It has everything in it: *dvarim beteilim* (mindless chatter), *lashon hara*, gossip, etc.”

In addition to his focus on personal character, Reb Berke also turned the discussion amongst the attendees of his *farbrengens* to maintaining the chassidic integrity of one’s home and surroundings. Amongst other things, they spoke of how a radio does not belong in a *chassidishe* home. He also spoke of how the day of Shabbos ought to be completely sacred, and how outrageous it is to keep a mundane periodical around, since it desecrates the honor of Shabbos.

This was style of the *farbrengens* then, and this was the atmosphere we felt in the company of R. Berke.

## THE ATTRACTION OF SAMARKAND

Over time, the Chabad population in Samarkand fluctuated. Once most of the Chassidim left Russia in 1946, it was at first extremely difficult to put together a *minyan* of trustworthy people, and we did not have possession of a Sefer Torah. We barely managed to assemble a *minyan* on

Yom Tov. By contrast, during the 1960s and early 70s—which was when we departed from Russia—the Chabad community in Samarkand expanded substantially.

I remember that before R. Mendel Futerfas left Russia in 1964, he asked to sit with me to discuss the community in Samarkand in detail, saying, “I will need to give a full report to the Rebbe.” At that time, I recall there were four separate *minyanim* every Shabbos with fifteen to twenty people in each. There was even the occasional *minyan* during the week.

The expansion of the community was due a number of reasons. Aside from the natural population growth, a number of locals had been attracted to and joined the Chabad community. Additionally, there were Chassidim who relocated to the town from other areas in Russia. Samarkand held a special attraction for them.

For example, in the 1960s R. Yosef Greenberg (Yossel Besseraber), a *yerei Shomayim* and *baal mesiras nefesh*, came to Samarkand with his wife shortly after their marriage.



R. Sholom Vilenkin

R. Sholom Vilenkin arrived at that time with his family as well. He was a vibrant Chassid who *farbrenged* with warmth and emotion. I will never forget his sweet *davening*, sitting over his open Siddur as he uttered every word as though counting diamonds. If a word was not pronounced correctly he would go back and repeat it properly. In the middle of *davening*, before *Borchu*, he would pause and spend quite some time meditating on Chassidus. The pleasant sound of his *davening* rings in my ears until today.

Following them, and along with his family, came R. Chaim Zalman “Chazak” Kozliner, who contributed greatly to the *chassidishe* atmosphere in Samarkand. R. Dovid Okunov and his family arrived as well, and his children learned in our underground yeshiva. So too R. Chaim Volovik;



his children were part of the yeshiva as well, and later on his son Yosef became a *magid shiur* there. R. Yaakov Notik, who arrived in Samarkand following the departure of R. Mendel Futerfas, was also an important influence in our community.

Another person who comes to mind is a Jew by the name of R. Aharon Friedman, a brother-in-law of R. Yitzchak Zilber from Yerushalayim, who arrived in Samarkand in the late 1950s. R. Aharon had come from prison, where he was thrown after attempting to cross the border in 1946. He was burning with *mesiras nefesh*. He didn't remove his beard, and would walk to *shul* in open view, even though he was a young man—as a rule, only the elderly would dare be seen walking to *shul*. He was brave and fearless, and after his experience in jail nothing frightened him. We, being extremely wary of the secret police, were afraid to have him join our *minyán*.

He would recite Kaddish at every opportunity, and would proclaim the words “*vikareiv meshichei*”

(may He bring near the time of Moshiach), accompanied by dramatic hand movements, with his long blond beard swaying to and fro. On Yom Kippur he would come to *shul* wearing an old, bloodstained coat over his white *kittel*. He explained that during his interrogation, when the interrogator tried to remove his *tzitzis*, before thinking twice, he slapped the man on the cheek. The interrogators, in turn, beat him viciously, and the blood from his many wounds stained his coat. “It is with this coat that I want to daven before Hashem on Yom Kippur,” he concluded.

Each one of the above-mentioned Chassidim—as well as others whom I have not mentioned—deserves entire pages of praise and honor. However, I did not spend much time with each of them, and there are those with whom I did not become acquainted at all. Hence, I am unable to write about them as they truly deserve. ■



Reb Chaim Zalman Kozliner







# FOUR FANATICS

*Authors note: Places, names and dialogue are fiction. Incidents are all factual.*

## CHAIM

Chaim. A Lubavitcher Baal Teshuva from the sixties. Gentle. Quiet. Decades ago, a graduate student of philosophy; today, an accountant. Chassidish. Perhaps a little too serious. Chaim is a member of a Chabad community somewhere on the West Coast. His four-year-old daughter, Bayla Rochel, attended the Chabad day camp for the first time. One trip was to the local public library. Chaim was distressed, and said so. The day camp director was incredulous, staring at Chaim with disbelief in his eyes. "What a fanatic."

I visited Chaim. "Explain yourself. Surely the public library is about the most children-friendly, innocuous place on earth. What upset you?"

Chaim smiled ruefully, fingering a corner of his long blond beard. Yes, I know what you mean. I doubt if I will ever be able to explain it to them. Let me tell you about it: I came from work last week and noticed my delicious little Bayla Rochel

standing at the dining room table wiggling her hips rhythmically, pigtails flying, chanting 'hokey, pokey, turn all around'.

"Curious, I asked, 'what's that tune?' Eyes shining, Rochele told me — with her usual exuberance — how their group in day camp had visited the library for today's trip. The nice lady had sat all the children down and told them a story. Then, she had put on a record and taught them how to dance to the music, singing, 'hokey, pokey, turn all around'.

"I confess, I was taken aback by the depth of my revulsion. I sat down in the armchair to think it through. Why did I feel

such a sense of outrage? After 20 minutes of deep contemplation, I found myself grinning at the paradox: It was *davka* my secular education that enabled me to find the appropriate words. How would an anthropologist say it? Perhaps like this: It was the first - and highly effective — alien invasion of Bayla Rochel's culture-system. My pure, *eidele*, impressionable baby had been implanted with several messages;

**For an impressionable, unaccompanied child to enter those stormy waters, is, from a *ruchniyus* standpoint, literally taking her life in her hands!**

... that a public library is a kosher place for a Chassidishe little boy or girl to visit. It must be: otherwise the familiar, trusted Lubavitch counselor from day camp would not have shepherded them into the place,

... what is more, a public library is a pleasurable, 'fun place,'

... that a non-Jewish librarian instructor is an "okay" role model and authority figure,

... that non-Jewish music is a legitimate entertainment form — and so is *goyish* dance.

"And here comes that paradox again. It is precisely because of my secular background that I can truly appreciate what a public library is — particularly in terms of *chinuch*. A public library is a repository of all kinds of legitimate wisdom and useful reference works that can be utilized for purposes of Torah and Yiddishkeit. But it is also the repository of every conceivable kind of literary filth and perversion, presenting to the reader every variety of philosophical and theological corruption. Having once received this early childhood 'okay' message, the child in later years

might well pay visits to the local library — without even thinking of asking her parent's permission. For an impressionable, unaccompanied child to enter those stormy waters, is, from a *ruchniyus* standpoint, literally taking her life in her hands!"

Chaim sighed. With pain evident in his eyes, he said -- just a little too quietly — "As for the potential harm from the other 'messages' about *goyish* music, dance and authority figures. I am sure I don't have to explain *that*."

And to think of it, all of that in just one forty-five minute visit to the friendly, innocuous, public library!"

## BRACHA

Her name is Bracha. Mother of six. A former teacher, and a stalwart *n'shei* activist in the east Canadian community which she calls home. A summer-school learn-and-play half-day program was organized by the cheder (*frum*, of course; in fact, *chassidish*.) One day during the pre-Tisha B'Av Three Weeks her ten-year-old Yossi's class was treated to several videos. A story on the Beis



*Rabbi Kagan presents the Rebbe with a collection of his weekly A Thought for the Week.*

Haimikdash was followed by ... "Lassie." Bracha was dismayed, and voiced her concerns. "You can't be serious!" was the principal's amazed reaction. "Don't you know that Lassie is just the story of a little boy and his dog; a children's classic; totally harmless. I hate to say it, but this is simply fanaticism."

I dropped by to chat with Bracha.

"Well, at least my husband understands; he is with me all the way on this. He tells me the Gemara looks with great disfavor at dogs, that the rearing of dogs was altogether forbidden in Israel because of their unwholesome nature. As for me, ever since I was young I've always had a deep sense of unease about the number of dogs that are found in our cities and streets. I asked my grandparents how it was in Europe. They told me that dogs were tolerated as farm dogs, guard dogs, or watch dogs — always housed outside the home; treated humanely, as Shulchan Aruch requires, of course, but never regarded as anything more than ... an animal.

"How does that ad go? 'You've come a long way, baby'. We sure have! Look how wide and deep is the abyss between our old traditional yiddishe attitude to dogs — and the modern American outlook, in which dog-involvement has reached near cultic proportions. It is considered normal human behavior to run with dogs, hug them, kiss them, let them sleep on and in beds and couches, and literally (yes, literally) treat them as a member of the family! I confess I find such standard American man-dog behavior to be not merely un-chassidic and un-Jewish, but also un-human. It is repulsive and nauseating; one more symptom of a sick society.

"I think of the Rebbe's exhortation to keep images and pictures of *treif* animals away from children. Then I think about my *cheder yingel* staring transfixed at the big screen, captivated by the wonderful, warm, moving story of a little boy and his very special relationship with his best friend — a dog...

...and I shudder."



## RABBI YITZCHAK MEIR KAGAN

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Kagan a"h was born and raised in London, England. He attended Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in Lud, Israel, where he was profoundly affected by the mashpia R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman. After learning in 770 and then Montreal, Rabbi Kagan moved on shlichus to Detroit, where he became associate director of the Lubavitch Foundation in Michigan.

His knowledge of Chassidus, combined with his gift for transmitting its message in English, brought about the pioneering work of spreading the Rebbe's message to the wider world through the publications of "A Thought for the Week" and the radio show "The Jewish Hour." He also authored the classic translation of the Hayom Yom. Throughout his life he inspired many with his speeches and writings. Rabbi Kagan taught chassidic philosophy at various universities in Michigan, until his tragic passing in a car accident in 2001.

## CHAIM ZALMAN

Chaim Zalman stood his ground calmly. His friends at the Lubavitch Shteebl in the large New England town surrounded him, eyebrows raised. "Come on, Chaim Zalman! You don't really mean

to say that you don't get any newspaper at all? "Nope," replied Chaim, "I used to, but I canceled my subscription years ago. Can't say that I miss it. As a matter of fact, I don't let any magazine, periodicals or books from non-Torah sources into my house." The other men exchanged knowing glances. Obviously, Chaim Zalman was one of "them."

I went to see Chaim Zalman, and we had a long talk in his homey, cluttered study/guest-room, surrounded by his *seforim* with the pictures of the Rebbeim Looking down from the walls.

"True, I'm a shliach. But I don't think that has anything to do with it. After all, my background is identical to so many of us. I'm fairly young, and was born right here in the U.S. Although I don't go around speaking about it (it's not popular, as I'm sure you've noticed) I truly believe that every Lubavitch chossid not just *sbluchim* — should have my attitude about newspapers, magazines, and that kind of stuff. How much more so if he is a *talmid* of one of the Rebbe's yeshivos, be it Tomchei Tmimim, Achei Tmimim, Morristown, Hadar Hatorah, or wherever.

"But, the sad truth is, that for years I myself used to get the daily paper, because I convinced myself that it was necessary for me to sound like a 'regular' informed, intelligent American to the people I'm trying to draw closer to Yiddishkeit. I managed to persuade myself that I should be "up" on current events, politics, sports, etc. After a while it became habit, a daily routine.

"The change began when I noticed my boys starting to look at the paper with more interest. Lubavitch Yeshiva bochurim reading a newspaper? I knew that wasn't right. I began to look through the pages with a new, different perspective: 'What kind of a chinuch effect would this article, photograph or ad have on my boys?' I couldn't fool myself. I began hiding the newspaper in my bedroom as soon as it came, but the guilty feelings increased. I had this nagging thought, 'Surreptitiously hiding the newspaper might be sending a not-so-subtle negative message to my children. Might they not be thinking, *Tatty reads something that Lubavitch Yeshiva bachurim should not be reading.*'



**I began to look through the pages with a new, different perspective: 'What kind of a chinuch effect would this article, photograph or ad have on my boys?'**

So I canceled the subscription for the daily, leaving just the weekend edition. (After all, I had to have some contact with the outside world.) But along with the Sunday newspaper came the Sunday newspaper magazine in full color. That magazine always had to be hidden from the boys because it was full of ads for clothing etc., that would not exactly win a Beis Rivkah prize for *tznius*, if you know what I mean. Finally,

something triggered my FF - "Feh Factor." (Feh is yiddish for "yech", or "ugh".) One Sunday the heavy newspaper arrived, complete with Sunday magazine, featuring in full color on its front page an article about a certain perverted 'alternate life style.' With a 'Feh!' of sheer disgust, I dropped the whole newspaper into the garbage can in the driveway, and canceled my subscription. I've never looked back.

"Interestingly enough, a couple of months later, I received an amazing reinforcement for my decision, A private meeting was called to discuss



a certain communal problem. About six of us, all Anash, met in one of our homes in the evening. Our host was “One of us”; he was a born Lubavitcher, a Tamim, and in tune with *chassidishe* ideals in all matters - including Chinuch. He apologized for the house being in disarray, the *kinderlach* had just gone to sleep, etc. We all laughed; when we had left our respective houses a few minutes earlier, they hadn’t looked any better, we assured him. After a few minutes of small talk, we moved over to the dining room table and sat down around it to begin our meeting. As we leaned over the table, we became embarrassingly aware that the daily newspaper was opened to its middle page, spread across the table — displaying a huge double-page photographic advertisement for underthings which, thirty years ago, would have been banned as pornographic.

“Without fuss, I quietly folded up the newspaper and tossed it onto an armchair. Everyone was a little red-faced — except our host. He had seen the ad, had calmly watched me fold up the newspaper, but was (obviously) utterly insensitive to the inappropriateness of that display on the table of a chassidishe house!

“Boy, did that ever make me think! What kind of insidious literary influences were being absorbed, unknowingly, by myself and my family, in my own house? How many immodest photo-messages were lodging themselves inside our consciousness — courtesy of advertising?

“You know what the *chevra* answer? “Ach, it’s just an *ad*! I mean, no intelligent person pays any attention to those things!’ Right. That’s why the advertisers spend millions.”

“You know what the *chevra* answer? “Ach, it’s just an *ad*! I mean, no intelligent person pays any attention to those things!’ Right. That’s why the advertisers spend millions.”

The sun was shining a little too strongly through the windows. Chaim Zalman reached up to close the shutters, then settled back into his chair and looked me straight in the eye with a certain quiet, yet fierce, determination.

“I had no idea how far it would go. I discovered that everything —I mean everything needs scrutiny. When I was a kid, I was once browsing in my uncle’s library (he wasn’t *frum*) and I pulled out a book, a history of Jews by Graetz. I hadn’t the faintest notion who the author was, but I was interested in Jewish history books. I randomly opened the book to somewhere in the middle, and the first phrase that caught my eye (amazing that I have never forgotten it) was, “...the Zohar, that

book of falsehoods,...” I slammed the book shut and shoved it back into the shelf vehemently. I was so thankful that Hashem had shown me the nature of the book at one glance.

“Decades later, in fact, just a few months ago, I had a similar experience. I always review the books for my Chabad-House library here. One that

was highly recommended to me was “Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust’ by Professor Yaffa Eliach. I was told (by a Lubavitcher chassid, of course) that the book was marvelous and a hundred-percent kosher. Mrs. Eliach was herself completely frum, etc. etc., I opened the copy at random, and the first story I read was entitled, “PUFF...” (p. 205). It was only a page long, but it was enough to have me pack the book up and send it back to the publisher. Any impression that might have been left by that story on a visitor to Chabad House would be one-hundred-percent negative and one-hundred-percent unkosher from a Torah-Mitzvos point of view!

"But wait! You think you've heard it all? Listen to my experience with American Baby magazine.

"Yes, you heard me right. American Baby. Surely the gentlest, most harmless magazine which is mailed, free of charge, to mothers right after the birth of their baby. Okay, I had (Baruch Hashem) never allowed women's magazines in the house. Again, the tznius issue. Particularly when my boys reached their teens. But American Baby? For heaven's sakes, surely nothing could be the slightest bit wrong with that purveyor of toy advertising, baby furniture and medicines, with articles on the latest in diapers, etc. Well, one day I'm idly leafing through the latest issue, and I come across an article by their most frequent contributor, Dr. Terry Brazelton, a nationally renowned pediatrician. The article informed me as a parent that the only way to ensure a balanced normalcy of bodily attitudes in my children was to expose them to the (adult!) anatomies of the opposite gender at an early age. Specifically, he recommended that young children take showers with their parents (of the opposite gender)."

Chaim Zalman leaned forward aggressively in his seat. "All right, I'll accept the title 'fanatic'. Let them call me what they will. But you tell me honestly,

does material like that belong in the house of the Rebbe's chassid?!"

## LEAH

Leah groaned. Chayale fidgeted uncomfortably in her laps reminding Leah that her feeding was soon due. Glumly she stared across the room at her father, still glowering, with his pipe clamped too tightly in his teeth. "Daddy, its just no use. You'll never understand." "Darned right," growled her father. He pulled the pipe out of his teeth and jabbed the air with it for emphasis. "It was all I could do to understand why my oldest daughter, a brilliant young woman, graduated from Barnard, should become so enamored with religion. But okay, that was a long time ago. Mother and I have learned to make peace with your strange new lifestyle. After all, we have always been proud Jews ourselves, and we remember our parents and grandparents fondly. So we put up with all this nonsense of your living in a bad area in Brooklyn, and your abandoning culture and music and literature in favor of your Jewish studies and your Rebbe. But to send your children to a school where they don't teach English, Math or Social studies, that's criminal, just plain criminal!"



Leah made as graceful an exit as she could. Standing up, she said nonchalantly, “Dad, we’ll have to talk about it another time; we really have to get going back to New York now. The traffic is soon going to get bad, and Chayale needs a feeding.”

I decided to make one final visit, to Leah, on a sunny Monday afternoon on Montgomery Street in Crown Heights.

“My husband Yaakov works as a systems analyst. He just bought me a computer with a good word-processing program on it. He’s trying to encourage me to get back into writing, which I’ve abandoned since my Barnard days. I’m excited about it. And I think one of the first papers I’m going to write will be “Cross-Cultural Blindness.” Intriguing title? Well, what I mean is the blindness of one culture towards the validity of another. More specifically, the refusal of one culture to recognize the existence of another culture’s educational database.

My father — *zol zein gezunt* — is a prime example of that blindness.

When I was in Machon Chana I once heard a story about a census in Czarist Russia more than a century ago. The only people who could be co-opted into becoming census-takers were pretty low on the societal totem pole. Sure, they had to be able to read and write so that they could fill out the census questionnaires; but most of them had only a rudimentary education beyond that.

One such dolt came to the house of a great Rav in a rural Russian town. The rabbi was immersed in an intricate and difficult problem in Halacha. Piled up in front of him on the table were several Gemaras, a Yoreh Deah, a Rambam, etc. He spoke no Russian. When the census-taker came to the door and called out, “Is anyone home?”, the Rav didn’t hear him, for two reasons: his super-

immersion in his Torah quest, and his automatic “tuning-out” of the Russian language.

“After a few increasingly irritated shouts of ‘Anyone home,’ the angry census-taker stomped through the house looking for someone to answer the questionnaire. He burst in on the Rabbi, lifted his clipboard, and asked gruffly, ‘How many people live in this house, and what are their standards of education?’ Needless to say, the Rav did not answer. The fellow asked the question a second time in a raised tone of voice. Again, no response. Finally, after yelling the question one last time, he furiously filled in the questionnaire himself: ‘One old man — illiterate.’

Leah smiled, “I think I’ll begin the paper with that story. I really love it. Here is this peasant census-taker whose level of culture and education—judged by the standards of any civilization—was so far beneath the Rav’s that you couldn’t even measure them on the same scale. Yet, because the Rav was deficient in one minute area

of knowledge — Russian language — the peasant classified him as ‘illiterate.’

At that moment the honk of the Oholei Torah school bus was heard outside and two excited little children of about 4 and 6 burst into the room, bubbling over with the day’s events in Cheder. “*Gutteh kinderlach; Gei in kich un vash gut op di bent.*” Noticing my surprise at her fluent, barely-accented Yiddish, Leah said proudly, ‘Hey, that’s my culture! Right?’ I heartily concurred.

After giving the kids cookies and milk, Leah sat down and continued: “Okay, now I’m really going to impress you. I’m going to roll out all my credentials. My degree was in education, and what is more, because of my anger at my parents’ attacks. I’ve thought this through dozens of times,

Yet, because the Rav was deficient in one minute area of knowledge — Russian language — the peasant classified him as ‘illiterate.’

but because of *kibud av* and the utter futility of talking to my Dad, I've never been able to get it out of my system. So here goes:

"I believe that you can explain our *limudei-kodesh*-only education system to any honest intellectual — Jew or non-Jew — who has no ax to grind, and you can do so without even mentioning Torah or Yiddishkeit! Let's take a good look at the basic definition of education. Break it down, analytically, to four components: **One**, transmission of information; **two**, enhancing intellectual acuity (i.e., training the mind to think, analyze and learn); **three**, character and morality training; **four**, functional training (teaching the ability to communicate, to ask directions, to make correct change in the store, etc.).

"It would be universally agreed by students of education theory that the first three components of education are the most important ones. Analyzed from that perspective, how well educated are my children at Oholei Torah?

"Criterion One, they are absorbing a veritable mass of information, quantitatively far more than I ever absorbed in my early years in the finest private schools.

"Criterion Two, training of the mind. Amazing! Absolutely *gevaldig*! You ought to be here and observe my older kids, especially the eight-year-old, when their cousins (non-frum, who attend public school) of the same age are over for a visit. It's awesome to see the veritable abyss between their maturity levels in terms of intellectual capacity — i.e. the ability to reason and to learn.

"Criterion Three, morality and character training? No comment is necessary.

"That leaves Criterion Four, training for function:

"It is precisely because I'm a college grad with a major in education to boot, that I get so infuriated and frustrated at shortsighted individuals who say my children are 'uneducated' because their English language skills are weak. If they would say, 'the children are functionally hampered in society,' they would at least be playing fair. I would

willingly agree that this is the case, but it doesn't bother me in the slightest, because it is only a temporary condition. When the kids get older they do marvelously well in society. Perhaps, years ago, you couldn't argue this point, because you had no successful young adults to whom you could point as examples of Oholei Torah graduates. But today there are dozens of *shluchim* scattered through the U.S. and Canada who are graduates of *limudei-kodesh*-only *chadorim*. They address groups publicly, they teach difficult texts (like Gemara or Chassidus) in competent English, they have all the arithmetic knowledge they need to wrestle with the Chabad House's ledgers, etc.; some of them even write commendable prose. They "picked up" all those functional skills later, with no problem.

"As I said, my father just won't hear any arguments. But, I've tried to use simple analogies. For example, I asked my Dad (by the way, he's a physicist and extremely well educated) 'What would you think if you met an elderly Chinese scholar who had been immersed in intellectual pursuit all his life and had a phenomenal mind, a calm disposition and a thoroughly reasoned and seasoned philosophy of Life — but had never heard of any of western culture? This great venerable Chinese sage had never heard of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, nor of Julius Caesar nor of Thomas Jefferson. Paine, George Washington or the entire western European experience?'

"When I press him on this he just mumbles and won't give an answer. But the sad truth is that my father's cross-cultural blindness is so bad that he probably would not recognize the genuineness and validity of the Chinese scholar's education or culture, *simply because he could not relate it to his own*.

"Isn't it about time that all of us who have selected traditional *cheder* education for our *chasidische kinderlach* stand up tall and straight and proclaim to the world (particularly to our own friends on the block), **our children are the most highly educated and cultured that any society would produce.**"

*Special thanks to the Kagan family for sharing the manuscript with us. ■*



Seenitte All,  
as confided to Yaffa Leba Gottlieb



# CONFESSIONS OF AN EX TV POSSESSOR

This article first appeared in Di Yiddishe Heim, Winter 5743 (1983).

Now don't get me wrong. We are a very *frum* family. It's just that we had a TV in our house. A working one, too, but when I explain, I'm sure you will understand.

I mean, here was my great-aunt Julia giving us some of her extra furniture, and in the lower left-hand drawer of the dresser she sent us was this little TV. "Keep it!" she told us, "we have three others!" — So what were we going to do? Send it back?

Besides, there *are* reasons for *having* a TV. For one thing, the kids can't learn *all* the time. They need a little relaxation, not to mention some relaxation for me. We were going on seven kids then — and just try to find a sitter for seven kids! And there *are* some educational things on TV, — nature shows, a little news. A few carefully selected programs, that's just nice, convenient, inexpensive entertainment. *And*

peace and quiet, for no TV could make as much noise as my seven kids.

Actually, I did miscalculate on a few points. For one thing, the children were *so* excited when

they saw it — not just our children, but all the children on the block. The word got around fast, and pretty soon our house was jammed every day after yeshiva with kids who wanted to watch TV. Our kids had never been so popular. So much for my peace and quiet — the house was always mobbed.

But that was just the beginning. Parents began to wonder why their children disappeared into our house every afternoon. Then one of the mothers, a friend of mine too, called me:

"Seenitte — Rachele says you have — a TV?!?"

"We didn't buy it — it was a gift..."

Well, she always was the kind to exaggerate. Certainly the few moments we spend watching TV won't affect the way we see the world. So I turned her off, and returned to my kitchen chores.

"But the kids are watching it?!"

"Just the children's educational show," I explained.

"Yes, but that children's educational show had a commercial that advertised the late night movie..." and in a state of semi-panic she whispered unprintables.

Okay, so it can happen, but really that was rare. Usually they advertise innocuous things like kids' cereals. Still, the next afternoon my ten year old said his best friend wasn't allowed over any more because we had a TV. "Don't worry," I assured him, and called the friend's mother.

"We have a TV, not the plague," I told her.

"TV is the plague!" she exclaimed. "Turning on the TV is to turn off your brain and be hypnotized into becoming a *goy*!"

"There's a middle road for everything," I assured her. But she was insistent and closed-minded. "I'm sorry, Seenitte," she said, "but I wouldn't let my children put *traife* food in their mouths; I don't want them to have *traife* ideas in their heads!"

Well, she always was the kind to exaggerate. Certainly the few moments we spend watching TV won't affect the way we see the world. So I turned her off, and returned to my kitchen chores. While I was working in the kitchen, my four and five year olds came in singing. That was nice. I usually learn the latest *niggunim* from my kids.

Syrupy-Squiggles!

Get you in the giggles!

Buy them for your breakfast!

The Syrupy-Squiggly Piggly says: Ha, ha, Mmmm!

"Ma, buy us Syrupy Squiggles!" they demanded.

"That's a new one," I said, "I haven't seen it at Mindel's."

"No!" they insisted, "it's on TV on the Micro-wave Company. Get it, Ma!"

"Does it have a *hechsber*?" I asked.

"Piggly says, Ha Ha Mmmm!" echoed my two year old, and before I could think of what to say, my eight-year old stomped in.

"Ma! I gotta have new sneaks!"

"What's a 'sneak'?" I asked innocently.

"You know!" he pointed at his sneakers, recently purchased at a neighborhood store. "These aren't good! I gotta have SHPIDS!"

"Shpids are for kids?" I guessed.

"No!" He didn't get the joke. "For running! I can't run good in *these*!"

So the TV was moved to a private place, to the adult room, beyond the undiscerning area of young children.

"You know," my friend Chava reminded me, "the *mashpia* says TVs make even basement air more dense."

I didn't know what she was talking about. My husband, I should add, really had no part in this whole thing. He is at work all day, has his *shiurim*

I am just not the type to go out and indiscriminately buy brand X, but still my husband continued to measure my housekeeping against these poetic images – Lemon Fresh, Sunshine Bright, Naturally Pure.

at night, and wakes up early to *daven*. The TV didn't affect him — he never watched it and barely knew it was there.

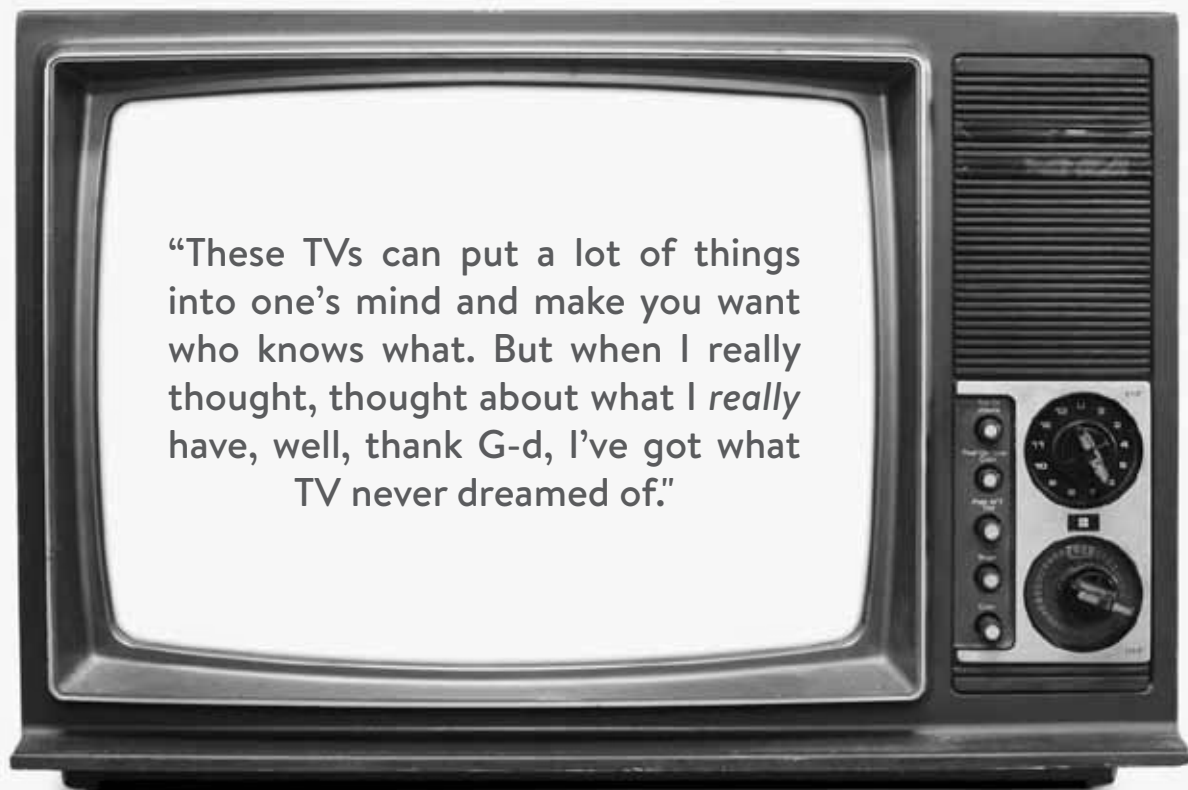
One night after the kids were finally in bed, I was relaxing after a very busy day, watching an educational drama. My husband came in, and since the show was interesting, we watched it together, until 2 a.m. He slept a little late the next morning, and so he prayed alone at home, rather than going to *shul* as usual. After that once in a while, he watched a show here and there. One program we both liked, so he would come home early from learning and we would watch it together. So what's wrong with a little togetherness? It was nice, in moderation, of course.

About then I noticed something which I really didn't pay too much attention to at first. I mean, every husband has a right to be pleased with his household, although my Shmuel had just never been too particular about these things. Yet one morning, out of the blue, he looked up at me after buttering his toast and inquired, "Is this the

better Spread?" At least I *think* that's what he said, although I didn't have time to answer, because it was the middle of the morning "rush hour," when I am trying to get out five school-aged kids on their right three different buses. During this time my husband is usually gainfully occupied, but this morning he just sat there, staring at the linoleum. "It just doesn't have that Gleaming Shine," he sighed disappointedly, adding also that our bathroom didn't smell Springtime Fresh, nor were his shirts Powerhouse White.

So what was I going to say? I mean, I am just not the type to go out and indiscriminately buy brand X, unless it's really cheaper, but still my husband continued to measure my housekeeping against these poetic images (Lemon Fresh, Sunshine Bright, Naturally Pure). And sometimes he would even look at *me* and shake his head. Still, I just thought that something was not going so well at his work, and that it would all just pass.

Little did I know. One night, about a week later, the whole thing came to a head. "Seenitte, I think we have to talk," said my husband.



"Can't it wait until the next commercial" I asked.

"I don't think so," he said. He got up and turned the volume down.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, "I'm watching that!"

"Well, I'm watching *you*", he said.

"Me!?" I tugged my kerchief and checked the baby I was nursing to make sure I hadn't inadvertently breached my standards of modesty.

"You know," he continued, "I was going to tell you... Well, I was going to tell you... well, I was *thinking*..."

"Darling, we just don't seem to have anything in common any-more," whispered the Educational Drama in the background.

We both stared at the long-locked, perfect-lipped, wide-eyed beauty glowing on the screen, and suddenly I got the picture. In my mind I saw myself three and a half months after my 7<sup>th</sup> child, and still wearing maternity dresses (the longer styles which conceal varicose veins). Compare and contrast to those electronic visions before us, who have nothing to do besides demonstrate how to look five pounds thinner, and model stockings which never sag.

"What do you mean, you were thinking?," as if I had to ask.

"Well, I was thinking all kinds of things" he said weakly.

I could imagine.

"You know," he continued, "These TVs can put a lot of things into one's mind and make you want who knows what. But when I really thought, thought about what I *really* have, well, thank G-d, I've got what TV never dreamed of. I have great kids, and a great wife — I've got a good deal."

"You bet you do," I assured him.

"However," he continued, "who would have ever thought that we would come to this? I don't want to be thinking such thoughts anymore! And I don't want to be late for *davening* anymore, or to miss my *shiurim* or even to be late and tired for work, and lose my job."

And he took the little TV and threw it into the garbage so that its face got bashed in.

*Boruch Hashem.* And I don't want to think what might have happened if he hadn't. ■







# BOOK REVIEW

## ALARM, HOPE AND HUMOR

### THE FRIERDIKER REBBE ADDRESSES AMERICA IN ENGLISH

Most translated classics have a definable target audience. Why, then, is the recently published English translation of *Sefer HaSichos 5705* being equally snapped up by eager readers who hail from Nevl, Kingston Ave., and Wyoming? They include chassidim young and old, and *stam* Yidden who are looking for a satisfying taste of *Chassidus* and the *chassidisher* approach to life – and of course the typical Anash-man-in-the-street who wants to rejuvenate his *chassidishkeit*.

That unusually broad readership is exactly what made us at *Perspectives Magazine* curious. Part of



the answer appears to lie in the fact that few classics can catapult a reader so vigorously through such a dramatic spectrum of thoughts and emotions, inspirational teachings, pungent pointers to personal growth, heartwarming narratives, and vigorous activism.

For a start: Many Jews in 1945, unaccustomed to the freedom and prosperity of the New World, were tantalized by the spicy aroma of the melting pot in the Land of

Gold. Accordingly, in more than one *sicha*, the Frierdiker Rebbe confronts the fact that many American rabbinic and lay leaders of his time

were simply wringing their hands in despair at the ravages of assimilation. He then proceeds, without kid gloves, to urge those leaders to be proactive, by mounting an unrelenting offensive against that invader. Finally, switching from a tone of alarm and rebuke to a tone of encouragement, he reminds them that "an army doesn't conquer a city with tears, but with a march!"

As is well known, the Frierdiker Rebbe was never fazed by considerations of being politically correct. Thus it was that in several of these *sichos* dating from that period he publicized and decried the secular indoctrination of thousands of unaccompanied refugee children – many of them from observant homes – who had been saved and brought to *Eretz Yisroel* during and immediately after World War II. In one *sicha* in this volume, intensely and passionately, he cries out to American Jewry to monitor their well-intentioned contributions: "In *Eretz Yisrael* Jewish children are being malevolently thrust out of the faith.... Jewish men and women, hear and be dumbfounded! The work of the 'apostasy corner' in *Eretz Yisrael* is being carried out with your power, with the power of American Jewry...."

Equally fearless was his cry from the heart with regard to *chinuch* without *yiras Shamayim* in America: "Since 'a *sefer* Torah written by a heretic must be burnt,' people must act with *mesirus*

*nefesh* to eradicate the *treife* Talmud Torah schools and the *treife yeshivos*."

In a very different direction: These *sichos* are sometimes seasoned by a touch of caustic humor. Just one example: "In the *chassidishe shuls* today, if people learn half a chapter of *Tanya*, or a whole chapter, once a week, that's already called a *chassidisher shul*. Sure, that routine should take place – but is that how *Chassidus* should look?!

True, during a famine even chaff passes for food, but...."

The Frierdiker Rebbe was fond of transmitting even weighty messages, such as the power of *biskashrus*, in simplistic language. At one *farbrengen*, for example, he invited his chassidim to join him, so to speak, on a forthcoming spiritual flight: "When one [referring to himself] is

recounting an episode from long ago, during that time the narrator is *there*. So why don't you come along, too?"

This volume is enriched by many snippets of conversations that provide a glimpse into the mindset of vintage chassidim. For example: Two brothers, both *melamdim*, once heard the Rebbe Rashab remark that "only among chassidim can one find true *abavas Yisrael*." When one brother heard that remark, he added, "Exactly like the love between brothers." His brother responded: "No, exactly like the love between chassidim."

Few classics can catapult a reader so vigorously through such a dramatic spectrum of thoughts and emotions, inspirational teachings, pungent pointers to personal growth, heartwarming narratives, and vigorous activism.

Elsewhere, the Frierdiker Rebbe makes the point that his uncle, R. Zalman Aharon, was fearless, by narrating that "once, in the middle of the night, a fire broke out in Lubavitch. Someone promptly woke up my uncle and told him that the fire wasn't far from his home. His response: 'So wake me up when the fire reaches that far wall over there!' With that he turned over and went back to sleep – and he didn't pretend to sleep, he really slept."

A recurring theme is the then-novel concept that everyone is obligated to exert himself in outreach activity. He states that "*temimim*, wherever they find themselves, should *create* an environment.... The work of a *shammes* is to wake everyone up. Whether a particular individual wants to be woken up or not, the *shammes* does his job. [In the days before the invention of alarm clocks] he knocks on the shutters and wakes him up, because in truth that fellow is willing – except that he is asleep, so he needs to be woken up."

It is in this volume that the Frierdiker Rebbe describes himself as a funnel – and this volume is filled with scores of illuminating *chassidische peirushim* on *psukim* and *maamarei Chazal* that have been preserved for us, thanks to his talks and writings. In the words of the sponsor of this series of translations, Reb Yossi Malamud, "All that we know about our Chabad roots was told to us by the Frierdiker Rebbe in Yiddish. It is critical that these talks are not forgotten by the next generation."

Translating the subtle charm of the Frierdiker Rebbe's poetic prose into a *goyisher* language is of course a formidable challenge to one's linguistic creativity, and this task was entrusted to Reb Uri Kaploun. The series is masterminded by Rabbi Yonah Avtzon, Director of Sichos In English, and is published in conjunction with Kehot Publication Society. ■

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# COUNTER PERSPECTIVE

## RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS ARTICLES

### Who is a Chossid?

Dear Editor,

I am writing to let you know that reading your publication has literally changed my "perspective." Living in a community where I don't get much exposure to real chassidim, my vision of what an ideal chossid looks like became very different from the one I learned about in Tomchei Temimim. I came to believe that it is possible to be a big a chossid while neglecting basic areas of *avodas Hashem*. Reading your publication which is full with authentic *chassidishkeit* and articles that feature true *chassidishe Yidden* reminded me what *Chassidus* is really about. In particular, the articles that featured Rabbi Shapiro, Rabbi Shwei, and Rabbi Korf had a very strong impact on me.

There is a famous story of Reb Shmuel Munkes where he hung himself in front of the Alter Rebbe's house saying that just as a shoemaker has a sample shoe hanging in front of his shop, so too the house of a Rebbe should have a sample chossid hanging from it.

I have heard the story many times but never really understood what message Reb Shmuel was trying to convey. However, after reading several issues of *Perspectives* it finally dawned on me what might be the point of the story.

Perhaps even in the time of the Alter Rebbe there were people who had a misconception of what it meant to be a chossid and there was a need to have a sample chossid to enlighten them.

(Perhaps even in the Alter Rebbe's time some people misunderstood the purpose of a Rebbe and Chassidus, and thought that the purpose of a Rebbe is to create impressive organizations, and make a good impression for the "movement." According to this vein of thought, it would have been fitting to hang the movement's most successful PR person or a picture of most impressive building. Seemingly they needed to be reminded that the purpose of a Rebbe is to create chassidim.)

I don't know if this is the correct explanation for Reb Shmuel's behavior, but in our generation it is definitely necessary to showcase true chassidim so people have a correct understanding of what a true chossid is.

Thank you very much for your great work and may you continue to have much *brocho* and *batzlocho*.

Yehuda S.



## What We Really Need (8)

Thank you for your wonderful magazine. It's refreshing to read such a high-quality and *toichendik* magazine nowadays.

In the article on Reb Avrohom Elya Axlerod by Rabbi Binyomin Cohen, you included a picture of Reb Avrohom Elya at a shiur. The caption under the picture said that Reb Avrohom Elya was the one delivering the shiur.

According to a recently published biography "Michoel B'Achas" it is HaRav Michoel Forshlager, a *talmid* of the Avnei Nezer and a tremendous *gaon*, giving his regular Gemara shiur, and Reb

Avrohom Elya participated in that shiur. When looking closely at the picture, it indeed seems so.

In the biography, they also publish a letter of Reb Avrohom Elya to Reb Yisroel Jacobson telling him about the greatness of HaRav Forshlager and how he wants to get close to him. He describes him as being a true *baki beshas*, *rishonim* and *poskim*, not only according to the standards of American Jewry but according to standards of prewar Europe.

Hatzlacha,  
Rabbi Michoel Lerner

■ ■ ■

Dear Rabbi Hellinger,

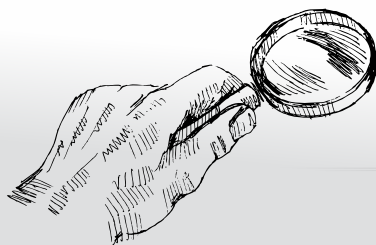
Many thanks for your exceptional work. In our home, a new issue is fought over, and provides topic for many a discussion.

I would like to suggest that you include in your magazine more stories. I find that there is a lack of well written, good *Chassidishe maisos*, which have not been tampered with.

I am sure I need not elaborate on the importance and power of a story, especially on our youth.

Best wishes for much *hatzlachah*.

Yours truly,  
Chaya Berkowitz



## *my* **PERSPECTIVE**

### Victory of Words

*Chana S.*

The Rebbe made the date of Hei Teiveis, the phrase *Didan Natzach*, and *Seforim* almost synonymous. Of course, this association is due to the famous events of Hei Teiveis, 5747 (1987). However, it extends beyond that particular day, pointing to a deeper connection between *Didan Natzach* – an attitude of victory – and the written word.

Every quality piece of writing represents a victory. From inception to publication, it battles – or rather, its writer battles – for its existence.

An idea begins as an entity barely distinguishable from the sea of consciousness in which it swims. At that stage, its most likely destiny is defeat – to remain in that form, or, rather quickly, to dissolve back into the stuff from which it emerged.

The would-be author, however, can change that destiny. Like the true Creator, a creative soul has the opportunity to triumph over nature, and to build an idea into a living being that can face the light of day.

An idea has been rescued! The first and most critical battle is won. Then comes the dual challenge of nurturing the idea without losing its direction, of keeping it focused it without

squeezing it dry – of selecting, at each juncture, the right words that will carry the idea to safety.

As the process continues, so do the questions that threaten to undermine it: Does my idea hold true, or is it useful to me alone? Is it really original? Maybe I'd do better to keep quiet, avoiding the embarrassment of proudly presenting to the world an idea which... well, has already been said, or worse, is plainly obvious.

In my case at least, the hours of sleep lost to travels of the imagination and other sacrifices to the relatively turbulent world of creativity (soup evaporating on the stove...?) make me wonder if it's all worth it. Since nearly all of this takes place in private, and the battle is between me and the bit of myself that my writing holds, the choice is entirely mine, again and again, whether or not to grant life to an idea yet unspoken.

Hence the triumph inherent in a complete – not to mention published! – piece of writing. A written work can only come to be with a call of "*Didan Natzach*" – victory is ours, as it should rightfully be.

The Rebbe used the expression *Didan Natzach* in reference to *Hai Teiveis*. The message of that day,

as the Rebbe reiterated, is that a book represents not just another space on the shelf but the triumph of a spiritual form of life, and he encouraged us to act upon that attitude.

For a reader, that means to esteem the written word enough to give it prominence in our budgets, on our bookshelves and in our lives. For a writer, it means to esteem the words that are yet to be written – to nurture the creative spark to victory.

## The Golden Balance

*Chaya Mushka R.*

Thousands of people come to the Ohel throughout the year and an astronomical number come for Gimmel Tammuz and managing the Ohel is a huge operation. There are always enough papers and pens for people to write their letters. There is always coffee, tea, milk and of course the famous Ohel cookies supplied. There are pushkas just in the places you need them. There are the perfect amount of washing stations. There is constantly a video of the Rebbe playing. The tables are designed beautifully, heavy enough not to be moved around every second, yet not stuck in place and also sport a divider in the middle for privacy. Most recently there has been added a phone charging station with every type of charger you could need and tablets with the JEM app installed. Coming to the Ohel, I feel like someone really took the time to deal with every *gashmiyus* concern a person could have so that we are free to focus on the *ruchniyus* and the *kedusha* of the place.

Standing in line for the Ohel on this past Gimmel Tammuz, I noticed this attention to detail even more. At well placed intervals all along the line were water stations and strategically right next to the water stations were garbage bins for the used plastic cups. Hanging from the shelter along the length of the line were videos of the Rebbe playing perfectly in sync, with speakers at the perfect volume and best of all fans to cool down those waiting their turn.

I have seen many events and operations. Each event has a goal, for us that goal is usually

maximum *mitzvos* and *ruchniyus*. The goal is to bring the world one step closer to *Moshiach*. To achieve that goal the Rebbe encourages us to use all the tools at our disposal. For one *shliach* that means serving sushi to have people come to a shiur. It might mean bringing attractions to encourage children to attend a Lag Ba'omer parade. We use fancy technology and web design to have people learn Torah most effectively.

The Rebbe's approach is that the world is here for us to use it in service of Hashem. Just as gold was created for the Beis Hamikdosh, video technology was created for JEM and the internet for chabad.org.

The problem with using all this *gashmiyus* is that we risk stepping over the line and becoming *megusham*. When using the physical it is all too easy to become physical.

Too many events lose the goal in the frills. A good book needs a nice cover but it would be foolish to spend years working on a design for the cover while neglecting the content quality of the book.

Take the weekly Shabbos table for example.

The goal of the Shabbos table is to have a forum where family and guests can spend quality time together being spiritually uplifted. That requires everyone to be involved in Jewish oriented inspiring discussion. To fulfill the *mitzva* there also needs to be candles, wine, bread, fish, two cooked foods and possibly

meat. To facilitate this and allow it to happen comfortably there are certain tools that we use. We try to have nice candles, proper cutlery and good food to name a few. These physical items are the medium which allow the spiritual stuff to flow naturally.

However, were one to scorn the physical and would instead prepare a Shabbos meal with cold food on napkins, tea light candles, and not enough chairs, I highly doubt the goal of creating an uplifting spiritually invigorating family bond would be achieved.

To the opposite extreme, were there to be such a ridiculous amount of food that everyone was so busy sampling, or were the women to be too busy in the kitchen to sit at the table there would be no room for the *divrei Torah* and discussion. The quality would be lost to the frills.

It was in line by the Ohel that I was struck by the golden balance.

On the one hand there were all the physical things that a person could possibly need at the Ohel. Yet at the same time there was nothing extra, nothing to distract from the purpose for which one comes. There are plenty of "Ohel cookies" available but they are simple cookies. They allow people to break their fast in a pleasant way. Having dry stale crackers would be lacking in *gashmiyus* and therefore distracting from the *ruchniyus*, and having fancy cakes and pastries would be a distraction on the other end making a mockery of the purpose of the Ohel.

■ ■ ■

I heard this delicate balance applied to education by my dear father *sheyichye*. One must reward children, but to give any reward more than the minimum needed to motivate the child is a crime against that child. Don't deprive but also don't spoil, just educate.

From those who have had the *zechus* of being in the Rebbe's home, I've been told that it is nice but simple. One woman put it so beautifully saying that it is a well furnished home, but every last thing has a place and a purpose

Standing now at the Ohel, at the threshold of establishing my own home, I was inspired to do it right. The home is the center of Yiddishkeit and it is a woman's privilege to be the home maker. Hashem gave a woman the special ability to find Hashem in the mundane, to see cooking dinner and mopping floors as something G-dly. She outfits her home in pleasant style with every little *gashmiyus* detail that is conducive to her strong chassidishe home while zealously avoiding any frills or tempting extras which would distract from that goal.

While I venture down to deal with the physical tools the world has to offer I pray that I not be distracted by the tools but have the wisdom to use the tools solely for the goal.

The mission is to use the *gashmiyus* but not become *megusham*; to make from *gashmiyus*, *ruchniyus*. ■



# A Girl's Third Birthday

*Sister and Sister-In-Law of Shluchos*

There's a new trend developing among *shluchim* of making candle lighting parties on or around their daughters' third birthdays. What probably happened was that one creative *shliach/shlucha* came up with a cute idea and others followed.

It's been bothering me for some time. It's not something any *shliach* ever did before Gimmel Tammuz.

One might come along and say: "What's the big deal? So it's not a *mitzvah*, but is it so bad?" Perhaps I am mistaken, but when we take a look at the Rebbe's directive regarding a *bas mitzvah* by *anash* and how it should and should not be celebrated, the answer is clear (see *Rishuma Shel Shana* p. 113 where the Rebbe wrote to the administration of Beis Rivkah that it should be held only as a *mesibas Shabbos* or a *melava malka*). Sadly, we've seen some celebrations by *shluchos* for their daughters' *bas mitzvas* that raise eyebrows and have influenced *anash* as well.

It seems very "apologetic" and a way to show our communities that we are "egalitarian" — it's not just the boys that we make a party for at three-years-old. Look! We do it for the girls too.

I know it's just one small example, but it just shows how easily we can get off track and that we should avoid using our *taiyere kinderlach* in this way.

Let's make sure we keep to doing the Rebbe's *mitzvoim* in a way that makes him proud.

P.S. By the way, the Rebbe clearly expressed that he wants girls *benching licht* at younger than three-years-old. Although when the Rebbe initially launched the *neshek* campaign he did speak about three-years-old, in later years the Rebbe asked that the girls begin lighting even younger. (See first *sicha* of Purim Katan 5746, as well as the two *sichos* quoted in the back of every *Dvar Malchus*.) ■

## Chassidishe Lay Leaders

*Rabbi Yaakov M.*

Thank you for addressing the topic of the importance of teachers being on a higher level of *ruchniyus*. As a teacher I always appreciate and benefit from being reminded of my responsibility and power of influence. At this time, I would like to bring up a similar topic that I feel should be addressed because many people are not aware of its importance.

Just as the level of a teacher's enthusiasm for *Yiddishkeit* will have a far reaching effect on the life of his students, so too the *ruchniyisdike* level of an "*askan*" can have a tremendous effect on the programs that he organizes.

Many people believe that the only requirement that is necessary to be appointed to a position of "*askanus*" within a *Yiddishe* community is that one be capable and talented enough to fulfill the task of the specific position.

It seems to me that this is a very big mistake. My experience has shown that in many cases the *chassidishkeit* of the *gabbai* has a greater impact on the atmosphere of a *shul* than the *rov*. The same is true with the one in charge of arranging *farbrengens* and other community events. Whether or not an event will have the spirit of a *chassidishe farbrengen* and will bring

positive results depends very much on the organizers.

This is true even regarding "*askanus*" of issues that seemingly have nothing to do with *Yiddishkeit*. For example, organizations whose purpose is to help people learn a trade, or deal with other *gashmiyusdike* issues — here too the spirit of *Yiddishkeit* achieved depends very much on the level of *Yiddishkeit* of the organizers.

The fact that an organization has a "rabbinical board" is not enough. The board cannot control every detail of the organization, and at the end of the day the organizers have a much bigger influence than the "board."

Perhaps in a future issue you can collect sources from *Chazal*, *minhagei Yisroel* and *horaos* of the Rebbeim that discuss this issue.

Wishing you much *hatzlacha* in your holy work. ■

## The Grandparents' Role

*Sara Chana bas Rivka*

It is very refreshing and truly inspiring to see the attention our leaders and organizations have recently been giving to one of the silent challenges of our generation: that of having large families. In addition to all the positive things I've seen printed and heard spoken of late, I'd like to point something out based on something the Rebbe said at the beginning of his campaign for large families.

Towards the end of the *sicha* to the Nshei Chabad women's convention on 17 Sivan 5740 the Rebbe says (free translation by Sichos in English): "And for the grandmothers and the grandfathers as well, that they should do all that is incumbent upon them, to influence their children and grandchildren. In keeping Hashem's ways in general and most especially in this area..."

What does this mean? What is the Rebbe asking of Bubbies and Zaydies? Haven't they already done their fair share already with their own children? Isn't now the time in their lives for them to have some fun (just the *nachas* part of it)?

(One might say that the Rebbe is referring to physical/domestic/child-care type of help that mothers commonly offer their daughters after birth. But did the Rebbe really need to remind

everyone about such a common practice throughout humanity? There seems to be something more.)

It seems that the Rebbe was calling upon the grandparents to encourage and support their children's decision to have more children. Now, these younger women (and men) were hearing the call for more children directly from the Rebbe, and yet it was important to have their respective parents' help and support. How much more so in this present day and age... I think the positive role parents can play should not be underestimated.

If we wish, we can take it a step further and argue that the Rebbe's message was meant especially for our time. Thus, the Rebbe was telling the women at that time: "I know you'll listen to me and follow my directive now, but there will come a time in 30+ years from now and your children — your daughters and daughters-in-law — will be looking to YOU for leadership, guidance and support in this crucial area."

May we be *zoché* to greet Moshiach now. ■

# A Letter to My Rebbi

*A bochur*

Dear Rebbi,

Your *shiurim* are amazing. I love the way you make Rashi and Tosfos so simple and clear, and you have such a special way to communicate with everyone. There's just one thing that I wanted to tell you and I found that writing you a letter is the most respectful way.

This past Chai Elul our *yeshiva* had a very *geshmake farbrengen*. The next morning we *davened* in 770. As I reached *yishtabach* I saw you come in and put on your *tefillin*... It's hard to write this... but the *minyana* nearby wasn't

holding at *hodu* but you joined them. As I put on my *Rabeinu Tam* you were already taking off your *tallis*... I felt the *hisorerus* start crashing down. Afterwards I criticized myself for mixing in to someone else's business and removed the incident from my mind. But on the day after the *yeshiva's* Chof Cheshvan *farbrengen*, the same story happened again.

Rebbi we as a class look up to you in everything. Please don't let us down.

A Respectful Student ■

## Hechsherim

*M Greenberg*

One most important rule in *chinuch* is consistency. Not only to constantly follow the same pattern of education, but that all the partners in the child's education should be consistent with each other.

Enter a most overlooked area: *hechsherim*.

Every home has some standards of *hechsherim* they allow and others they don't. Now, not eating a certain *hechsher* comes with a sacrifice, sometimes very great, on behalf of the child. There are certain candies he can't eat and there are friends he cannot accept *nosh* from.

If the rule is consistent, in school and at home, it makes it easier, for all his role models are abiding by the same rules. However, when he sees his teacher eating something questionable,

or worse yet, he receives a prize from school with a weak *hechsher*, the child becomes confused and torn.

If only there were proper guidelines in place. Obviously, a teacher could do whatever he wants at home, but in *cheder* there should be rules; to be considerate to more stringent families.

Another point: if the schools would be able to get together on this issue, it would also alleviate confusion. It could be very difficult to explain to kids, why something is kosher for a boy and not for a girl...

As an aside, it's important to note that besides for the educational consistency aspect, it wouldn't hurt to make some *kashrus* awareness. ■

# Stop Experimenting With Our Children

*Yerachmiel ben Moshe*

In recent years, there seems to have been a reawakened interest in good practices in education. When we were growing up most parents considered education to be the art of discipline and coercion, many of today's parents understand that it also entails a gentler shaping of the child's personality and psyche.

However, lacking training in the Torah-prescribed practices of "*chinuch*," many parents and educators turn to prevalent educational methods and theories. These "new and improved" methods are implemented in schools for a new generation of children. Unfortunately, the results will only become apparent in years to come and nobody wants to look back at a path of destruction.

The proponents of these methods argue that the current system is failing, as children are discontented and falling through the cracks. "We have to do *something*! Let's give this a try." From their perspective, they are right. They have no better option than to try these new "unknown waters."

But actually, there is no need to experiment. The Torah holds the timeless approach to education.

As the times change, the Torah's approach need only be reapplied, exactly like principles of *halacha* that's applied to modern technology.

There is, however, one more point to be emphasized:

Be wary of those new methods that boast to have sources in the Torah. Sources can be creatively misunderstood to support a wide variety of practices. Someone once said in jest, "The Torah clearly instructs us to serve idols, for it says in Shema, "*va'avadtem elohim acheirim*," "and you will serve other gods"... (Contextually, of course, this very verse is recounting how the Jews will wrongly stray, *RL*).

Torah should be studied without preconceived notions. *Chinuch al Tabaras HaKodesh* should follow education models found within Torah, without trying to integrate it with other methods. When in doubt, consult with those who are familiar with our pure untainted tradition.

This is the authentic and tried way of Jewish Education. ■

## Why I Don't Teach My Daughter about Tznius

*Shaindy P.*

I don't talk to my six year old daughter about *tznius*. When her skirt goes above her knees I don't tell her that she is "not *tznius*."

My reason: There are some values that when defined and taught, lose their entire meaning.

Take for example inappropriate language. By saying that it is "forbidden" to say XYZ, we are in fact reinforcing the mindset of doing so. The message is that speaking those words is exciting, but we are not 'supposed' to say them. This is a moral

corrosion of the highest degree. I want my child to understand that normal, happy and healthy people have no desire to use unclean language.

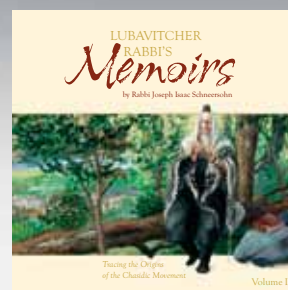
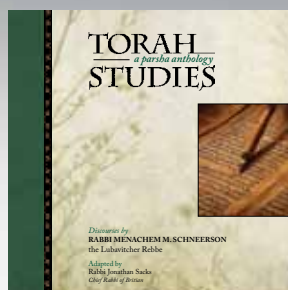
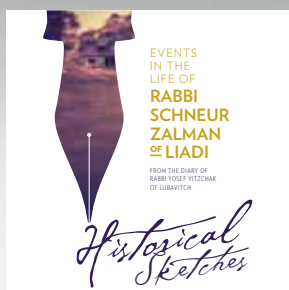
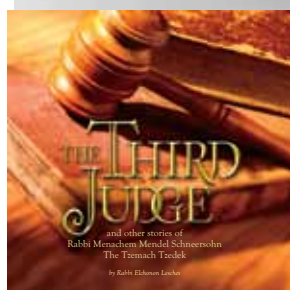
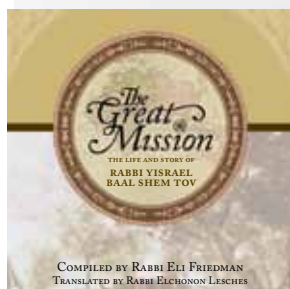
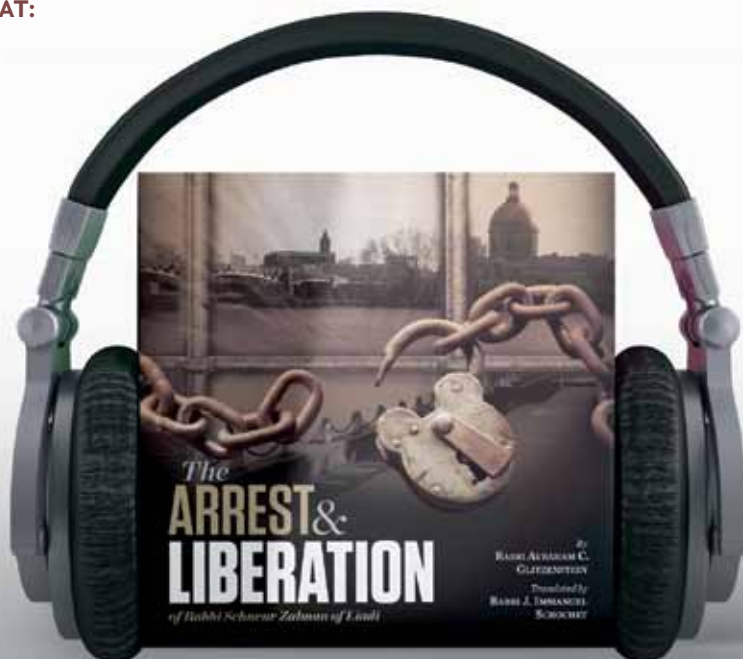
Maybe one day I will teach my daughter the "rules of *tznius*". For now, I prefer that she think of it as the normal way of dress of every self-respecting person. ■



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