

ME'OROS HA'TZADDIKIM

LIGHTS OF OUR RIGHTEOUS TZADDIKIM



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יעקב משה בן דבורה שירה

ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה

A Tzaddik, or righteous person, makes everyone else appear righteous before Hashem by advocating for them and finding their merits.

Kedushas Levi, Parshas Noach (Bereishis 7:1)

❧ **VAYECHI** ❧

❧ CHASSIDUS ON THE PARSHA ❧

A Lesson in Chinuch ~ Avoid Embarrassing Others

Sikel Es Yadav Ki Menashe HaBechor, "He switched his hand because Menashe was the firstborn."

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk in Noam Elimelech asks the apparent question. The pasuk tells us that the reason for which Yaakov Avinu switched his hands was 'because Menashe was the firstborn.' If anything, this would have been the reason for which Yaakov Avinu *should not* have switched his hands? In fact, when Yosef brought Menashe and Ephraim in front of Yaakov to be blessed, he placed Menashe on Yaakov's left so that when Yaakov faced them, Menashe would be on Yaakov's right side. As such, when he would bless them, he would place his right hand on Menashe *because* he was firstborn. However, Yaakov crossed his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and blessing him first, placing him before his older brother, Menashe. According to this, the words the pasuk should have said were 'Yaakov crossed his hands, *even though* Menashe was the Bechor,' why then did the Torah use words that imply the exact opposite of Yaakov's true intention?

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech explains that the Torah is teaching us a valuable lesson in chinuch. When we wish to instill and teach derech eretz to our children, the best method is always by example. Yaakov was instilling in Menashe and Ephraim the lesson of giving proper honor and respect to all individuals. In the Rebbe's words - the middah of "SheYinaheg Adam Kavod BeChaveiro", to act with honor and respect towards one's friend and fellow.

How did Yaakov demonstrate this? Yaakov could have taken Menashe and Ephraim and physically switched them, positioning Ephraim in Menashe's place and vice versa. Then, Ephraim would be on Yaakov's right side and he would have received the beracha with Yaakov's right hand before his brother - without requiring Yaakov Avinu to cross his hands. However, if Yaakov had done such an overt gesture, he most probably would have caused Menashe embarrassment. In order to avoid embarrassing Menashe, Yaakov crossed over his hands, in the words of the pasuk – Sikel Es Yadav – he used sechel and intellect to skillfully avoid embarrassing Menashe. He therefore repositioned his hands rather than move Ephraim and Menashe around. All this was precisely *because* Menashe was the firstborn and Yaakov's primary intent was to avoid embarrassing him!



A Lesson in Chinuch ~ We Always Have a Father

The Shinover Rav in Divrei Yechezkel (Parshas Massei) tells us a story about how the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, author of the Noam Elimelech, instilled a valuable lesson in chinuch to his son Rav Elazar.

Rav Elazar took note of how his father constantly sang the praises of Rav Pinchos Koritzer and said that anyone who would meet Rav Pinchos of Koretz would merit yiras shomayim – fear and awe of Heaven. Deciding that he too wished to merit yiras shomayim, he took his father's advice and left to spend a Shabbos by Rav Pinchos in Koretz.

On Shabbos, during the tisch, as Rav Elazar sat along with all the assembled, a sigh escaped his lips and he murmured "Oy Tatteh" (A common Yiddish expression that means - Oh Father, which refers to Hashem, our Father in Heaven.) Upon hearing Rav Elazar's sigh, Rav Pinchos responded by quoting the Gemara (Chullin 11b) "Dilma Lav Aviv Hu?!" (Perhaps He is not your father?) His clear intention was to chastise Rav Elazar, as if to say - why do you have such pride to think Hashem considers you his son. Maybe He is not your Father. How can you be sure that you are worthy of such a father-and-son relationship with Hashem?! Rav Elazar accepted the retort and remained silent.

When he returned to Lizhensk, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech asked his son, "Nu vus hust di geheret in Koretz – what have you heard and learned by Rav Pinchos in Koretz," whereupon Rav Elazar told his father about the incident at the tisch. "Well?! What did you answer?" asked the Rebbe Reb Elimelech. "Nothing," answered Rav Elazar. "You should have responded as follows," his father told him. "MiLayt Zich A Tatte – we can always borrow a Father for ourselves!" as it says in pasuk She'al Avicha, which literally means "ask your father" but can be cleverly reread as – "borrow a Father for yourself!"

Even if we deem ourselves unworthy of a father-and-son relationship with Hashem, nonetheless, we are always His children we are banim lamakom. This is what the Noam Elimelech taught his son; even if you feel unworthy, 'borrow' a Father for yourself!



הילולא

The anniversary of the *petira* of a *Tzaddik* is known as a *Hilula*, which means “A Day of Joy”.

One of the tools that *Kabbola* teaches is to connect to a *Tzaddik* (righteous person). The method to connect to a *Tzaddik* is to adopt the following ritual:

1) Learn the anniversary of his *petira* or, if this information is not available, the days of *Erev Rosh Chodesh*, *Rosh Chodesh* and the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month can be utilized for a connection.

2) Light a twenty-five-hour candle in his or her honor. There is no specific *berocha*. Some say the following: This candle is being lit in the merit of _____.

Others say that it is the custom within *Klal Yisrael* to light a *yahrzeit* candle on the day that a relative or a *Tzaddik* has passed away. The lighting has no accompanying blessing, and people would like to express themselves in a *tefilla* when lighting the candle. This is not only true on a *yahrzeit* but on every *Yom Tov* as well.

The author of the *Pele Yo'etz*, Rav Eliezer Papo (1785–1828), did in fact compose such a *tefilla*. Rav Papo was the *Rav* of the city of Selestria in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was a part of the Ottoman Empire at the time. The *tefilla* of the *Pele Yo'etz* is reproduced and translated below, as a public service.

Hebrew Tefilla for Lighting a Yahrzeit or Hilula Candle

[תפילה הנמצאת בספר אלה המגן מבעל הפלא יועץ על פרשת ויצא עמוד כ"ד]

הריני מדליק נר זה למנוחת ולעילוי נשמת אבי / אמי מורתי / הצדיק
בן/בת _____, יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שתקבל ברחמים
וברצון כל מעשה הטוב שאני עושה, בין במחשבה, בין בדיבור, בין במעשה ויהיה הכל
לזכות ולמנוחת ולעילוי לנשמות עמך ישראל, ובפרט לנפש רוח ונשמה של אבי / אמי /
צדיק _____. יהי רצון שתהינה נפשותיהם צרורות בצרור החיים.

Translation:

Behold I am lighting this lamp for the resting and uplifting of the soul of my father/my mother/the *Tzaddik* _____ the son/daughter of _____. May it be Your will before you, *Hashem*, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that all my good deeds whether in thought, speech or action be done for a merit and a resting and an elevation of the souls of your nation Yisrael. It should be especially for the soul of my father/mother/the *Tzaddik* _____. May it be Your will that their souls be bound in the bond of life.

3) Learn about the person including history, culture, writings and teachings.

4) Study some of his teaching or writings.

See more at: www.yeshshem.com/hilulah.htm



❁ GEDOLIM BE'MISASAM YOSER ❁



YAHREITS BEGINNING SHABBOS VAYECHI

http://www.chinuch.org/gedolim_yahrtzeit/Teves

Biographical information and yahrzeits compiled by Reb Manny Saltiel and www.anshe.org

✧ **14th of Teves ~ Begins Friday Night (Dec 10th)**

- ✧ **Reuven ben Yaakov Avinu;**
- ✧ **Rav Refoel Meir Penijel** (1804–1894). Born in Bulgaria, he moved with his family to *Eretz Yisrael* when his son was three years old. When Refoel Meir was fifteen, his father died. When he was seventeen, he married the daughter of Rav Osher *HaLevi*. In the early 1840s, he was chosen as one of the *shadarim* (*sheluchei de'rabbanan*) and sent to Northern Africa to collect funds for the *yishuv*. Following stints in Morocco and Tunisia, he traveled to Italy. While there, he befriended the Pope, who offered to show him the Vatican's archives. There, he saw some of the sacred vessels that Titus had stolen from the *Bais HaMikdosh*. The visit is described in his *sefer*, *Lev HaMarpei*. When he returned to *Eretz Yisrael*, he founded the *Doresh Tzion Yeshiva* in 1868 and was instrumental in helping to found the *Tiferes Yerushalayim* institutions. In 1881, he succeeded Rav Avrohom Ashkenazi as Yerushalayim's chief *Sefardic Rav*, the *Rishon LeTzion*. In addition to the *sefer* noted above, he also authored *Sheilos U'Teshuvos Leshon Marpei*, (5655/1894);
- ✧ **Rav Reuven Dov Dessler** (1863–1935), father of Rav Eliyohu Eliezer Dessler, the *Michtav Me'Eliyohu*, born in Libau, Lithuania, to Rav Yisrael Dovid and Chinke Hinde, who, along with Rav Yisrael Dovid's brother, Rav Eliezer, were great philanthropists and who helped Rav Simcha Zissel move his *Yeshiva* from Kelm to Grubin, a small town near Libau. When he was twelve, Rav Reuven Dov was sent to Rav Simcha Zissel's *Yeshiva* and stayed there for eleven years. When it closed, he moved to Kelm to continue learning with the *Alter*. In 1891, he married Henne Freidel Grodnensky, daughter of Rav Eliyohu Grodnensky, a leading *Dayan* in Vilna. Her maternal grandfather was Rav Yisrael Salanter. She gave birth to Rav Reuven Dov's only son, Rav Eliyohu Eliezer. Sadly, she was *niftar* four years after they married, and Rav Reuven Dov married Fruma Rochel Rabinowitz of Telz. A few years later, he moved to Homel, on the Okraïne-White Russia border. Although he was very successful in business, he maintained a rigid learning schedule, and took off every *Elul* and *Tishrei* to travel to Kelm to learn. In 1923, the Communists gained control of the area, and Rav Reuven Dov lost all of his assets. His final years were trying. In 1931, he moved into his son's home in London and immersed himself in *Torah* study, (5696/1935);
- ✧ **Rav Alter Elozor Menachem** of Lelov (1935–2001). Born to the Admor of Lelov, Rav Moshe Mordechai, he learned with the *Chazon Ish* in Bnei Brak as a youth. In 1958, he married the daughter of Rav Shimon Aharon HersHKowitz, the *Ga'avad* of Slavita. In 1965, he founded his *Bais Medrash* on Rabbi Akiva Street in Bnei Brak. After the *petira* of his mother in 1978, he established the *Or Menachem* network of *kollelim*. He also founded *Kehal Ateres Moshe* of the Lelover *Chassidim* of the United States, now headed by Rav Alter Elozor Menachem's son, Rav Dovid Tzvi Shlomo, (5762/2001);
- ✧ **Rav Leib Bakst**, studied in Mir from the age of thirteen under Rav Eliezer Finkel and Rav Yeruchom Levovitz; he also studied with the Brisker *Rav* and Rav Baruch Ber Leibovitz in Kaminetz. He was involved in the miraculous escape of the Mir *Yeshiva* to Kobe, Japan, and Shanghai, China, and eventually came to Detroit. There, he became the dean of the *Yeshiva Bais Yehuda* Rabbinical College. In 1985, he founded the *Yeshiva Gedola Ateres Mordechai* as an independent high school, (5676–5765/1915–2004).

✧ **15th of Teves ~ Begins Motzai Shabbos (Dec 11th)**

- ✧ The *Amora*, **Mashrisha bar Pekud**, of Bovel;
- ✧ **Rav Refoel** of Bershad, a *talmid* of Rav Pinchas of Koritz, (5588/1827);
- ✧ **Rav Chaim Mordechai Rosenbaum** of Nadvorna (1904–1977). Born to Rav Issomor of

Nadvorna, he learned with his father in his youth, and married a first cousin at the age of nineteen, then learned full-time, supported by his father-in-law. He took a position as *Rav* of Seret in 1928. In 1941, Romania allied itself with Germany. Of the 420,000 Jews of Romania, 160,000 were murdered by German and Romanian soldiers, and another 150,000 were shipped by cattle cars to Transnistria in the Ukraine; ten thousand died on the trip and another eighty thousand died in the camps there. In 1942, Rav Chaim Mordechai and his family arrived in the Djurin camp in Transnistria. They survived and arrived in Yerushalayim on *Sukkos* in 1948, but moved to Tel Aviv because of the war. He established *Yeshivas Ma'amar Moredechai* in Yaffo and moved his *Yeshiva* to Bnei Brak in 1961. He was succeeded by his only son, (5738/1977).

✧ **16th of Teves ~ Begins Sunday Night (Dec 12th)**

- ✧ **Rav Chaim Kreiswirth**, *Rav* and *Av Bais Din* of Antwerp and son-in-law of Rav Avrohom Grodzinski. Rav Chaim was well known to have memorized *Talmud Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*, as well as *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, (5681–5762/1920–2001).

✧ **17th of Teves ~ Begins Monday Night (Dec 13th)**

- ✧ **Rav Yaakov Krantz**, *Dubno Maggid* (1741–1804). Born in a province of Vilna, Yaakov *ben Ze'ev* (Wolf) Krantz showed exceptional homiletical and kabbalistic talents at an early age, and by the age of twenty had become the *darshan* of his city. From there he began preaching throughout the cities around Lublin in Poland, finally settling in Dubnow. His reputation as a *Maggid* spread, bringing him in contact with the great *Rabbonim* of the period, including the Vilna *Gaon*. The majority of his works were in homiletics, using stories and parables to transmit deeper ethical and moral teachings, (5565/1804);
- ✧ **Rav Ephraim Fishel Shapira** of Strikov (1743–1822). A *talmid* of the *Maggid* of Mezritch, the Rebbe Elimelech and the *Chozeh* of Lublin, he was called the *Ola Temima*, (5583/1822);
- ✧ **Rav Aryeh Leibush Lipschitz** of Vishnitza, the *Aryeh d'Bei Ilai*, (5610/1849);
- ✧ **Rav Pinchas Epstein**, *Av Bais Din* of Yerushalayim (1887–1969). Born in Griva, Lithuania, his primary teacher was Rav Zalman Sender Kahana Shapiro in Bialystok. In 1904, he settled in *Eretz Yisrael* with his father and began studying at *Yeshiva Toras Chaim* in the Old City of Yerushalayim. Rav Epstein was one of the founders and early leaders of the *Eida HaChareidis*, a group that split from the established Yerushalayim community in 1919 in response to the growing influence of the Zionists on the existing religious council. In 1949, he was appointed to head the *Eida HaChareidis*, (5730/1969);
- ✧ **Rav Suleiman (Salman) Mutzafi** of Yerushalayim (1900–1974). Born in Baghdad, his father, Rav Tzion Meir, descended from an illustrious family of *Torah* scholars who first arrived in Baghdad during the Spanish expulsion, (5735/1974).

✧ **18th of Teves ~ Begins Tuesday Night (Dec 14th)**

- ✧ **Rav Huna bar Mar Zutra**, *Reish Galusa* killed *al kiddush Hashem*, (4231/470);
- ✧ **Rav Tzvi Elimelech Shapira** of Dinow (1783–1841), born to Rav Pesach and his wife, the niece of Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk. A *talmid* of the *Chozeh* of Lublin, Tzvi Elimelech was told by the *Chozeh* that he was from *Shevet Yissochor*, which explained the *talmid's* special feelings toward *Chanuka*, as it is known that the *Sanhedrin* of the *Chashmono'im* had many members from *Shevet Yissochor*. This is the source of the name of his *sefer*, *Bnei Yissoschor* [*Hamodia* 2005 says 1850], (5602/1841);
- ✧ **Rav Moshe** of Korestchov. Born to the Chernobyler *Maggid*, Rav Mordechai, Rav Moshe was the grandson of the *Me'or Einayim* of Chernobyl on his father's side and Rav Aharon *HaGodol* of Karlin on his mother's side. His brother was Rav Yochanon of Rachmastrivka.

A few years after his father's *petira*, he acceded to the urging of the *Chassidim* and set up his court in Korestchov. He was succeeded by his son, Rav Mordechai, (5627/1866);

- * **Rav Chaim Shmuel Horowitz** of Chentchin, (5676/1915);
- * **Rav Moshe Chalfon** of Djerba, Tunisia, *mechaber* of *Sho'el Venishal* and *Bris Kehuna*, (5635–5711/1874– 1950);
- * **Rav Mendel Geffner**, initiator of mass *Chol Hamo'ed Bircas Kohanim*, (5749/1988);
- * **Rav Moshe Heller** of Yerushalayim, only son of Rav Refoel Tzvi Mechel Heller, (5763/2002);
- * **Rav Aryeh Leibish Halberstam**, the Zhmigrader *Rebbe* (1912–2007). Two of his sons succeeded him: the Sanz-Zhmigrader *Rebbe* of Boro Park and the Sanz-Zhmigrader *Rebbe* of Europe, (5768/2007).

* **19th of Teves ~ Begins Wednesday Night (Dec 15th)**

- * **Rav Arye Leib HaKohen Heller**, *mechaber* of *Ketzos HaChoshen*, *Avnei Miluim* and *Shev Shmaatsa*, (5574/1813);
- * **Rav Avrohom Shmuel Binyomin Sofer**, the *Kesav Sofer* (1815–1872). Born and died in Pressburg, Hungary, oldest son of the *Chasam Sofer* and grandson of Rav Akiva Eiger through his mother, Rebbetzin Sorel. After his father's *petira* in 1839, the *Ksav Sofer* succeeded him as *Rav* and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pressburg, at the unusually young age of twenty-four. He served Pressburg for thirty-three years, the exact number of years his father had served before him, (5633/1872);
- * **Rav Menachem Mendel Zaks**, son-in-law of the *Chofetz Chaim*, (5735/1974).

* **20th of Teves ~ Begins Thursday Night (Dec 16th)**

- * **Rav Moshe ben Maimon**, the *Rambam* (1135–1204). Born at Cordova, Spain, the *Rambam* received his rabbinical instruction from his father, Maimon. Moshe was only thirteen years old when Cordova fell into the hands of the fanatical Almohades, and Rav Maimon and the other Jews were compelled to choose between Islam and exile. Rav Maimon and his family chose the latter course, and for twelve years led a nomadic life, wandering throughout Spain. In 1160 they settled in Fez, Morocco. In 1165 they went to Acco, to Yerushalayim, and then to Fostat (Cairo), where they settled. After the *petira* of Maimon, Moshe's brother Dovid supported the family by trading in precious stones. Dovid perished at sea, and with him was lost not only his own fortune, but large sums that had been entrusted to him by other traders. These events affected *Rambam's* health, and he went through a long sickness. After several years of practice, the *Rambam's* authority in medical matters was firmly established, and he was appointed private physician to Saladin's vizier, who recommended him to the royal family. Between the years 1158 and 1190 *Rambam* produced a commentary on the *Mishna*, the *Mishne Torah* and the philosophical work *Moreh Nevuchim*, (4965/1204);
- * **Rav Yaakov Abuchatzaira**, grandson of the founder of the Abuchatzaira family, Rav Shmuel (Elbaz), and son of Rav Masoud, who was *Rav* of Tafelalet (Tafilalt), Morocco. He took his father's position upon the latter's *petira* and built the *Yeshiva* there, which produced thousands of students. He wrote many *seforim* on all aspects of *Torah*, including *Abir Yaakov*. His grandson is Rav Yisrael, the *Baba Sali*, and his great-grandson is Rav Meir Abuchatzaira. In 1880, he attempted to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, but was *niftar* in Damanhur, Egypt, where he is buried, (5641/1880);
- * **Rav Simcha Yissochor Dov** of Chechenov, (5675/1914);
- * **Rav Yisrael Reich** of Budapest, (5694/1933);

- * **Rav Refoel Eliyohu Eliezer Mishkovski** (1917–1981), *Rav* of the town of Rechasim and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshiva Knesses Chizkiyohu* in *Kfar Chassidim*, both in northern *Eretz Yisrael*. *Mechaber* of *Mishnas Eliyohu*, (5742/1981);
- * **Rav Elimelech (Meilich) Izak** (1943–2006). He was named after his mother's ancestor, the *Noam Elimelech*. He was born in *Yerushalayim*, learned at the *Chayei Olam Yeshiva*, and became a leading *Chassid* of *Karlin-Stolin*. In his later years, he was appointed director of the *Karlin Talmud Torah* and *Yeshiva* and *gabbai* of the *Bais Medrash*, (5767/2006).



❁ HILLULA DE'TZADDIKA ❁

WHAT'S BEHIND YAHRZEIT MEANINGS & CUSTOMS

The *Maharil*, in *Hilchos Taanis*, teaches us that the reason why there is a custom to visit the *Bais hachaim* on a fast is because “this place is the resting place of the *Tzaddikim* and is therefore sanctified, pure and holy and our tefillos are more readily heard, accepted and answered when *davened* on holy ground. When you *daven* there, do not make requests of the dead who are buried there; rather ask *Hashem* to answer you mercifully in their merit. Then circle around the graves and donate charity before reciting tefillos.”

בית הקברות הוא מקום מנוחת הצדיקים ומתוך כך הוא מקום קדוש וטהור התפילה נתקבלה שם יותר, אך אל ישים מגמתו נגד המתים, אך יבקש מהשי"ת שיתן עליו רחמים בזכות הצדיקים שוכני עפר, ויקיף הקברות, ויתן צדקה קודם שיאמר התחינות.

The *Zohar* in *VaYeira* page 71 teaches us that if we suffer any calamity or tragedy we have the custom to go and daven at the kevorim of *Tzaddikim*. The reason for this is that we approach them with fasting, remorse and repentance, and we have in mind that the departed souls ask and *daven* for us before *Hashem* on High, as opposed to the prohibition against speaking to the dead which is an idolatrous practice where the idol worshippers sought out the impure dead souls and bodies using sorcery and witchcraft. Instead, beseech our *Tzaddikim* who, in *gan eden*, are truly alive, and ask through *tefilla* and fasting and *teshuva* alone.



❁ GEDOLIM BE'MASAYHEM ❁

STORIES & ANECDOTES

Rav Alter Elozor Menachem ben Moshe Mordechai Biderman of Lelov,

14th of Teves

100 Percent Character

The *Rebbe* used to tell over that people have a saying regarding *shidduchim* – that finding the right match means to seek three things: *keren tov* (a good person), *kesef rav* (wealth) and *yichus*

(good family pedigree). He explained that actually the percentage of how much importance to attach to each of these three is hinted at by the first letter of each one: *keren tov* begins with *kuf*, whose *gematria* is 100, implying that your search for a

chosson with a good character is 100 percent important! *Kesef*, on the other hand, only requires 20 percent, since it is spelled with a *kaf*, which has a *gematria* of

twenty. *Yichus*, which begins with a *yud*, is only 10 percent important! (*Ne'imos HaChaim* p. 77)



Rav Refoel of Bershad, 15th of Teves

Talmid of Rav Pinchas Koritzer

Too Much Kovod

Once, Rav Refoel visited Berditchev, where he was received with great honor and much fanfare. Afterward, he vanished. A search party looked for him and found him in the marketplace, encircled by a throng of lowly simpletons and merchants who were all laughing at the “*batlan*”, the good-for-nothing weirdo dressed oddly with a handkerchief over his head.

When they questioned his disappearance and odd behavior, Rav Refoel explained that he was distressed by the outpouring of honor; they had simply inflated his ego with too much *kovod*, and so he had tied his handkerchief over his head and entered a fabric store, asking to buy some snuff. The owner saw a simpleton and a stranger who was certainly acting oddly, and he poked fun at him, taking him from store to store in search of the fictitious snuff, while they all had a hearty laugh. “In this way, they belittled and mocked me,” explained Rav Refoel, “and I was spared all the honor!”

(*Imrei Pinchas* II p199)



Anger Control

Whenever an opportunity presented itself, the *Imrei Chaim* of Vizhnitz would retell this story about Rav Refoel of Bershad’s amazing control over his *middos* and character. For example, once after his *tisch* – conducting the *Chassidic Shabbos* banquet where the *Rebbe* presides over his table, sharing songs, stories and words of *Torah* at his meal with his devoted *Chassidim*, which lasted some seven hours,

the *Imrei Chaim*, exhausted and weak, walked home in the cold and rain only to discover that the *gabbai* – who had the keys – was nowhere to be found! While waiting an infuriatingly long while for him to show up, the *Imrei Chaim* related this story:

Rav Refoel of Bershad had a burning desire for many years to acquire pure wool from the Holy Land to fashion a *tallis kotton* and *tzitzis* to wear in a *mehadrin*, resplendent and glorified manner befitting such a precious *mitzva*.

After great effort he finally succeeded, and one day he acquired pure, white wool from *Eretz Yisrael*! His joy knew no bounds. Elated, he passed the wool on to one of his *Chassidim* and asked him to take extra special care of the wool and to fashion with it a *tallis kotton* and *tzitzis*. The *Chassid*, who realized the importance of this task and the great lengths the *Rebbe* had gone to in order to procure this wool, approached the task with awe and love. However, his attempt failed and in his haste to tailor the garment he accidentally folded it over twice, so that when he cut the hole in the middle of the *tallis kotton* to create the opening where the head is placed through, he ended up with two holes instead of one! When he unfolded the garment and held the *tallis kotton* open, instead of one opening for the head, there were now two!

With great fear and trepidation he brought the ruined garment before his expectant *Rebbe*. Rav Refoel was waiting on tenterhooks with excitement, but when he noticed the sad *Chassid* and his downfallen countenance he beckoned him

near.

“What is it? What is wrong?”

The *Chassid* was so ashamed that he became dumbstruck and silently, with his head down, he presented the ruined garment before the *Rebbe*, waiting for the *Rebbe*’s anger and disappointment to break over him.

What he heard instead was the smiling Rav Refoel’s delighted voice proclaiming, “Why, of course this garment needed two holes! Yes, yes, exactly, one

hole just as any *tallis kotton* has for the head, and another hole to teach Refoel to suppress and contain his emotions and not be angry.”

When he concluded the tale, the *Imrei Chaim* said with great emotion, “*Kodesh Kodoshim!* Holy of Holies! From where can we learn such lofty holy ways and manners of behavior? This story shakes me up and excites me much, much more than any miraculous tales you could tell me about the *Tzaddik!*”



Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, 16th of Teves

Av Bais Din, Antwerp

Bending and Stretching Ourselves for Torah

Rav Chaim Kreiswirth was well known to dance on *Simchas Torah* with great *hislahavus*, aflame with excitement and joy! He was careful not to lose time from learning and often danced with an open *Gemora*, a sight that left its impressions on many.

He once observed a father holding the *Sefer Torah* and lowering it to allow his little boy to kiss the holy scroll. Rav Kreiswirth was not in favor of this practice, and lovingly admonished the father,

explaining his reasons for opposing the father’s well-intentioned, but in his opinion, misguided actions. “When you bend down and lower the *Torah* to your son, you’re teaching him that the *Torah* can be lowered or bent down to suit his needs, Heaven forbid. Instead, he needs to stretch himself or be lifted to kiss the holy scroll, so that he learns to accommodate and adjust himself to the *Torah* and not the other way around,” a profound lesson that became forever inscribed on the father’s heart. (*Mayim Chaim* p. 148)



Rav Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dynow, 18th of Teves

Mechaber of Bnei Yissoschor

Once, when Rav Tzvi Elimelech was traveling to visit his *Rebbe*, the *Chozeh* of Lublin, he was pondering the following question in his mind on the way: I wonder why my soul is so inspired and aflame every *Chanuka*. I myself do not descend from a family of *Kohanim*, so it cannot be that I am descended from the *Chashmono'im*. Perhaps I should ask my *Rebbe* when I arrive in Lublin.”

In fact, when Rav Tzvi Elimelech arrived in Lublin, even before he opened his mouth to ask, the *Chozeh* said, “You are descended from *Shevet Yissoschor* and the reason you feel such sanctity that excites you on *Chanuka* is that you were previously a member of the *Bais Din* of Chashmonai.” This is the reason why Rav Tzvi Elimelech named his *sefer* on the *Moadim* “*Bnei Yissoschor*.” (*Bais Shlomo*, p. 1 footnote 1)

Rav Arye Leib Heller, 19th of Teves

Mechaber of Ketzos HaChoshen

It is said in the name of the *Divrei Chaim* of Sanz that the *Ketzos HaChoshen*'s popularity needs explaining, since many other *Geonim* who were greater in *lomdus* and *Torah* did not enjoy such acclaim. The *Divrei Chaim* explained that Rav Heller studied *Torah* with great *Yiras Shomayim*; he would closet himself in a special private room and do *teshuva*, crying and asking that he not be counted among those about whom *Hashem* says, "What have you to do with My laws?" (*Avodas HaLeviim* on *Masechta Shavuot*, Introduction)



Rav Chaim Shmuel Lopian (son of Rav Eliyahu Lopian and author of *Ravcha Shmaateta* on the *Ketzos*'s famed *Shev Shmaateta*) related the following regarding the *Ketzos*.

Every day before beginning to learn, the *Ketzos* would reflect upon his actions and would say, "I am unworthy to learn *Torah* since the *passuk* prohibits a wicked person from learning *Torah*." He would then accept upon himself that from then on he would serve *Hashem* properly and only then begin to learn *Torah*.

This scene would repeat itself every single day!



Rav Yaakov Abuchatzaira, 20th of Teves

The Abir Yaakov

Rav Dovid Chai Abuchatzaira of Nahariya told the following story about his illustrious forebear, the *Abir Yaakov*:

There was once a group of *gabbo'im* who were the *tzedoka* collectors in Tefilalat, Morocco. They passed by the house of a certain *ba'al habayis* and heard him counting his money. The sound of the coins as they jingled when counted was well known; it was even well known how to differentiate between gold coins and silver ones. The gold coins were heavier and made almost no sound when counted whereas the silver ones were much louder when they clanged. This gave birth to the well-known saying: speech is silver and silence golden!

This group decided to wait patiently outside and count in tandem with the householder, hoping to find out exactly how much money he had. Then he would be unable to deny his wealth; even if he was

stingy and tightfisted they would be able to demand a just donation for charity. The *tzedoka* collectors "heard the coins" and determined by their sound that they were golden. Furthermore, they counted out five thousand gold coins jingle one after the other – altogether a princely sum. And so they entered smiling smugly and demanded a donation of no less than five thousand gold coins!

The poor householder was baffled and embarrassed, and earnestly denied that he had so much money. The *gabbo'im* did not accept his words and refused to back down. The matter came before the *Rav*, the *Abir Yaakov*, for judgment. The poor householder cried and pleaded with Rav Abuchatzaira that he did not own so much money and there was some kind of error.

The *Rav* listened and said, "Your words ring true, that you do not have five

thousand gold coins – and if so, I give my *berocha* that you will!!!”

That day the poor blacksmith, for that was our *baal habayis*’s job, took the five thousand horseshoes that he had been counting (that was the clanging sound the *gabbo'im* had mistaken for gold coins!) to sell to the authorities of the French military, who had commissioned them. Except that a miracle occurred: the official inspector stamped the work order and told

the astonished blacksmith to go to the cashier to use the document to collect his pay – one gold coin per horseshoe. On the work order, instead of five thousand horseshoes for five thousand gold coins, was written fifty thousand! Immediately, the blacksmith collected his moneybags, hung them on his horse and made his way to the *Tzaddik*, the *Abir Yaakov*, to give the *tzedoka*!!!

Zechuso yogen oleinu.



לזכר נשמת אמנו החשובה, נפש יקרה ועדינה
אשה יראת ה' ובעלת מדות טובות
מרת זיסל ז"ל
בת הרה"ה מו"ה מאיר זאב הכהן כ"ץ ע"ה הי"ד מ
עיר נירעדהאז יע"א
ונקדת הרה"ק רבי אהרן צבי טערקלטיוב זי"ע מבריד
אשת הרה"ח מו"ה אברהם חיים ע"ה גאלדענבערג

She was a Holocaust survivor who never let that period of time define her life. Although she lost most of her family - she claimed that *Hashem* gave her an amazing life. She had a unique knack of making everyone who encountered her feel like they were the most important loved person. Her inimitable smile never left her face.

She transmitted a strong value system stressing *Emunas Hashem* and *Tzaddikim*. Her love for stories of *tzaddikim* gave her *chiyus* and she conveyed that *chizuk* to anyone who met her. In her eighty-nine years of life, there wasn't one person who had an untoward word or adverse feelings about her. She loved her family deeply and immensely. May *Hashem* console her family and may she be a constant *melitza yeshura*, אמן.

(מתוך אמונה טהורה) בדרך המסורה
(והתנהגה כאשה כשרה) לכל משפחתה,
היא הודה היא הדרה - נקיה וטהורה
היוצר וצר צורה (וקיבלה הגזירה)
נפטרה בש"ט בת תשעים שנה
ביום כ"ד לחודש כסלו (ערב חנוכה)
שנת תשע"ח לפ"ק
תמליץ טוב בעד משפחתה היקרה
ותקים לתחיה לקץ הימין מהרה
ת"נ צ"ב'ה'

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Hilula

14 - Rabbi Rafael Meir Panizhel,
author of 'Lev Marpeh'

15 - Rabbi Chaim Mordechai
Rosenbaum, Admor of Nadvorna

16 - Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth

17 - Rabbi Salman Mutzefi

18 - Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira,
author of 'Bnei Yissachar'

19 - Rabbi Avraham Shmuel
Binyomin Sofer, the 'Ksav Sofer'

20 - Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon,
the Rambam



Monotony in Avodat Hashem is Detrimental

"Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days" (Bereishit 49:1)

The Gemara tells us (Pesachim 56a): "Ya'akov wished to reveal the end of days to his children but the Shechina left him. He said perhaps, G-d forbid, there is some blemish among my children... His children recited 'Hear O Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem, the One and Only'. Just as in your heart there is only One, so too in our hearts there is only One. At that moment Ya'akov Avinu called out, 'Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity'."

This Gemara is most puzzling. How could it be that Ya'akov Avinu a"h suspected that there might be some blemish among the holy Shevatim? Was not the Name of G-d engraved on them, as it says (Tehillim 122:4), "The tribes of G-d, a testimony for Israel". How could he suspect one of them of not being wholly committed? Certainly, Ya'akov knew his children and was aware of their greatness and prominence. So why did the holy Shevatim need to prove their allegiance by reciting the Shema, which is a declaration of acceptance of the yoke of heavenly sovereignty?

Chazal also tell us that when Ya'akov met up with Yosef, he did not fall on his neck and did not kiss him. The reason for this was because at that moment he recited the Shema. We need to understand why Ya'akov chose to recite the Shema just at that moment. Was it because this moment happened to be the exact time when the Shema must be recited?

To answer these questions, we have to understand what kind of blemish Ya'akov suspected might be present, chalila, in his children. The Mishna tells us (Succah 29b): "A dry lulav is unfit". The Torah commands us to take a green, fresh lulav. Once the lulav dries up, it is no longer called a lulav but a piece of wood. Within this commandment lies an important allusion to the way in which we must serve Hashem. A person may not fulfil the mitzvot blandly, without vitality and enthusiasm, for this disqualifies his Avodat Hashem. A person may pray three times a day and even study Torah, but he is doing it out of habit, without zest and fervour. He is missing a passionate excitement in his avodat Hashem. His lips utter words of prayer and Torah but it is not an expression of his heart.

It is possible that this was Ya'akov's concern. Of course, he knew clearly that all of his children were faithful and pure, "seed that Hashem has blessed", but he thought that if the Shechina suddenly departed from him, maybe it was due to a lack of 'freshness' in their mitzvah performance. Maybe one of the Shevatim were fulfilling the mitzvot without feeling inspired and motivated, which would disqualify their Avodat Hashem. This is why the Shevatim immediately recited

the Shema. They wished to prove their allegiance so they told Ya'akov that he should know that just like in his heart there is only One, and he accepts the yoke of Heaven with enthusiasm and with a holy awe, so too, in their hearts there is also only One. They too accept the yoke of Heaven with enthusiasm and they perform their avodat Hashem with a fiery holiness. When Ya'akov heard this, he rejoiced greatly and thanked Hashem by saying, "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity".

To what can this be compared? To a tall, sturdy tree that has started to wilt inside. Although externally it still looks beautiful and blooming, but since it has started withering inside it does not stand a chance. It certainly doesn't possess the strength to stand firm against even the slightest wind. Ya'akov Avinu a"h was concerned about this since his children were now living in Mitzrayim. If they fulfil Hashem's will without vitality and their Avodat Hashem is bland, the impure winds that blow in that land will have the power to uproot them completely from their pure roots and distance them from the correct path.

Now we can understand why, when Ya'akov went down to Mitzrayim and met his son Yosef, he recited the Shema. Ya'akov Avinu a"h was also concerned about his own Avodat Hashem. He thought to himself, if until now he was a holy and spiritual person living in the Holy Land, filled with sparks of holy fire that motivated him to fulfil Hashem's will, now that he is going to Mitzrayim, the power of this impure place can cool off his Avodat Hashem and have a negative influence on him, chalila. He was worried that he might lose his enthusiasm, his Avodat Hashem may become dry and without feeling. Therefore, he immediately accepted the yoke of Heaven upon himself and with this act he designated Hashem's Name to inspire his soul and strengthen his heart. Specifically now, when going to live among the nations of the world, he required additional protection and additional spiritual reinforcement.

How can we distance ourselves from this inappropriate 'dryness'? The answer is: Only through consistent Torah study. One who merits studying Torah regularly every day, besides the enormous reward of studying Torah, also acquires the merit of being able to arouse his soul to fulfil Hashem's commandments with enthusiasm, passion and alacrity.

May Hashem give us the merit of removing all impurities from our hearts. Both the impurity of blandness in our Avodat Hashem, and the impurity of discord. May we fulfil Hashem's will with a fiery enthusiasm, together with the freshness of the life-giving dew, the holy Torah, and with complete unity between man and his friend. Amen v'Amen.



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

The Power of the Tongue

About ten years ago, on Erev Shabbat Parshat Vayechi (5770) my mother a"h baked a special cake for Shabbat, in our honor. After the Friday night meal, this cake was brought to the table.

I was the only one who had already tasted a small amount when my daughter tchy' ran to the table in a panic and informed us that the cake was milky!

I was terribly distressed. It is hard to describe the aggravation that I felt at that moment.

Of course, I immediately tried to vomit what I had ingested. I also searched my soul and started examining all my deeds. I wondered why I had come to commit this sin, especially now, after a week that I had spent in Eretz Yisrael giving many Torah lectures and devoting myself to public matters. Why had I stumbled with this serious prohibition of eating milk together with meat?!

Suddenly I remembered that a few days ago, I had unintentionally stumbled with my tongue. While talking to my mother a"h about a certain matter, she felt offended by something that I had said, r"l, since she did not understand me correctly. Later on, she told me that for three days she had been distressed about it and had even shed tears. In truth, I certainly did not intend to hurt her with my words or cause her any suffering, chalila. It was simply a case of some misunderstanding. Nevertheless, Hashem was punishing me for the insult that she felt and the same mouth that unintentionally insulted her and offended her honor, also stumbled unintentionally with the sin of forbidden foods.

I know that I will never forget this day; it is deeply engraved in my heart. Certainly not by chance did I, David Pinto, who is almost sixty years old, transgress such a serious prohibition of eating milk and meat, even unintentionally...

The Haftarah

"Kind David's days grew near to die" (Melachim I, 2)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftarah speaks about the death of David Hamelech a"h, and his final instructions to his son Shlomo. The Parsha speaks about Ya'akov Avinu's death and his testament to his son Yosef.

Guard Your Tongue

Investigate the Matter

One may not accept lashon hara even if the speaker announces the lashon hara in public. One may not take this fact as a proof that the matter must be true. However, the ones who hear the lashon hara may be suspicious and investigate the matter, and if they find out that it is true, they should reprove the one who was spoken about for his misdeed.



Words of our Sages

Tranquility Versus Achievement

"He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer" (Bereishit 49:15)

Switzerland is famous throughout the world for its breathtaking scenery. With its snowy Alps that add to its imposing beauty, we admire Switzerland for the enchanted tranquility which saturates its expanses, for the calm and serenity which envelops its residents. It is a country which sees little poverty and its residents generally enjoy a high standard of living, coupled with much wealth. From a financial viewpoint, the country is stable and everything appears promising and impressive.

Poland and Lithuania are two backward countries whose residents live in poverty. The standard of life is low, its scenery is nothing remarkable, and progression and technology were slow to make their impression. Their financial situation is considerably lacking, and things appear depressing and despondent.

Yet we are faced with the unlikely outcome! Switzerland, with all the peace, wealth and tranquility that its residents enjoy, has not benefitted the world proportionately with impressive achievements. The number of famous scientists or artists and its scientific and technological advancement for the benefit of the world at large is not in ratio to its serene state of affairs. In which way Switzerland has profited the world beyond its exquisite, scenic pictures adorning living rooms and hotel lobbies has to be thought about.

However, strangely some nearby countries, such as Poland, Lithuania and Hungary are considered backward countries. When Berlin was already enjoying electric street lights and modern modes of transport, Warsaw, Vilna and Lodz, lacking the infrastructure for electricity, were still enveloped by darkness at night. Yet these countries produced the greatest merchants in the world, and l'havdil, the greatest Torah scholars. A partial illustration is Vilna that produced Torah luminaries such as the Vilna Gaon and his talmid, Rabbi Chaim (of Volozhin), Poland that was

home to the Rema, the Maharsha and the Maharshal, and Hungary where the Chatam Sofer and Rabbi Akiva Eiger grew up. The list goes on but what is significant is that they all grew up in countries that lacked basic infrastructure, lived in abject poverty and endured the pressure of day-to-day survival.

How do we understand this phenomenon?

The answer can be found in this week's Parsha. As part of Ya'akov's blessings to his sons, he blesses Yissachar with the words "He saw tranquility that it was good...yet he bent his shoulder to bear". There is a famous question: Don't these words contradict each other? If he saw how good tranquility was, why did he bend his shoulder to bear? One who appreciates the advantage of tranquility, immediately books a weekend in a luxury hotel. Yet concerning Yissachar it says that after seeing the benefit of tranquility, he decided to bend his shoulder to bear?

The Mashgiach of Mir, Rabbi Yerucham, explains a great foundation in life that transforms our entire perception of the much beloved concept, 'tranquility'. For the nations of the world, tranquility is, as we mentioned, synonymous with a dream vacation in a luxury hotel, or a situation where a person is unhindered by the burden of livelihood or employment and he is free to do as he pleases, without being encumbered by any obligations or demands.

But the Torah outlook on tranquility is completely different. True tranquility is when a person carries a burden: the responsibility of restrictions and times or obligations of demanding tasks with which one is occupied from morning to night. This is when a person's soul feels that it is doing what it is supposed to be doing. All these obligations ensure that we are filled with vitality and eliminates any feelings of a depressing emptiness. This kind of person is relaxed and at ease, his soul is at peace and he personifies tranquility.

True tranquility, the Mashgiach R' Yerucham zt"l explains, is accustoming oneself to hard work and carrying responsibility, for this fortifies the body and soul and enables it to stand strong against the regular winds of change. This is called tranquility! Life is full of surprises and one who feels capable of withstanding any changes in life, feels truly at peace. ('Shteigen')



Pearls of the Parsha

The Indictment of Am Yisrael is Undesirable

"Ya'akov lived" (Bereishit 47:28)

Many explanations have been offered to try and clarify the meaning of the Rashi that tells us: "He wished to reveal the end of days but the Shechina departed from him".

Rabbi Bunim of Pashischa zt"l offers his own unique interpretation: Ya'akov wished to reveal how the generation will appear at the time of 'the end of days'. He wanted to tell his children about the chutzpah and the ignorance that will prevail when the Moshiach arrives, but the Shechina departed from him. Why was he prevented from revealing this information?

Because Heaven did not want him to talk negatively about Am Yisrael, chalila.

Who is Called a Son of the Creator?

"So he called for his son, for Yosef" (Bereishit 47:29)

Seemingly, the verse should say 'for his son Yosef'?

The point is, the Noam Elimelech zt"l explains, that fulfilling the Torah and not transgressing its commandments, qualifies a person for the title of 'eved', a servant. A servant is one who does not transgress his master's command.

But to be considered Hashem's 'son', one must add precautions and restrictions, increasing one's efforts to the best of one's pure reasoning, while striving to climb from level to level.

This is the meaning of "He called for his son". If you wish to know who is considered a 'son', the answer is 'for Yosef', (lit. meaning to add) one who continually adds precautions and restrictions in his Avodat Hakodesh.

In the Merit of Our Forefathers

"O G-d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked" (Bereishit 48:15)

The holy Ohr Hachaim stresses that Ya'akov Avinu first asks in the merit of his fathers and only after that in his own merit. From this verse, the Leaders of the Great Assembly derived the correct order of the blessings of the Shemone Esrei prayer: One must first awaken the merit of our forefathers, the holy avot, and only after that to ask for mercy and compassion.

Ya'akov Avinu mentioned his own merit using the phrase "G-d who shepherds me", saying that in front of Hashem he feels like a sheep in front of its shepherd, prepared to go to any place that Hashem will lead him.

Yosef Continually Remembers the Day of Death

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am about to die'" (Bereishit 50:24)

It seems strange that Yosef phrased his sentence in the present tense, **בנא הנה**, lit. I am dying, and did not say "I am going to die", using the future tense?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger zt"l answered that Yosef used this expression to let his brothers know that he doesn't hold a grudge against them or feel any jealousy.

Chazal have advised us (Berachot 5a) how to handle the yetzer hara at all stages: "If a person is victorious, all is well and good, but if not, he should study Torah. If (now) he is victorious, all is well and good; if not he should remind himself of the day of death."

The way to uproot pride from a person's heart is by remembering the day of death.

This is why Yosef said to his brothers, "I am about to die", using the present tense. He was implying that he continually remembers the day of death and this is how he acquired the attribute of submission.

Chazal also say (Shabbat 152b), that if a person does not suffer from jealousy, his bones do not rot (after his death). According to this one can understand the continuation of Yosef's words: "Then you must bring my bones up out of here", meaning even if you leave Mitzrayim after an extended period, you will still be able to take up my bones for they will not rot.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



What Tzaddikim See with their Pure Eyes

One who studies this Parsha will notice that the word 'eyes' is mentioned several times. "Now Yisrael's eyes were heavy with age", "Red eyed from wine" and more. Why is this?

Due to Ya'akov's old age, he was no longer able to see, but this only refers to human sight. He was, however, able to foresee all that would transpire in the future with a spiritual vision, for he had rectified his eyes. Since Ya'akov's attribute was truth, as it says (Micha 7:20) "Grant truth to Ya'akov", he was therefore unable to hide what his eyes saw with Divine Inspiration and asked "Who are these?", for even though Menashe and Ephraim were considered tzaddikim, he saw that their descendants will serve idolatry.

The holy Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto zya"a, became blind in his old age yet he could perceive everything using his supernatural wisdom. Although he could not see, he was able to name every person who entered his home.

I recall an incident that happened many years ago, with my esteemed father Rabbeinu Moshe Ahron zya"a. He required a certain medical procedure on his eyes and I was directed to an expert doctor for eye disease, who lived in Manchester, England. I accompanied my father zya"a on this trip and on arriving in England, we took a taxi to the doctor's house. The taxi stopped two streets away from his house since there was no entry for vehicles, and from there we had to make our way by foot.

Wonder of wonders! My father had never been to England and was not familiar with its streets, but when we got out of the taxi he started walking quickly with his face down. He knew exactly where to turn and where to go, and I had to run to try and keep up with him, all the time wondering how he knew the way.

When we arrived at the doctor's house, Abba zya"a stopped and asked me simply, "Is this where the doctor lives?" And indeed it was the right address.

How did Abba zya'a merit attaining these holy levels? Because he rectified his eyes and was most particular to guard them from looking at forbidden sights. This is how he merited seeing things with Divine inspiration. With this spiritual vision, he knew how to get to the doctor's home, without any previous knowledge of the area.

May it be His will that we merit guarding our eyes against looking at improper sights and may we sanctify ourselves with our actions, sight and thoughts. Amen v'Amen.



A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

As part of the momentous occasion of Ya'akov blessing his children before his death, we read about the unique blessing which Yis-sachar merited, "He bent his shoulder to bear". What burden did he take upon himself? Rashi answers that it refers to the yoke of Torah.

The Gaon Rabbi Chizkiyahu Mishkovski shlita tells over the following story:

There was once a very talented bachur who had an excellent memory. He could learn an entire page of Gemara in five minutes, after which you could test him in great detail. Waking up one morning, he discovered to his astonishment that he had suddenly lost this ability...

He sought out all the Gedolim to ask for their blessings and advice. Each Gadol, according to his personal outlook, suggested a different piece of advice.

But the Steipler's zt"l reaction was entirely different. He said to the bachur: "You are asking me to curse you. There is no way I will do this... a camera in one's head is not a blessing! A person does not come to this world to photograph. There are enough cameras in the world... We are here to work, to put in the effort!" Even though the bachur continued crying and begging, the Steipler remained firm! "Under no circumstances will I bless you to retrieve your previous ability. It is a curse, not a blessing!"

Another bachur once came to the Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Shteinman zt"l, and told him that he was encountering difficulties in the yeshiva where he was learning at present and he wishes to move to a different yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva replied: "You have problems? Difficulties? Know that this is l'chatchila, this is how things are meant to be. When things do not go easily, this is how one merits acquiring Torah, for Torah is acquired with toil, with hardship! Only in

this way can a person grow in Torah". He instructed him categorically to remain where he was.

Our generation, (this was already said by the Chafetz Chaim zt"l!) is a pampered generation. This is why not many people merit acquiring Torah. We live in a generation where everything needs to go exactly as we want and every problem, even the smallest, takes us away from our learning. In this manner, it is impossible to grow!

When the Yeshiva 'Orchot Torah' was first established, it was located above a bakery and the smoke and smell made it hard for the bachurim to learn. We approached Moreinu, the Rosh Yeshiva zt"l and told him the problem. The Rosh Yeshiva sighed and replied forcefully: "Do you think that the creation has changed? From time immortal this has always been the way of Torah: 'Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure...' If all the conditions were optimal, it would be impossible to succeed. To be successful, there have to be hardships! Be happy that these are your difficulties. Torah without toil and effort, without investment and sacrifice, does not thrive."

The Dog is Under Five

Harav Mishkovski illustrates the admirable personality of the distinguished Harav Hirsh:

The outstanding feature of the Slabodka Yeshiva of Chevron, under the leadership of the two Mashgichim, Rabbi Meir Chadash and Rabbi Hirsch Palei, was its emphasis on a shining countenance and good middot. The two Mashgichim served as a living example for their talmidim, with their exceptional devotion on behalf of others. They invested tremendous thought in how to make another person happy, how to help him and elevate him. They lived only for their talmidim. Rabbi Meir's home was open twenty-four hours, completely at the service of the talmidim. They would come in and make themselves at home, at all hours. He even gave them his house keys. He did not know the meaning of a private life.

When Rabbi Hirsh was niftar, I came to be menachem avel. While I was there,

they read out a letter that someone had faxed, in which the writer wished to protest. This is what he wrote: "Rabbi Hirsch zt"l was greatly praised for the extent to which he would take care of all his acquaintances, and how he devoted himself completely to the Yeshiva bachurim. But I wish to protest! Did Rabbi Hirsch care only for those who were close to him? Did he give himself up only for the Yeshiva bachurim? I lay in 'Hadassah' hospital, Rabbi Hirsch did not know who I was, yet when he saw that I was suffering, it is impossible to describe in words how much he sacrificed himself for me, how much devotion he showed for me. I felt that he was not living for himself, but only for me and for others"...

The following is a story that circulated about Rabbi Hirsh, in the Chevron Yeshiva. It is hard to verify if the story is true or not, but generally, the stories that they told there could be backed up.

Once Rabbi Hirsch was travelling by bus, and he found a seat towards the back of the bus. At one of the stops, an irreligious lady boarded, together with a big dog. The driver demanded that she pay for the dog too but the woman refused. An argument broke out, a complete tumult of raised voices and angry words.

The Mashgiach of Chevron yeshiva was not embarrassed. He walked from the back of the bus all the way to the driver and said with a smile: "The dog is under five years of age and the law is that one who is not yet five does not need to pay"...

At once everybody calmed down. The driver smiled, the woman smiled, the argument ended and the bus carried on its route.

What would we say? The Rav was embarrassing himself! Is it fitting for the Rav to get involved and try and get a ride for a dog?! But all of this did not interest Rabbi Hirsch. What was important to him was offering a good word and making peace between people!

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