

The Weekly *Farbrenge*



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HONORING SEFORIM

HOLY GARMENTS

Seforim are considered “the garments of *HaShem*,” no less. Indeed, *Chazal* teach us that a person who treats them with respect will be respected by others; the reverse applies to a person who does not.

(אבות פ"ד מ"ו לפיה"ג, ס' חסידים סי' תתקטז)

Reb Shimon ben Tzemach, author of the *Tashbetz*, treated *seforim* with such loving care that he brushed the dust off them with a special silk cloth. In this merit, his reward was that the *seforim* which he authored would never be infested with bookworms.

In all the libraries that the Rebbe Rashab visited, he found that even when the *seforim* standing immediately near the *Tashbetz* were affected with bookworms, that *sefer* alone stood untouched.

(שנה בשנה תשכ"ג ע' 490)

Respect for *seforim* includes: placing them in a respectable bookcase, keeping them off the floor or a surface on which people are sitting, depositing torn pages in *sheimos*, setting them right side up, and keeping them at a distance from anything unclean.

(רש"י ור"י לאי אבות ד,ו, ר"ח שער היראה פט"ו, א"ר סי' מ סק"ה, שוע"ר סי' מ"ה ס"ג, פסקי הסיפור סוף הל' תפילין)

The *Maharil* – a *Rishon* who is a major source for many current *minhagim* – used to show his respect for *seforim* by telling anyone carrying a *sefer* to pass through a doorway ahead of him. Whenever a *sefer* fell, he would lift it up and kiss it.

(ליקטי מהר"ל סי' צח, צט)

Reb Yehuda HaChossid, a contemporary of *Rambam*, gives us numerous instructions on caring for *seforim*. For example: If a *sefer* and other valuables fall to the ground, one should lift the *sefer* first. Similarly, if liquid spills on a *sefer* and on other items, one should dry the *sefer* first. A *sefer* should not be placed near the edge of a table where it is likely to fall, and when handing someone a *sefer*, one should do so with his right hand. Finally, a *sefer* should not be used for any mundane purpose.

(ס' חסידים סי' תתקכג, תתצד, תתקכב, קט)

LOVING REVERENCE

A *sefer* should of course be positioned on the shelf right side up, not upside down.

It once happened that a certain fellow took a *Gemara* down from its shelf for reference and unknowingly replaced it upside down. Suddenly it crashed to the ground. He picked it up and replaced it – once again upside down, and the same thing happened. After this repeated itself again, he realized that something was amiss. He checked how he had placed it, and once the *sefer* was positioned correctly, it remained in its place.

(קב הישר פ"ד)

CONSIDER

To whom is one showing esteem when according respect to a *sefer*?

Why is closing a *sefer* and returning it to its place an act of respect towards the *sefer*?

The Rebbe related: I was once in the presence of the Friediker Rebbe when another person present got up to leave without closing his *sefer*. Though the Friediker Rebbe was always careful not to trouble others, he called the man back and gently reminded him to close his *sefer*. After the man left I asked the Friediker Rebbe, “I know how careful you are not to trouble others. Perhaps you could have instead asked me to close the *sefer*?”

The Friediker Rebbe answered that aside from the importance of closing the *sefer*, it is preferable that the learner close the *sefer* himself.

(שיח"ק תשכ"ד ע' 246)

Reb Yechiel Meir of Gostynin was a student of Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and later a chassidic leader himself. While studying in Kotzk he had a stealthy custom: Late at night, under cover of

darkness, he would steal into the *beis midrash* unnoticed and return every *sefer* to its proper place.

(היהודי הקדוש ע' יב)

After recovering from an illness, Reb Elimelech of Lyzhensk related what he had then seen in the higher realms:

“As I approached the entrance to the heavenly *yeshiva* of Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg, I met Mordechai, the late *seforim*-binder of our town. Knowing him to be a simple, unlearned individual, I asked him how he had merited reaching such a lofty sphere.

He told me how at his judgment, the *Beis Din shel Maalah* brought all the torn pages that he had collected over the years from the damaged *seforim* and placed them on the scale. This had earned him a direct entrance to *Gan Eden*. However, since he was so lacking in learning, he first had to be taught Torah, beginning with *nigleh*, the revealed dimension of the Torah, and now he was ready to study *nistar*, the Torah’s hidden dimension – at the *yeshiva* of Reb Shmelke.”

(אוצר הסיפורים ח"ה ע' כט)

SEFORIM AS PROTECTORS

The Rebbe taught that in addition to their obvious benefits, *seforim* protect a home and those who live in it.

The elder chossid, Reb Foleh Kahn, related: In the year תרע"ו (1915), when the Rebbe Rashab left the village of Lubavitch, he left behind a full crate of valuable *kisvei yad* (manuscripts) written by many Rebbeim and *gedolei Yisroel* in the Moscow home of a chossid by the name of Reb Zelka Parsitz. When I once visited Reb Zelka with another few *temimim*, we opened the box and saw what it contained. Reb Zelka told us that his home had been searched by the dreaded Secret Police numerous times, yet its officers had never once opened the box.

He added, “This box saved me a number of times.”

When he was eventually asked to return it to the Rebbe, he was saddened, and said, “Who will now protect me at home?”

(לקו"ש ח"ג ע' 213, שמועות וסיפורים ח"ה ע' 116)

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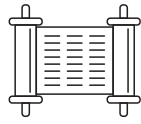


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USING ANOTHER'S SEFER

I found a siddur in shul with a name, may I use it?

One who finds an article with an identifying feature has a mitzvah and obligation to return it, unless one knows that the owner has despaired of finding it. If one found it after the owner despaired—as can be assumed when the majority of passerby are non-Jewish—he may keep it, though it is commendable to return it. Since seforim or other holy articles will eventually be sold back to Jews, the owner does not despair even in this case.¹

If a sefer was left and forgotten about for an extended time, it is sometimes evident that the owner despaired of its recovery (e.g. left in yeshiva by bochur from previous years, siddurim left in shul by people who have since moved away, or in big shul like 770).² In these cases, the sefer may be kept by the finder—though it is commendable to attempt returning it—and it may certainly be used.³ In a typical scenario, however, the owner assumes that the finder will return it and doesn't despair, thus the sefer may not be kept. Yet, shuls can put up a sign that anything left around for a while gets sent to geniza and then those items may be taken after the allotted time.⁴

If the sefer was purposely left in shul and isn't lost to the owner, the question becomes whether it may be used without permission. It is generally assumed that a person appreciates when a fellow Jew uses something of his to perform a mitzvah. For this reason, one may use another's tallis or tefillin occasionally without explicit permission if the owner is not around. (If the owner is in the vicinity, plans to use them soon, or is generally particular with his articles, one must ask him.) Yet, the articles must be put back as he found them—tefillin wrapped and tallis folded (excluding Shabbos)—for otherwise the owner might disapprove of his actions and his mitzvah will be accompanied by sin.⁵

This assumption is only when the article won't depreciate in value, but if it may get ruined through use, one requires explicit permission. Halacha therefore rules that a sefer may not be used without permission since the owner may be concerned that his seforim will get ruined. While some hold that just checking something in the sefer is permissible, the Alter Rebbe holds that it may not be used at all.⁶

It would seem therefore that one may not use seforim left in shul.⁷ However, some write that this concern doesn't apply to standard seforim like siddurim and chumashim which aren't expensive in the present age, as well as sturdy seforim that aren't ruined by regular usage.⁸ Furthermore, if one leaves a siddur in shul where it will probably get used, it is equivalent to stipulating that people may use it, and this can surely be relied upon when there are no other copies of the sefer available.⁹

1. שו"ע ר"י סי' ק"ג (חושב שמא יקרא בהם הרבה עד שיקרעו). ערו"ש או"ח סי' י"ד סק"ג (לעין בעלמא נוהגין היתר).
2. ראה פרי"ג או"ח סי' י"ד משב"ז ס"ק ז. הועתק במשנ"ב סקט"ז (העולם נוהגין שלוקחין בלא דעת בעליו. ואינו יודע היתר לזה ומאי שנא סידור מספרים).
3. ליקוטי מהר"ח סדר ברכות השחר. מקור חיים או"ח סי' ט"ט י"ד (ספרים זולים). ובמשנ"ב עוז והדר סי' תרמ"ט הערה ע"ד (ספרים חזקים).
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5. שו"ע ר"י סי' ק"ג (חושב שמא יקרא בהם הרבה עד שיקרעו). ערו"ש או"ח סי' י"ד סק"ג (לעין בעלמא נוהגין היתר).
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REB MOSHE YITZCHAK OF YASI

Reb Moshe Yitzchak (in some sources: Yitzchak Moshe) of Yasi was of the younger chassidim of the Alter Rebbe and later a chossid of the Mitteler Rebbe. He was very mekushar to the Mitteler Rebbe, and the Mitteler Rebbe said that Reb Moshe Yitzchak was one of the three chassidim in whom he fulfilled Hashem's true intention ("ehr hot oisgefirt di kavana Elyona"). After the histalkus of the Mitteler Rebbe, Reb Moshe Yitzchak became a chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek and the Tzemach Tzedek would recite ma'amorim for him in yechidus.

The Tzemach Tzedek once asked the son of Reb Moshe Yitzchak if he remembered anything about his father. The son shared a story to which he did not know the meaning.

"One Friday afternoon, when my father was returning from the mikvah, he was walking on the street when he suddenly looked up to the sky and became very excited. He asked to sit and a chair was brought from a nearby store. Bystanders thought that the hot bath had hurt him and they asked if he wanted a doctor. 'No need,' Reb Moshe replied, 'Just leave me alone'. He sat

for about half an hour, leaning on his hands with his eyes closed. He then looked once more at the sky, got up, and carried on his way. To this day, we do not know what it was all about."

The Tzemach Tzedek inquired about the date of the event, and the Rebbe started to laugh at the answer. The Tzemach Tzedek explained, "At that time was the Z'lobiner chassunah (the famous chassunah of the grandchildren of the Alter Rebbe and Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev). While under the chuppah, the Alter Rebbe said the ma'amar "Ki Al Kol Kovod Chuppah". All the malochim gathered in shomayim to hear the ma'amar. Your father merited to hear the ma'amar as well..."

At the time of the arrest of the Alter Rebbe, all the chassidim were busy trying various ways to save the Rebbe. Among other things, the chossid Reb Moshe Yitzchak bought potatoes and began making mashke from them. He explained, "It is beyond any doubt that the Rebbe will soon go out of jail and there will be a great and wondrous geulah. There will be a great need for mashke, so I am starting on it already..."

A Moment with The Rebbe



JEWISH PRIDE

Harav Leibel Schapiro of Miami, Florida relates:

During the 5710's (1950's), the Rebbe lived in an apartment on the corner of President St. and New York Ave. There was a certain Yid, not a Lubavitcher, who would often meet the Rebbe at the corner, and the Rebbe would always bow his head slightly to him as a greeting.

Once, as this Yid was watching, a gentile l'havdil greeted the Rebbe. The Rebbe stopped, returned the greeting with a few words, and

continued into the building.

This Yid was mystified as well as hurt. Why would this goy deserve words of blessing, while he merely received a polite nod? This troubled him and he approached the Rebbe himself with his difficulty.

The Rebbe smiled and said, "I have never in my life lowered my head before a goy. However, since I didn't want to ignore a human being, my only option was to exchange a few words with him."