

Living Jewish

חב"ד
כל הלב לכל אחד
צעירי אגודת חב"ד

Tell your Children

Obstacles are Illusions

The righteous Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, author of Chidushei HaRim and founder of the Gur Chassidic dynasty, was the son of Rabbi Yisrael Rothenberg, the Rabbi of Magnishov and Gur. His father was among the disciples of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev and was close to the Maggid of Koznitz. Whenever Rabbi Yisrael came to Koznitz, he would bring his son along. The Maggid loved to engage with the sharp young boy in matters of Torah.

As he grew up, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir married the daughter of the wealthy Rabbi Moshe Halpern-Lipshitz of Warsaw, and soon his name became well-known as the *ilui* (genius) of Warsaw. A few years later, he founded a yeshiva for talented students. His lessons became known for being so complex that only those with particularly sharp minds and quick comprehension could understand them.

Over time, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir received offers to serve as a Rabbi in important communities, but he rejected them all. Even after his father-in-law lost his fortune and difficult times came upon the family, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir insisted on not taking on the burden of the rabbinate. He continued to study and teach Torah while also engaging in book trade, though with modest means.

The Cramped Yeshiva

The room in which Rabbi Yitzhak Meir's yeshiva operated eventually became too small to hold all the students. There was a need to expand, so learning could continue in a manageable environment and allow new students to join, as many were knocking on the door of the yeshiva.

However, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir feared that moving from the permanent location to a temporary one in order to carry out the expansion work would disrupt the learning and cause a cessation of Torah study. For this reason, he firmly rejected any building plans.

Thus, more and more students—all sharp minded—continued to squeeze into the cramped room. When it became impossible to fit even a needle into the space,



*Torah is a Tree of Life,
painting by Alex Levin, artlevin.com*

they started crowding the windows. One day, when it seemed that the situation had reached its limit, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir said, "if someone could begin and complete the construction work in one day, it would give me great pleasure." This wish seemed impossible to fulfill.

The Idea!

The matter reached a chassid named Reb Ya'akel. He racked his brain to find a solution. Suddenly, an idea struck him.

In Warsaw, there was a prominent contractor who was neither a chassid nor a member of the religious community. Reb Ya'akel approached the contractor and told him about the severe overcrowding in Rabbi Yitzhak Meir's yeshiva.

The contractor, though he had heard of the "ilui of Warsaw," was not particularly moved by the plight of the yeshiva and its students. He quoted a substantial fee for the work, set a typical time frame, and waited for Reb Ya'akel's response. "We'll discuss the money later," Reb Ya'akel replied, "but the time frame you've given is not acceptable!"

"Meaning?" the contractor asked, puzzled.

"Meaning," replied Reb Ya'akel, "the

work must begin and finish within one day."

The contractor looked at him as if he had lost his mind. "No one will do this work in less time than I specified!" he declared.

Reb Ya'akel was not quick to lower his gaze in embarrassment. On the contrary, he gave the contractor a sharp, penetrating look. "May I ask you a personal question—how many years have you and your wife been married?"

The Promise

Despite his shock at the unexpected personal question, and though he couldn't understand why Reb

Ya'akel was asking it, the contractor answered with the number of years they had been married.

"And children?" Reb Ya'akel continued to probe into the contractor's life.

"Unfortunately, not yet," the contractor replied sadly.

"Well," replied Reb Ya'akel with enthusiasm, "here is the deal: you will complete the construction within one day, and in return, the Rabbi will bless you with children!"

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Shabbat Times

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat
Jerusalem	4:51	6:07
Tel Aviv	5:12	6:08
Haifa	5:01	6:07
Beer Sheva	5:13	6:09
New York	5:20	6:20

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Divine Mercy

This week's Torah reading, Mishpatim, deals extensively with laws of damages between individuals. In the case of a thief, the Torah prescribes a special law: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep."

What is the reason the thief must pay five times for an ox and four times for a sheep? Rashi provides two explanations. The first, from Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: "G-d shows mercy on the honor of creatures, as the ox walks on its own feet and the thief has not disgraced himself by carrying it on his shoulder – he pays five. The sheep, which he carries on his shoulder – he pays four, since he has disgraced himself with it." The second, from Rabbi Meir: "Come and see how great is the power of labor – the ox, whose labor has been nullified, he pays five, while the sheep, whose labor has not been nullified – he pays four."

Strictness or Leniency?

These two explanations are not similar to one another. According to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the proper punishment for a thief who slaughters or sells what he stole is five times the value of the theft, but

the Torah is lenient toward one who steals a sheep because "he has disgraced himself with it."

On the other hand, Rabbi Meir believes the proper punishment is four, but the Torah is stricter with a thief who steals an ox, as "its labor has been nullified."

We must say that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Meir have different perspectives, from which their respective views derive.

Severity of the Sin or Pain of Victim

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai judges the severity of the thief's action. He believes that such a grave act – stealing and selling or slaughtering an ox or sheep – warrants a fine of five times the value of the stolen item. However, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai sees room to be lenient with a thief who steals a sheep, since the thief has already been somewhat punished – "he has disgraced himself with it."

In contrast, Rabbi Meir focuses on the victim, judging the appropriate compensation for the harm caused to him. In his view, the fitting compensation is four times the value of the theft. However, in the case of stealing an ox, which also involves the loss of labor, Rabbi Meir believes the compensation should be increased to five times.

Human dignity

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai teaches us how important it is to preserve human dignity, to the point that even with a thief – "G-d shows mercy on the honor of creatures." According to the strict letter of the law, we wouldn't expect to be so lenient with someone who steals a sheep just because "he has disgraced himself with it," but G-d has mercy on the dignity of all creatures and thus lightens the punishment.

The Gemara relates: "It was said about Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that no one ever preceded him in greeting, even a non-Jew in the marketplace." He was so meticulous in greeting everyone, even a non-Jew in the market, that it was unheard of for someone to greet him before he had already greeted them.

Therefore, it is precisely he who sees in this mitzvah the concept of "G-d shows mercy on the honor of creatures," where G-d has compassion even on the thief and takes into account the small humiliation he faces when carrying the sheep on his shoulder, thus lightening his punishment.

From the teachings of the Rebbe, Likutei Sichot, Volume 16, p. 258.

The Nature of the Tree

A chassid of Rabbi Chaim of Autonia sent his son to a school that was not appropriate. The tzaddik sharply rebuked him, even telling him that if he did not return his son to a Torah based, G-d fearing education, he had no place in his presence.

The chassid decided to go to the tzaddik's brother, who was considered by him to be more "moderate." The brother welcomed him warmly and said nothing about the education of his children. One day, they went on a walk together. They arrived at an avenue of trees, and the tzaddik began to speak: "When we were children, our teacher took us on a walk in an orchard. He tried to teach us the signs of each tree, so we could distinguish between an apple tree and a pear tree, and so on, but we didn't really grasp it.

"Months passed," the tzaddik continued, "and we no longer needed the signs. When the trees began to bear fruit, we knew a tree producing apples was an apple tree, and a tree laden with pears was a pear tree." The tzaddik looked directly into the chassid's eyes and said, "do you hear? By the fruit, you can certainly identify the nature of the tree."

The chassid immediately understood the implication of these words and, that same week, returned his son to a Torah based, G-d fearing education.

From our Sages

Health of the Body

Respect for the Jewish Body

The Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek once told a chassid, who, in his old age, wasn't taking proper care of his health, "as the body ages, you need to honor it more, because of the mitzvot it bears, such as tzitzit and tefillin."

Recognition Brings Healing

"I am the Lord your Healer" (Exodus 15:26). When we live with the awareness that "I am the Lord," and act accordingly, this itself is healing for all kinds of ailments.

(Mei Miriam)

The Torah Testifies

Hundreds of halachot testify to the value of the Jewish body before the Holy One Blessed Be He – laws of forbidden foods, family life, fasting laws, the desecration

of Shabbat, and the desecration of Yom Kippur.

(the Rebbe)

Prevention of Illness

Once, the ruler of Egypt said to his doctor, the Rambam, "all my life I've had good health, and I have never had the opportunity to test your abilities in medicine." The Rambam replied, "the greatness of a doctor is tested in preventing illness, more than in curing it." This is what is meant by the verse (Exodus 15:26): "...all the sicknesses that I have visited upon Egypt I will not visit upon you, for I, the Lord, heal you."

The Value of the Body

Rabbi Hillel of Paritch said: "Before I became a chassid, the body was repulsive to me, and I saw it as the source of all spiritual troubles. After I learned Chassidus and the concept of 'from my flesh I will see God' – that the body is a mirror through which we perceive the Divine – the body became precious to me."

Chassidus page

Transforming the Falsehood

Chassidus explains that this world is an "alma d'shikra" (a world of falsity), and the purpose of a person's work is to transform the falsity of the world into holiness. This is done by using the same methods that are common in the world of falsehood, but with a positive direction.

For example, in the world of falsehood, there are conventions that are not necessarily based on logic, yet they have great power, and no one dares challenge them. In contrast, when it comes to Torah and mitzvot, questions are suddenly asked. One must apply to Torah and mitzvot the concept that these are accepted and fundamental matters, beyond questioning.

When you call your friend's home and are told that he is resting, it is considered holy of holies, and it is clear that one must not disturb him. But if they answer that he is sitting and learning, you may ask to interrupt "just for a moment." Why? Because the conventions of the world dictate that resting and sleeping hours are sacred. A Jew is required to reverse this reality and establish the hours of Torah and prayer as sacred, and one must not disturb them. As the Rebbe told one of his Chassidim, during study time, he should feel as though it is Shabbat, and the phone is "muktzeh" (not to be touched).

Only Truth

Chassidim were very careful about any trace of falsehood. The Chassidic master, Rabbi Isaac of Vitebsk, avoided eating honey cake ('lekach') his whole life. In his old age, he was asked the reason, and he explained that when he was young and

newly appointed as a Rabbi, he was once invited to a meal. There were various foods on the table, including 'lekach'. He took from the other foods, said the blessing, and ate. One of the guests asked why he didn't take the 'lekach', as it was considered more important. [editor: in regards saying the blessing on the lekach before the other foods.]

The truth was that he simply forgot, but as a young Rabbi, he didn't want to admit that he had forgotten, so he answered: "I don't eat 'lekach'." When he realized that he had failed to speak the truth, he decided to make his statement true, and from that day on, he never ate 'lekach'.

Distinction Is Necessary

The Previous Rebbe explains: This world is called 'Alma d'Shikra'. Materiality is falsehood in that it hides and conceals the Divine life force that enlivens all of creation. He also explains: "The evil inclination is deceitful and a liar. Sometimes it appears as sincere. However, 'when he entreats with his voice, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart.' (Mishlei 26:25) Therefore, a constant distinction is necessary – to always know who is speaking: the good inclination or the evil inclination."

Falsehood also includes an exaggerated view of one's shortcomings, as the Previous Rebbe explains, there are people who see only their flaws and hardships. Such behavior is considered false humility, and it damages the person. For "just as a person must be aware of their shortcomings, they must also recognize their strengths."

Obstacles are Illusions

continued from page one:

It goes without saying that Rabbi Ya'akel had not coordinated this promise with Rabbi Yitzhak Meir in advance.

A spark of hope appeared in the contractor's eyes. After considering Rabbi Ya'akel's words, he agreed.

In the following days, the yeshiva's expansion plan was completed, and all the building materials were brought to the site. The contractor, who employed many workers, prepared a large crew for the designated day. When everything was ready, Rabbi Ya'akel informed Rabbi Yitzhak Meir that the work would be done the next day, exactly as he wanted – within one day.

The next day, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir gave his lesson in another location, while at the yeshiva, there was a great commotion. Steel, bricks, cement, and many workers were all under the supervision of the contractor.

The work continued all day, through the night, and even into the early morning hours. Just a short time before the scheduled lesson in the yeshiva, the windows were installed. What had been, just one day before, a small, shabby room had now transformed into a spacious hall. Some workers were still finishing the last small details.

When Rabbi Yitzhak Meir arrived at the yeshiva, he could hardly believe his eyes. In one day, the place had changed beyond recognition! His whole being radiated joy and contentment. "A miracle! A miracle!" he murmured.

Rabbi Ya'akel approached him, sensing that this was the right moment. "Everything is wonderful," he said, "but the cost is very high. We promised the contractor—children!"

In an instant, the smile on Rabbi Yitzhak Meir's face turned into a serious expression. He sank into his thoughts. "May G-d help him," he said, and entered to begin his daily lesson.

At the end of the year, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was invited to be the sandak at the circumcision of the contractor's son.

Moshiach Now

Peace and Unity—Catalyst for Redemption

Spreading peace and unity serves as a catalyst for the Redemption. This is also reflected in the Torah portion of Mishpatim, for the purpose of the laws placed in the category of mishpatim is to increase peace.

In a similar context, our Sages relate that Zion will be rebuilt through judgment as it is written, "Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through tzedakah." Significantly, we find an emphasis on deeds of kindness in the Torah portion of Mishpatim which mentions the mitzvah of offering free loans.

the Rebbe, Mishpatim, 5752—1992, reprinted with permission from Sichos in English

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Human Interest

Bar Mitzvah at 82!

A Miraculous Journey: An 82-Year-Old Jew Puts on Tefillin for the First Time in Remote Quebec

The story began in a Torah class when someone mentioned a Jewish man living in isolation in Quebec. This participant knew Rabbi Yehuda Dahan from Montreal and estimated that, under the right circumstances, the Rabbi might be just a two-hour drive away. He also believed Rabbi Dahan, known for his passion for



mitzvot, would eagerly make the trip just to help a fellow Jew don tefillin.

However, the drive was actually five hours. And, the man had no interest in Judaism—or Rabbis. After calls and messages, Rabbi Dahan finally reached him—only to be met with silence. Undeterred he made the arduous journey. Upon arrival, there was another challenge—trekking two kilometers through deep snow to reach the remote cabin.

When he finally arrived, the man refused to put on tefillin. But just moments before sunset on the eve of the 24th of Tevet, with bitter cold of -20°C surrounding them, something inside him began to thaw. Finally, for the first time in his life, he agreed.

In a surreal scene—far from Jewish life, in an area dominated by Baptists, with no electricity except a small generator—an 82-year-old Jew celebrated his Bar Mitzvah for the first time, minutes before nightfall.

Adapted from Chabadinfo

Cooking Tip of the Week

Healthy Muffins

These muffins came from improvising! Preheat oven to 180°C and grease a muffin pan or use liners. In a bowl, mix $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups spelt flour, 2 packs instant apple oats, 2 tsp baking soda, 2 tsp cinnamon, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ginger, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sea salt. Add 3 XL eggs, 1 small applesauce, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup avocado/olive oil, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup maple syrup, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup orange juice, 1 grated apple, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate seeds. Scoop into 12–16 cups, bake 20 min. Cool, refrigerate, or freeze.

*Alizah Hochstead
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Halacha Corner – Reusing Cup and Ladle on Shabbat

When making a cup of coffee or tea on Shabbat, it's common to pour boiling water into a cup that was previously used for hot water or was rinsed with cold water. This raises the question of whether this would be considered bishul (cooking), since the boiling water affects the small amount of cold water left in the cup from prior use. The halachah is that, strictly speaking, irui (pouring hot water) is a problem on Shabbat only when water is added to solids, not to liquids. However, there's room for stringency if one is adding a comparatively large amount of hot liquid to a small amount of cold liquid. Therefore, it's advisable to wipe the cup dry before adding hot water. However, if the water from the previous use was originally hot and then cooled off, and especially if it's still slightly warm, then there's no problem with pouring hot water over the remaining drops of water in the cup.

Reusing a ladle that has some solid food left on it from prior use is usually not a problem, since it was almost certainly cooked previously; it's unlikely that uncooked solids would be found on a ladle. However, if there is cold liquid on the ladle from a previous use, even if it was originally hot but has now completely cooled off, it should be wiped dry before putting it back into a pot that has hot food in it. If the liquid is still slightly warm, there is no need to wipe it dry before putting it back into the pot.

Rav Yosef Yeshaya Braun, shlita, Mara D'atra & member of the Badatz of Crown Heights, 1 Minute Halachah, #526, crownheightsconnect.com

Farbrengen

Question: I have been married for 25 years and have six children. I truly have so much to be grateful for. But—(you're probably going to think I'm such a complainer!)—there's something that weighs heavily on me. My husband and I share many interests: we hike together, enjoy the same books, attend lectures, and more. Our shadchan always said we were the perfect match, and in many ways, she was right.

But despite all this, I feel lonely. There's a deep sense of loneliness in my life and marriage, and I don't know what to do about it.

Answer: You are certainly not just complaining. It takes courage to share your feelings and seek ways to strengthen your marriage. And you're not alone—many people experience this, even in seemingly ideal relationships.

The key question is: what is causing this loneliness? Surprisingly, the emphasis on shared interests may actually be a barrier to deeper connection.

Rabbi Manis Friedman explains that while common interests might seem like a source of closeness, they can sometimes create distance. A couple can have few shared activities yet feel deeply connected, while another may share everything and still feel distant. Why? Because when the focus is on the "things," it prevents truly being with one's spouse. In other words, a couple can spend hours together and still feel lonely since a true connection is lacking.

Pirkei Avot (4:16) states: "Any love that is dependent on something—when that thing ceases, the love also ceases. But a love that is not dependent on anything never ceases." Rabbi Yitzchak Arad teaches that the key to a fulfilling marriage is simply enjoying each other's presence—not for what you gain or because of certain qualities, but purely for the joy of being together.

The Zohar explains that before entering this world, a husband and wife were one soul. Upon descending, half the soul was placed in the man's body and half in the woman's body. Marriage reunites them into a complete soul.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that every Jewish soul contains spiritual treasures. The more we dig, the more we uncover. Marriage works the same way—its unity already exists, waiting to be revealed. By truly accepting, appreciating, and enjoying our spouse we create the vessel for the inherent unity to be manifest. The more we focus on our spouse and the less we focus on the "things" about our spouse, the more fulfilling our marriage will be.

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