

ניצוצי אור Sparks of Light

בס"ד



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פרשת ויגש תשע"ו

Toiling in Torah (1)

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger, Editor

The Need to Toil

When the **Maggid of Mezritch** first traveled to see the **Baal Shem Tov**, he was already great in *Torah* and *avoda*; "lacking" only the new path of *avodas haChassidus*. When he entered the *tzaddik's* room, the **Baal Shem Tov** asked him to explain a certain passage in **Eitz Chaim** of the **AriZal**, one of the deepest most difficult *seforim* in *Nister*. The **Maggid** explained the meaning, but the **Baal Shem Tov** was not satisfied. Looking again, the **Maggid** insisted that this was indeed the *pshat*, and asked, that if the **Baal Shem Tov** thought otherwise, he should kindly explain it to him.

The **Baal Shem Tov** then began learning aloud the words of **Eitz Chaim** with a tremendous *hislaavus* & *dveikus*. When he mentioned the names of the *malochim*, they were literally seen in the room, and the entire house was aflame.

The **Baal Shem Tov** later explained that although the **Maggid** knew the simple meaning of the words, because he had not learned it with all of his capacities, his learning had been lacking.

(תו"מ חכ"ח ע' 243)

No Shortcuts!

R. Yitzchok said: "If someone says that he toiled in *Torah* but did not find (meaning that he was not successful), do not believe him. If someone says that he did not work hard but did find, do not believe him either. Believe the person who claims to have toiled and found (*Yagati u'matzasi – taamin*)."

Rava said: "Every physical body was created to work. Fortunate is he who merits having his work and effort in *Torah*."

(מגילה ו' ע"ב, סנהדרין צ"ט ע"ב)

Eliyahu HaNavi related: A *talmid* who was not well versed in *halacha* once complained to me, "I learn *Torah* and strongly desire it, and wait that it come

to me, but it does not." I explained to him that only a person who gives up his life for *Torah*, for the honor of *HaShem*, merits this.

(תנא דבי אליהו רבה פכ"ב)

Based on the **Zohar**, the **Baal HaTanya** explains that just as the Jews toiled physically and then went out to receive the *Torah*, so too we must toil in learning *Torah*, to bring about the final *Geula*. Of course, even the laziest person would choose such work over the backbreaking labor in *Mitzrayim*.

(תורה אור פ' וארא)

The **Baal HaTanya** writes that since *HaShem* demands of us to serve Him "with all [our] *nefesh*," every individual is required to learn to use his skills to the utmost. One who is capable of learning something difficult cannot discharge his duty by learning something easy.

Learning that takes place without effort is essentially insufficient, since it does not involve the entire person.

(מאמרי אדה"ז ענינים א' ע' קנח, לקו"ש ח"ב ע' 566)

The Fruits of Toil

Reb Yekusiel, a salt merchant from *Liepli* who had been a *chossid* from the time of the **Baal HaTanya**, was a great *oved HaShem*, but with a limited understanding of *Torah*, especially *Chassidus*. Once, a young *mashpia* traveling through *Liepli* stayed there for a few days, and every day he taught a *maamar* of the **Reb Dovber of Lubavitch**. His sharp mind and gifts of articulation, left a strong impression on all those who heard him, **Reb Yekusiel** though couldn't grasp the *maamarim* and was greatly disheartened by it.

As he later related, "I was then forty years old. For fifteen years I had often traveled to visit the **Alter Rebbe** and when I was there I studied with all my strength. Yet when this

young man sat and taught the *maamarim*, I didn't grasp them. Every *maamar* I heard made me feel utterly crushed. Because of my burning desire to know the *maamarim* and understand them, I asked the young man to review them over and over again for me. This he did, but despite his repeated explanations, my mind remained like a block of wood. It was closed to it all.

"For three weeks I held him back from continuing his journey home, and let my family run the store. Days and nights I toiled to understand what the *mashpia* had taught me, but it was all to no avail. He eventually left, and I was left like a stranded ship at sea. I fasted and said *Tehillim* with tears, but my mind didn't open, so I decided to travel to *Lubavitch*.

"There I noticed that over the past nine months since my last visit, there was a new atmosphere. Fifty or sixty young men sat for hours on end, learning *Chassidus* diligently. On my first *Shabbos* there, the **Rebbe** delivered a *maamar*, and I understood it. But unlike the others, I couldn't understand the **Rebbe's** additional explanation. This caused me such intense pain that I cried all night and fasted the next day.

"When I went to a private audience with the **Rebbe**, I told him all that had transpired. He told me that nothing can stand in the way of a person's will. Indeed, a strong desire can actually change his mental capabilities. When I heard that everything depended on my desire, I decided to remain in *Lubavitch* until I would begin to understand, and sent a message to my family to continue running the store on their own. I spent about four months working intensely, training myself to think about a concept for hours at a time and reviewing each concept dozens of times.

"That *Tishrei* I felt like a new creation, as if I had 'washed out the pot' and had become a proper recipient for receiving what I truly desired to receive. Only then did I go home."

(אג"ק אדה"ר צ"ח ע' שס"ד)

Sparks of Greatness

Reb Pinchas Reizes

Reb Pinchas Reizes, one of the greatest *chasidim* of the **Baal HaTanya**, was an incredible *gaon*, and highly trusted confidant of *Rabbonim & Rebbe*s. He was involved in many clandestine activities on behalf of the *Klal*. He was a wealthy and influential resident of Shklov who used his influence for holy matters. When the *Baal HaTanya* recited lengthy *maamorim*, Reb Pinchas would memorize them and record them precisely.

Many of his transcriptions are the only ones which were left for posterity.

Reb Pinchas traveled to the *Baal HaTanya* four times a year: *Elul*, *Tishrei*, *Nissan* and *Sivan*. Once, he fell ill and was could not make the journey for *Tishrei*. That year while sitting in his *sukkah*, he suddenly cried out, "Oy Rebbe!" Exclaiming to those sitting with him that the *Rebbe* had just thought of him.

At the same time, the *Baal HaTanya* was sitting in his *sukkah*, and exclaimed: "Pinchas Reizes needs a physical healing. What I am unable to give him, I cannot give. However a *Brocha* for physical health I can give him."

The young men from Shklov were very surprised to hear the *Rebbe* suddenly mention Reb

Pinchas, in the middle of the *Yom Tov* meal no less. After *Yom Tov*, upon their return home, those who heard the *Rebbe*s exclamation immediately went to the home of Reb Pinchas where they shared what happened.

They then all discovered, that it was at the same moment that Reb Pinchas had cried out, "Oy Rebbe!"

Chabad Chasidim were averse to showing off greatness or displaying anything which smacked of *ruach hakodesh*, and reprimanded Reb Pinchas him for his "uncouth" conduct. Reb Pinchas excused himself claiming, "It's not because of my greatness that I felt the *Rebbe* thinking of me. You see, the first time I went to the *Rebbe*, I gave him my *nefesh*, the lowest portion of my soul. The second time I gave him my *ruach*, the intermediate portion of the soul. The third time, I gave over my *neshama*, the highest portion. Since my entire *neshama* was given over to be "with the *Rebbe*," it was not my powers inherently feeling the *Rebbe*'s thoughts, but rather it was the *Rebbe* himself who was touching my soul directly."

(ס"ה"ש תש"ה ע' נב, חסידים הראשונים ח"א ע' 64)

Library Sparks

In this week's *Parsha*, *Vayigash*, Yosef's brothers return to Yakov and bring him the wonderful news that his son is still alive. "Yosef is yet alive, and is ruler over all the land of Egypt." Yakov, however, could not believe it was true until "he saw the wagons which Yosef had sent to ferry him." Only then was he convinced, "and the spirit of Yakov their father was revived."

Rashi explains that the wagons- "*agalos*" in Hebrew- were a special sign from Yosef to Yakov. The last time Yosef and his father learned Torah together, 22 years before, they had studied the portion of the "*egla arufa*" -- the calf that is beheaded to atone for a murder whose perpetrator is unknown.

When Yakov saw the "*agalos*" he understood the allusion, and was thus convinced that Yosef was indeed alive.

Nonetheless, this explanation is problematical. Surely Yakov did not suspect his sons of telling a falsehood; why then did he not immediately believe them when they stated that "Yosef is yet alive"?

Did Yakov truly think that they had been fooled by an Egyptian stranger, who had somehow tricked them into believing that he was their long-lost

brother?

The answer is simple. To a *tzadik*, a truly righteous person such as Yakov, "life" is not the primary realm of the physical body, but rather that of the soul. When the brothers told him that Yosef was not only alive but "the ruler over all the land of Egypt," he could not believe that his son had been able to maintain his spirituality and continue to live as a Jew in such a fraught environment. After all, Yosef was completely alone for so many years, in the most corrupt and abominable civilization the ancient world had known. Not only was he surrounded by the lowest class of people, but despite this Yosef was their leader! How then could he "live"--truly "live," the spiritual life of a Jew?

When, however, Yakov was given the sign of the "*agalos*" and understood that Yosef had not forgotten his Torah learning, he realized that his son was on the same high spiritual plane as before his descent to Egypt.

Yosef had managed to remain a *tzadik*, despite his degraded surroundings. Only then was Yakov convinced that his son still "lived," and "the spirit of Yakov their father was revived."

Halacha Sparks

Scrabble on Shabbos

Rabbi Chaim Hillel Raskin

Is there an issue of writing on Shabbos when playing Scrabble?

The *melachah* of *koseiv* is defined as the creation of a symbol or character that conveys an idea. This is not limited to writing in the conventional understood sense, as even marking a paper with one's fingernail to note a typing error is *assur*. Any manner of creating a letter on a surface is also *koseiv* even without actually etching the surface. For example affixing shapes of letters to a wall or any surface is included in *koseiv* because letters are effected upon a surface.

Only the formation of an image where none existed previously is considered *koseiv*. However, arranging existing letters to form a word, such as placing cards with letters on them next to each other, is not *koseiv*. Therefore the use of a combination lock that opens by requiring a specific succession of numbers on adjacent dials is permitted without concern for *koseiv*, because the letters already exist on that surface and are merely being rearranged and aligned. However, attaching shapes of letters to a backing is prohibited, because that is equivalent to creating the letter and therefore constitutes an act of *koseiv*.

There are two types of Scrabble games: (a) One is a board on which the lettered tiles are merely placed to form words. This would be comparable to arranging loose cards and therefore permissible on *Shabbos* (provided that one does not usually record the scores in writing). (b) The second is designed with framed squares into which the lettered tiles are fitted snugly. Snapping the tiles into place is comparable to attaching letters to a backing and therefore prohibited to do so on *Shabbos*.

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