



Reb Yosef 'Kol-Bo'

As the Chassidic 'movement' gained followers and popularity, the Misnagdim desperately tried to put a stop to it. Meetings were held, plans were conceived, and webs of lies were publicized—all in order to crush the 'cult' that was spreading like wildfire.

At one such meeting, it was agreed that they would proclaim a public fast day, to enlist in Heavenly mercy. With this decided, they now had to determine which Selichos to say—what was most similar to the troubles they were contending? Present at the gathering was Reb Avraham Sheina's, a young but brilliant scholar, who immediately responded, "let us say the Selicha: אנשי" "אמנה אבדנו."

One would assume from this incident that he was a staunch opponent and nothing would change his mind, however, Reb Avraham's antagonism did not last very long.

Reb Avraham would learn regularly with a young man fluent in Torah as he was. His chavrusah, however, held one advantage over him; he would always learn with great enthusiasm, something Reb Avraham was sorely lacking. This matter bothered him greatly, until he finally asked the secret to his chavrusah's enthusiasm.

"If you would hear the Tikkun Chatzos of Reb Yosef Kol-Bo," replied his chavrusah, "then you would have a Chavrusah like I do."

Curious, Reb Avraham embraced his friend's suggestion, and, as predicted, he was greatly influenced by what he witnessed. It dawned on him that perhaps

the Chassidim were not as he originally thought; perhaps they were truly of great stature.

Reb Avraham embarked on a complete turnaround, and became a fervent chossid, eventually marrying the Alter Rebbe's daughter, Rochel.

This is one of many examples of the effect Reb Yosef Kol-Bo had on Misnagdim, bringing them closer to the ways of Chassidus.

At first Reb Yosef himself was a staunch opponent of the new 'cult' that had only recently sprung up. It would take three encounters with the Alter Rebbe until he would be completely won over.

Reb Yosef 'Kol-Bo'

Reb Yosef of Shklov was renowned as an incredible Gaon, and although known by most as Reb Yossela from Shklov, his contemporaries referred to him in regard of his genius; he was called Reb Yosef 'Kol-Bo'—Reb Yosef who contained everything.

In a sicha, the Frierdiker Rebbe described his prominence:

"The Gaon Reb Yosef 'Kol-Bo' was already renowned throughout Lithuania and Minsk. Even in Vilna they had crowned him with the title '*Morona V'rabono*'. His greatness was also well known by the Ashkanazik scholars, for he had encountered them on his travels to the Leipzig fair. This was despite his young age, not having yet reached forty."

[On another occasion, he was described as one who has all the sugyos of Gemorah open in front of him].

Reb Yosef was exceedingly wealthy, and at the same time, a complete Yorei

Shomayim—not permitting his material eminence to interfere with his spiritual qualities; withstanding many challenges during his business trips. He truly fulfilled Chazal's statement, "Torah and greatness in the same place."

A Deep Lesson in Bittul

Notwithstanding all his remarkable qualities, Rav Yosef suffered one character flaw; he recognized his importance and prominence, and did not shy away from sharing this knowledge with others.

He would learn in a loud, powerful voice, with great enthusiasm, as though he was learning with someone else, even if he was alone. And when involved in learning, all knew not to interrupt or disturb him with a question. Only when he himself paused was one 'permitted' to inquire of him.

It was not uncommon to hear him mutter, "Rashi, how can you say that is the way to explain the Gemorah if you write differently elsewhere? Rather this must be your intention." This was his learning style for the other Rishonim as well.

Thus, upon being exposed to the truth of Chassidus, it was this particular area where he understood and appreciated the difference between Chassidim and Misnagdim, between Bittul and Yeshus.

The First Encounter

The first time Reb Yosef met the Alter Rebbe he did not know who the Alter Rebbe was.

This incident occurred when the Alter Rebbe traveled to Shklov without revealing his identity.

The Frieddiker Rebbe related the details of this monumental encounter in the name of Reb Pinchas Reitzes, who witnessed the incident first-hand:

One bitter evening, deep into the Russian winter of the year 5531, Reb Yosef 'Kol-Bo' sat in the *Perushim's* shul deeply engrossed in a sugya. In middle of his learning, a young man walked in, a bag hung across his shoulder, and looking to warm himself by the fireplace, the strains of his journey evident in his weary stride. Reb Pesach, who was also learning in the Shul, quickly approached the guest and greeted him with a 'Sholom Aleichem'. A few others joined him and a scholarly discussion ensued.

Reb Yosef lifted his eyes from his Sefer and noticed a group of people surrounding one individual in heated conversation. Curious as to what they were discussing, he came closer and heard them discussing a certain sugya. The discussion lasted many hours and they enjoyed it immensely, Reb Yosef most of all.

Reb Pinchas Reitzes was part of 'the early risers,' a group of men who would come to the Shul at 3am to begin learning. That night, when he entered the shul, he encountered an unusually large crowd. Around a table in the southern side of the Shul sat Reb Yosef and Reb Zalman Yechiel, the 'Magid Shiur'. Surrounding them were most of the people who would stay up and learn until midnight, and next to the table sat a stranger, who was listening to Reb Zalman delivering a lengthy explanation on a certain sugya.

When he had finished his Pilpul, the guest turned to him and said, "This is a sound Pilpul and has many chidushim, but I am accustomed to learn this sugya differently." And he began to explain the sugya with astonishing clarity, bringing light to the many intricacies of the matter.

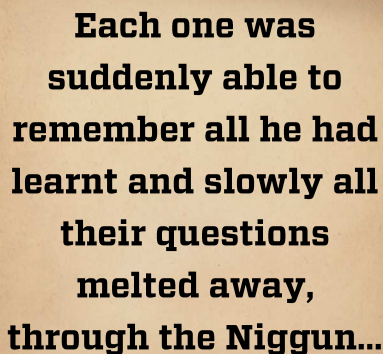
Reb Yosef, awed by the explanation, concluded that this had to be the true way of understanding the sugya.

The anonymous guest refused to an-

swer questions about his identity, merely saying that he was not a Rav, but rather someone who simply sits and learns.

The following day, around Mincha time, the Alter Rebbe left town, his identity remaining a mystery.

It was only later that the town's scholars discovered it was the Alter Rebbe who had impressed them so.



Each one was suddenly able to remember all he had learnt and slowly all their questions melted away, through the Niggun...

The Second Encounter

The second time Reb Yosef met the Alter Rebbe was in an entirely different setting. Again, they discussed Torah, but this time they were alone, and also discussed chassidus.

During their conversation, Reb Yosef mentioned the Baal Shem Tov in disparaging terms. Hearing this, the Alter Rebbe said, "You should know that a revelation of the Baal Shem Tov is greater than a revelation of Eliyohu Hanovie."

Reb Yosef was shocked, and his surprise only grew when the Alter Rebbe claimed his statement was a clear Gemorah; he knew the entire Gemorah off by heart, but this he had missed?

The Alter Rebbe explained a passage of Gemorah to support his claim, and similarly clarified why the same applies to himself.

This incident further warmed Reb Yosef towards Chassidus, but it would take one more encounter before he would truly embrace it.

The Third Encounter: An Unusual Way of Answering a Question

Once, in the early years of his nesius, the Alter Rebbe visited the city of Shklov. The Gaonim of the city, aware of his fluency in Torah, turned to him with their questions. However, surprisingly, the Alter Rebbe refused to answer the inquiries, but agreed to deliver a public address in Shul, and answer the questions then.

Ascending the bima, the Alter Rebbe exclaimed, "Shall I say Torah? It is better that I sing a niggun, as the mishna states "kol balei shir..." – a niggun causes the angel's to arise and descend." The Alter Rebbe then sang the 'Daled Bavos' with great dveikus.

The Beis Medrash fell silent as the Alter Rebbe intoned each stanza twice, and the fourth stanza even more times. Watching him sing with such devotion, the people seemed transported, and the Gaonim of Shklov felt connected with the deeper levels of their Neshamos. Each one was suddenly able to remember all he had learnt, and slowly their questions melted away; through the niggun, the Alter Rebbe had opened for them the wellsprings of knowledge.

From then on they would refer to this niggun as the 'Mattan Torah' niggun.

Reb Yosef, who himself had four complicated questions, saw the solutions play out before his eyes as the niggun was sung over and over.

Reb Yosef later admitted that he had felt like a small child at the time.

That same year he joined the ranks of the Chassidim, bringing many colleagues to the Alter Rebbe, and showing them the truth of Chassidus. Among them was; Reb Baruch Mordechai of Bobroisk; Reb Shlomo Rafoel's; Reb Avraham Sheina's (as brought above).

1. See Beis Rebbi in Hebrew page 59 and on.

2. 25 Shvat 5696, and Likkutei Dibburim.

3. Sefer Hasichos 5704

4. Sefer HaSichos 5703 page 144. This story was featured in *A Chassidisher Derher*, Vol. 1 issue 19, Alter Rebbe's Niggunim Part 2.