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Perspectives

ELEVEN



Reb Aizil Homiler

*Biography,
Correspondence
& Anecdotes*

A Glimpse from Up-Close

Reb Yoel Kahn

The Whole Picture

The Tolna Rebbe

Not "Minor" Details

Rabbi Yeboshua Mondshein

Shidduchim in the USSR

Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman

A Rov Versus a Rabbi

Rabbi Abaron Lindenblit



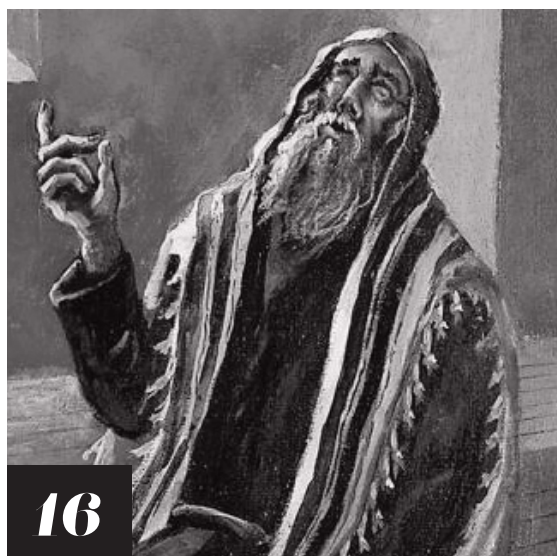
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SHIDDUCHIM IN THE USSR

Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman



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478 Albany Ave. Ste. 11
Brooklyn NY 11203

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Rabbi Matisyahu Friedman

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Rabbi Schneur Zalman Rabin
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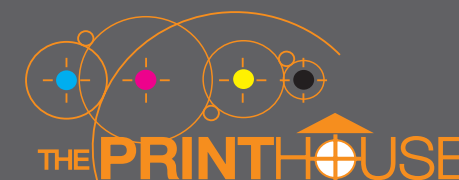
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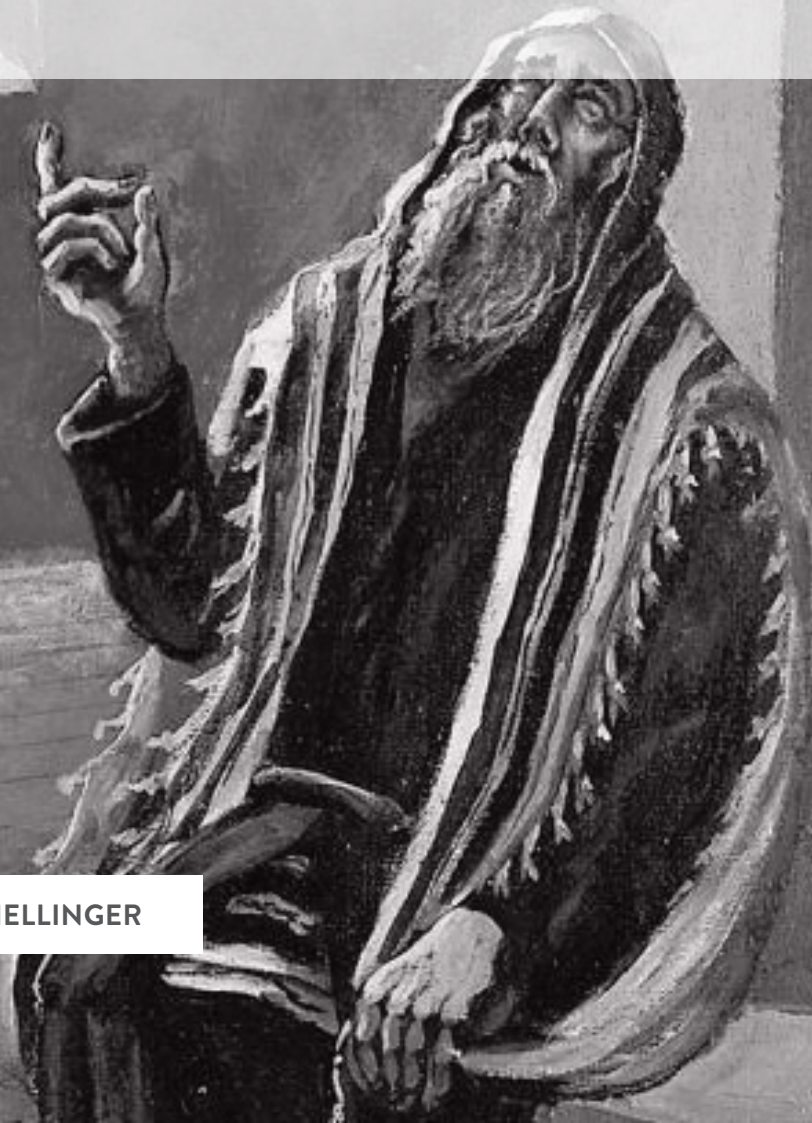
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A CHOSSID'S PERSPECTIVE

Reb Aizil Homiler



RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

A Life of Chassidus

Reb Yitzchak Aizik Epshtein, or Reb Aizil Homiler, was one of the greatest Chabad chassidim of all time. He is praised by the Frierdiker Rebbe for his genius in Torah, one that earned fame even in the distant Vilna, and for his descriptive imagination with an eloquent delivery. He had a pleasant demeanor even with ordinary townsmen and he was well liked by all.

Reb Groinem, the legendary mashpia in Lubavitch, summed it up: “Reb Aizil was a man of all talents. He was incredible in the intellectual understanding of *Chassidus* (*baskala*) and its application in life (*avoda*), in the study of revealed parts of Torah and of Chassidus, in the ways of Chassidus and in the ways of the world.”



EARLY BEGINNINGS

Reb Aizil was born around the year 5530 (1770) to Reb Mordechai HaLevi Epshtein and a long line of respected *rabbonim*. In his youth, he learned under his grandfather Reb Dovid, *rov* of Halusk, excelling in the study of *Gemara*, *Poskim* and other holy works. Before the age of twenty-three, he had already learned the entire Shas with commentaries seven times (!), and prepared an extensive commentary of his own.

When Reb Aizil learned of the Alter Rebbe, he toiled in the study and *avoda* of Chassidus for two years before traveling to *yechidus*. On his way to Liozna, he stopped in a town along the way and visited the home of a seasoned *chossid*, Reb Shaul, who inspired him to spend another year in preparation. When

he finally entered *yechidus*, his *pan* read, “How can the ‘toiling soul’ draw near to *Elokus*?” As he handed the *pan* to the Alter Rebbe, he fainted.

Reb Aizil’s father was disappointed that his son had become a *chossid*, even tearing his clothing in mourning. When his son continued to conclude the entire *Shas* on *erev Pesach* as usual, he made peace with him. For the last days of Pesach his father joined the Chabad minyan that Reb Aizil established, and that Shavuot they traveled together to the Alter Rebbe.

Reb Aizil joined the Alter Rebbe’s *chadorim* (“classes”), the *yeshivah* established by the Alter Rebbe. The prerequisite for acceptance in the highest class was fluency in *Shas*, *Midrash*, the philosophical works of *Ikarim* and *Kuzari*, and basic knowledge of Zohar.



CORRESPONDENCE OF *Reb Aizil Homiler*

Logical Faith

In these letters, Reb Aizil explains the meaning of faith in a Rebbe in a simple and logical fashion. Since the Rebbe is observably an exceptional genius, we know that he can understand the advanced concepts he discusses. From his personal commitment and sacrifice, we conclude that he is sincere and not misleading us. Having this faith in the Rebbe's comprehension of the hidden spiritual realms is essential, since it is key to hastening the *geulah*.



Wednesday, 24 Iyar 5606 (1846), Homil

To my dear friend . . . Reb Tzvi Hirsh Feigin,

Just as I invited you to visit both verbally and in writing, I will now repeat my oral thanks for your visit in writing as a token of our mutually beneficial relationship. And based on our conversations here,

I'm sure you know that I don't mean physical benefit.

When you were in my home, you mentioned several times that the

concepts of Chassidus we discussed require *emunah*. I took this to mean that they cannot be understood in an apparent and logical manner, unlike logical ideas that can be fully grasped, such as the formula that three times three equals nine. I desired to respond to you in person, but I was distracted and forgot to share my answer with you, so I will suffice with this letter.

My response is that that is precisely the reason we were commanded¹ to have faith in Torah scholars (*emunas chachomim*) and to connect with them, as I will explain.

There is no doubt that although it is possible to understand the wisdom of *kabbalah*, an important prerequisite is required, namely, authentic *yiras shamayim* (*nisht genart*). This is the reason why most people are unable to understand it. Even though every Jew possesses an *emunah* that we have inherited from our ancestors, it does not have the power to inspire a person to conduct himself accordingly, and to leave behind what he can actually understand and enjoy in a tangible way.

This is why we need *emunas chachomim*. It is much easier to acknowledge that whatever claims they make in their field of expertise are true.

Even someone who is extremely knowledgeable can't compare his degree of concentration when he's engaged in studying and *davening* to when he's



***Emunas chachamim* means that what the sages tell us is true without a doubt, although we don't and can't understand it ourselves. This is something we can logically understand.**

involved in business. Certain holy sages, like the [Alter] Rebbe and his son [the Mittlerer Rebbe], retained their wisdom even while conversing with others. People like us, however, can only hope not to forget what we know, but we can't expect to uphold the same level of concentration as while *davening* and learning. So those who are always preoccupied with business certainly can't expect to attain any meaningful understanding in *emunah* themselves.

However, *emunas chachamim* means that what the sages tell us is true without a doubt, although we don't and can't understand it ourselves. This is something we can logically understand.

In fact, we see that our sages are proficient in every known field of wisdom, like the [Alter] Rebbe who excelled in all the sciences, such as astronomy (as evidenced in *hilchos tefilab*² and *bachnasas Shabbos*) and mathematics (as demonstrated in *seder bachnasas Shabbos*).³

A Glimpse from UP-CLOSE

Reb Yoel Kahn



— Accuracy and Precision —

QUOTING FROM MEMORY

The Rebbe's outstanding memory in all parts of Torah is well-known and needs no proof. One need just flip through a volume of Likkutei Sichos and see the thousands of references over a wide range of topics to appreciate the extensiveness of the Rebbe's Torah knowledge.

Nevertheless, as part of my work to review and transcribe the Rebbe's *sichos*, I had the chance to catch a glimpse of his amazing memory from up close.

For example, after a certain *sicha* was given to the Rebbe for editing, the Rebbe added a number of lines from the *sefer* Resisei Layla from R. Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin. Since he didn't have the actual *sefer* at hand, the Rebbe asked that the quote be checked for accuracy before the *sicha* was printed. We visited the Rebbe's library and checked up the quote in the *sefer*. Aside for a word or two, we discovered that the entire citation was accurate! (The quote is printed in Likkutei Sichos Vol. 5 p. 86.)

Now, the *sefer* Resisei Layla was written relatively recently (the author passed away in 5660 [1900]), yet the Rebbe was familiar with its content word for word! Besides for demonstrating the Rebbe's outstanding memory, perhaps this indicates the high regard the Rebbe had for the *sefer* and its author.

A similar incident took place not long after the Rebbe accepted the *nesius* in 5711 (1951). At that time, we began compiling and publishing the *sichos* said by the Rebbe during the previous year (the year of mourning for the Frieddiker Rebbe), and a number of these *sichos* were edited by the Rebbe.

One time, after the Rebbe finished editing a certain *sicha*, Rabbi Chodakov gave me the *sicha* to prepare for printing. As I glanced at the sheets, I noticed a reference written by the Rebbe to Sefer Chassidim section 1129. Curiously, the Rebbe had added a line over the number of the *siman* (תתשכט).



REB YOEL KAHN served as the chief teacher and disseminator of the Rebbe's teachings for over forty years. Besides his breadth of knowledge, Reb Yoel is considered by many to be the most profound scholar of Chassidus in our generation.

In this article, Reb Yoel shares several personal experiences in which he merited to be involved. Although ordinary people cannot fully appreciate the true greatness of a tzaddik, benefit may be derived from appreciating whatever we can.

Translated by Rabbi Yebuda Leib Altein.

THE WHOLE PICTURE

The Rebbe's Extraordinary Balance



HARAV YITZCHOK MENACHEM WEINBERG

If, in attempting to describe the greatness of the Rebbe, we concern ourselves solely with stories of his miracles, and the like, we will never reach an accounting of his true greatness. Moreover, the purpose of the exercise would only be to seek out those aspects of his personage that are relevant to us, so that we may follow his example.

Therefore, our approach the subject will attempt to assess the Rebbe's greatness by using a different yardstick, a yardstick that in, my opinion, itself requires a re-understanding of sorts: Completeness. What, then, does it mean for a person to be complete, or to be of consummate character?

The concept of completeness—in Hebrew *shleimus*—and that of peace—or *sholom*—are one and the same. But what does peace mean? It is a common error to understand peace as total alignment with a former adversary.

In the course of a discussion of the laws of burglary in Parshas Mishpatim (22:2), the Torah says that "if the sun shines" on an intruder, then he may not be killed in defense of the home. The *Mechilta* understands this turn of phrase to mean that the intruder doesn't wish to cause any harm: "Just as the sun makes peace in the world, so it is here; it is known that he has come for peaceful purposes." Why is the sun said to make "peace in the world"?

NOT "MINOR" DETAILS

————— Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshein

The following is a collection of stories and quotations regarding two "small" and "simple" matters: the Rebbe as a *Shulchan Aruch Yid* and his sensitivity to speak in refined terms.

————— A Shulchan Aruch Yid —————

To be a "*Shulchan Aruch Yid*" seems such a petty matter. Could it be otherwise? Doesn't every G-d-fearing person follow *Shulchan Aruch*?

Yet, with the Rebbe we saw how all of his movements were calculated according to Torah and *halacha*. He did it inconspicuously, and sometimes even endeavoring to hide his conduct. These were practices which were not meant for all, as it says in the *Mishna*, "Not all who wish to assume a position of prominence may do so."



Halacha was the core in the Rebbe's ideals and conduct, including through numerous public affairs. When the Rebbe discussed "*Mihu Yehudi*," he demanded "*giyur kabalacha*," conversion **according to *halacha*** (even when some argued that obviously that is the only real conversion...). The same is true for the prohibition of giving away parts of *Eretz Yisroel* to our pursuers; he founded his stance on a *halacha* from *hilchos Shabbos*. Many other campaigns were similarly based on *halacha*.

Throughout the years, the Rebbe spoke regularly about the necessity of learning *halacha* in a consistent and systemized way.

"The only solution," the Rebbe stated (13 Tishrei 5743), "is to learn these *halachos*, because when you learn them, you know them! In such a case, no miracle or tricks will help. In order to know *halacha*, you have to learn it! When speaking about a *shaila* relating to



RABBI YEHOSHUA MONDSHEIN
OBM was widely recognized as the preeminent Chabad historian of our times. As a young man under the Rebbe's close guidance, he began to work on indexing and publishing Chassidic texts. During his lifetime he authored many seforim and articles on Chabad history, bibliography and minhogim, in addition to publications in various other fields. He also served as manuscript librarian in the Israeli National Library.

As a chossid operating in the academic sphere, he was unapologetic and unintimidated. His writing is characterized by comprehensive and impressive knowledge, originality, provocativeness, and a willingness to battle against what he saw as distortion of Chabad's image by outsiders.

Translated by Mrs. Basya Yabel.

Shidduchim IN THE USSR

RABBI HILLEL ZALTZMAN

Excerpts from the forthcoming book "Samarkand"

*If match-making in general is "as difficult as krias yam-suf,"
finding a match for a chassidic bochur in the Soviet Union was far harder.*

SHIDDUCH CRISIS IN THE SOVIET UNION

Living a religiously observant life in the Soviet Union was always difficult, but at certain times it was even harder than usual, such as when the time came to get married. The main problem was the small number of G-d fearing, chassidic families. In the free world there were hundreds of thousands of religious Jews who could observe a Torah lifestyle without fear. Every young man and woman had dozens

of potential people to marry within a small radius of their home, and thousands of people farther afield.

After the great post-war exodus, very few Lubavitcher families or other religious Jews remained in the Soviet Union. When a young man came of age, he could count the potential candidates for marriage from the entire Soviet Union on the fingers of one hand.

Among the families that remained in the Soviet Union, those who lived in a

◀ A chupah in the USSR

community would support one another, and together could educate their children in the spirit of Torah. However, the families scattered in isolation throughout the country, at times just one or two religious families in a city, found it difficult to prevail spiritually.

As long as the children were at home, and under supervision, their parents retained control. However, once they grew up and became independent, many children went off their parents' path.

In the Soviet Union, it was almost impossible to open one's own business. Therefore, someone who wanted to support himself honorably had to study a profession. This is the reason why even our young men and women went to university. Obviously, studying in a gentile environment and the unavoidable socializing with gentile students had an adverse effect. This was the main factor in their veering from their Jewish roots.

Even if they managed to avoid eating non-Kosher food, they found it extremely hard to keep Shabbos. This was especially so in the big cities and especially when working in large factories. Keeping Shabbos entailed substantial sacrifice, and many did not withstand the test. Understandably, this kind of spiritual life ended up weakening them in other critical areas such as prayer, laying *tefillin*, and so on.

But the main problem was finding chassidic girls. In chassidic families the *bochurim* learned secretly and attended *farbrengens* with the elder chassidim where they absorbed the chassidic flavor. Without these institutions of chassidic life, the girls' attitude to Yiddishkeit and Chassidus could only be shaped by the atmosphere in their homes. And when the atmosphere in the street and schools were antithetical to everything they heard from their parents, the girls found it hard to preserve their Jewish character.

This problem, by the way, was the problem of world Jewry up until close to a century ago. The heretical winds of the Enlightenment that blew through the shtetls of Europe felled many, but especially young women who had scarcely been taught about Judaism. They were easily enticed to join the "progressive" *Maskilim*, as they were known. It was the righteous Sarah Schenirer, of blessed memory, who saved the day by founding the Bais Yaakov school in order to combat the secularization of Jewish girls. In 1918, she opened the first independent religious school for girls in Krakow, which turned into a huge network of schools under the aegis of Agudas Israel. The Frierdiker Rebbe greatly encouraged this movement, and in the 1930s he founded in Riga the Achos HaTmimim girls' school, which was to be the first of many.

So a chassidic *bochur* who was looking for a chassidic girl, or even just a *frum*

A ROV Versus a Rabbi

RABBI AHARON LINDENBLIT

As the years go by, small anash communities are developing in more and more locations around the globe as a result of successful hafatza by the Rebbe's *shluchim*. An anash community has its own distinct needs that vary from the needs of the "Chabad House regulars." The *shliach* usually sees his job as drawing non-frum people close to Yiddishkeit and nurturing those that he has already brought close. He doesn't have the time or means to properly oversee the needs of anash, and he often doesn't see that as his responsibility.

One of the needs of a frum community is a competent *moreh hora'ab*. In this article we would like to point out the crucial need for one in developing anash communities, and the responsibility of anash to pull together their resources to provide this service for themselves.

A byproduct of the blessed phenomenon of new anash communities is the blurring of the distinction between a *shliach* or a congregational rabbi and a *rav moreh hora'ab* who *paskens shailos*. Sincere *yungeliet*, attempting to live their lives according to the highest *halachic* standards, commonly refer all their *shailos* to their local *shliach*, who in an attempt to assist them, fields the questions either based on his own store of knowledge and research expertise, or by consulting

a recognized *moreh hora'ab*. This often gives unsuspecting community members the impression that their pulpit rabbi and *shliach* - who never saw himself as a *posek* - is the address for serious *halachic shailos* that inevitably arise in a frum household.

Another reason for the prevalence of asking *shailos* to pulpit rabbis is the fact that there is a shortage of competent *morei hora'ab* within the global anash community, which makes the available

Rabbonim Mordechai Altein, ►
Zalman Shimon Dworkin
and Yisroel Jacobson.

ones not easy to get hold of. Due to these factors, various other means of obtaining *halachic* information have crept into our society. Whether it's *heterim* from the grapevine, heard from a neighbor who heard from her modern orthodox cousin who heard it from a YCT graduate, or plain rumors based on misunderstandings. People also sometimes become their own *rabbonim* by using *sifrei melaktim* (concise compilations on various topics) or Rabbi Google. Perhaps to combat these developments *shluchim* feel forced to field the *shailos* they receive, since they figure it's better that the *baalei batim* rely on them who possess basic knowledge of *halacha*, than on their own understanding.

Often people lack the knowledge to determine whether a question is a real *shaila* or merely an open-and-shut case explicit in *Shulchan Aruch*. That's where a *shliach* or pulpit rabbi can assist. But it is imperative for every frum Yid to have a relationship with a *moreh hora'ab* that he trusts.

This essay should empower people by giving them the information to be educated *halachic* consumers, allowing



Credit: Lubavitch Archives

There is a popular myth that having *semicha* automatically enables someone to *pasken* a *shaila* as if by magic.

people to make an informed choice when choosing a *rov*.

Imagine we were dealing with serious medical questions. Would anyone deem it responsible to consult a high school biology teacher that has some familiarity with medicine? Likewise *halachic shailos* need to be addressed to a professional *posek*. When one chooses a medical specialist, one researches first to ascertain whether they are competent and experienced. How much more so when dealing with serious *shailos*.

There is a popular myth that having *semicha* automatically enables someone to *pasken* a *shaila* as if by magic. People possess a worldview adopted from the secular academic world where learning is done to obtain a degree. Once one has the "*semicha*

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