



In honor of Yud Tes Kislev, Rosh Hashonah L'Chassidus, we present the following fascinating story of how a Yid participating in Shiurei Chassidus was transformed entirely, as the words of Chassidus permeated his soul. Insightful and intriguing!

Reb Meir Blizinsky, a noted chossid known for his ability to articulate the profound teachings of *Chassidus* in simple terms, gave many well attended *shiurim* in *Chassidus* in Tel Aviv. One Shabbos morning, an elderly and obviously non-observant Jew entered the shul, sat down at the table and listened intently to the lesson being taught. When it was over, he asked what time the lesson would begin next week, stood up, left the *shul* and removed his *yarmulkah*.

The same thing happened the following week. However, at the end of the third week's lesson, he turned to the person whom he happened to be sitting next to and asked him a question concerning the topic that had been taught at the *shiur*. The person answered to the best of his ability, but his explanation did not satisfy the inquirer who said so and left.

The man was offended and loudly criticized the new-comer to his friends. "That guy doesn't even stay for *Shacharis*. He is obviously not religious and he is telling me, someone who has been studying *Chassidus* for quite a few years, that I don't know what I am talking about. Some nerve!!"

Reb Meir heard the man's anger and realized it was his responsibility to make sure the situation did not deteriorate. So, approaching the offended individual, he said, "Next week we will change places. I will sit in your usual place so that if he comes again, he will pester me with his questions and leave you alone."

Sure enough, the following week, the new-comer entered and took his usual place. When the lesson was over, he turned to Reb Meir, who was now sitting next to him, and asked a question.

Reb Meir patiently answered it, using words and definitions that would help a new-comer to *Chassidus* understand the Chassidic concept. This time the man said, "That is a thought worth contemplating."

Reb Meir and the new-comer then introduced themselves. Reb Meir was shocked! The new-comer was one of the leaders of the *Shomer Hatzuir*, the most non-religious and anti-religious Zionists in *Eretz Yisroel*. He was also a close confidant of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, and here he was coming to learn *Chassidus* and asking questions. Without divulging his thoughts, he said, "You are welcome to come again." And so the man left.

Over the next few weeks Reb Meir came to appreciate his new student's thoughtful questions and insights. He was obviously an intellectual of the highest caliber, a deep thinker, who was developing a keen understanding of *Chassidus*, even though he was presently not observant. So, at the end of the following week's class he said to him, "If you want we can learn privately. This way you can learn *Chassidus* in an orderly fashion. We will begin by discussing some of the fundamental aspects and then develop and expand upon them."

The new student eagerly accepted this proposition and thanked Reb Meir for his thoughtfulness. They decided that the best time for both of them would be early Shabbos morning at 6:00 a.m. in Reb Meir's house, before Reb Meir gave his regular *shiur* to the public in the shul at 8:00 a.m..

Early Shabbos morning, the new-comer arrived, listened and asked a few probing questions. Reb Meir, who was blessed with the power of speech and was a master of

clarity, answered them all in a manner the man understood. Once, after weeks and months had passed, Reb Meir gently broached the topic of his student's observance. "You now understand the significance of fulfilling a mitzvah in actuality. So why don't you begin observing just one *mitzvah*?"

The man didn't respond. However, the following week, when Reb Meir stood up from the table to bring him a drink of tea or coffee, the man took out a cigarette and began smoking. Reb Meir was flabbergasted at this blatant insult, but continued the lesson without mentioning anything.

Their learning continued for another six months and on yet another occasion, the man smoked a cigarette. This was a declaration; don't even try to change me. At this point, some of the chassidim who had noticed this as they passed by his house, went to Reb Meir and said, "Don't you see that you are wasting your time with him. He has no respect. You see he openly smokes in your house on Shabbos. Stop wasting your time with him!"

Reb Meir did not know what to do. On the one hand, as long as the Jew was coming to learn and was demonstrating an interest in learning, who knew how this learning might influence him? However, one could not ignore the fact that he was brazenly demonstrating that he had no interest in becoming observant in any way. He was definitely refusing to be religious. Maybe his friends were correct. Maybe he should stop these private lessons and utilize the time in a more productive way.

Not knowing what to do, Reb Meir decided to ask the Rebbe, noting in the letter he wrote who the student was. The Rebbe replied, "You should continue learning with this individual as before. In addition, be careful to make sure not to mention to him in any way whatsoever that he should observe any *mitzvah*."

Receiving this clear answer, Reb Meir

FORCED FROM WITHIN

continued the lessons, making sure not to say anything that could be interpreted as a request for him to undertake the observance of a *mitzvah*. A few months later, after the conclusion of the lesson, the man turned to Reb Meir and asked, “How does one write a letter to the Rebbe?” Seeing Reb Meir’s puzzled face and his bewilderment, the man

observing a *mitzvah*, I responded disrespectfully and blatantly smoked a cigarette in your house on Shabbos. There is no way that my intellectual pursuit is going to change my life style.

After your mentioning a few more times that I should begin doing a *mitzvah*, I decided that the next time you mentioned it

journey. What should I do? Should I begin observing commandments? That would be proof that my conduct throughout my entire life until now was false and wrong! Should I stop our learning? That would be an admission of defeat, that I could not stand up to the truth.”

We don’t know exactly what he wrote in the letter, nor do we have a copy of the Rebbe’s response to him. However, we do know that he became a *shomer Torah u’mitzvos*.¹



Reb Meir Blizinsky Farbrenging (R) with Reb Mendel Futefas (L)

Whenever the *mashpia* Reb Yoel Kahan related this story he would conclude; “And this was speaking about an intellectual, a person who had made a firm resolution that the *Chassidus* he was learning would not influence nor affect him. Nevertheless, since he studied in earnest, his strong resolve fell by the wayside. He was so inspired that he had the courage and strength to change his whole way of life.

“How much more so for us, who want to be inspired and uplifted by *Chassidus*? Without question, if we learn it properly, it will definitely affect and inspire us. The only requisite is that we learn *Chassidus* in earnest, not just say and repeat some words. Perhaps you learned *Chassidus* for some years and know some *hemshechim*, but did you delve into it trying to understand it properly?”

Reprinted from a booklet due to be distributed by United Lubavitcher Yeshiva (Ocean Parkway), and written by Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon.

1. In a *sicha* during Sukkos 5717 (1956), the Rebbe spoke about the importance of stopping to be on the defensive; rather we should begin the offensive of bringing the message of yiddishkeit to the non-religious people. After *yom tov* he instructed Reb Shmuel Blizinsky, one of the chassidim who came from *Eretz Yisroel*, that upon his return, he should bring some *kos shel brocha* to this Jew and review for him the *sicha* that was said.

After hearing the *sicha*, the person said the Rebbe is right, now is an appropriate time to bring this message to my former associates, and he was instrumental in arranging that those non and even anti religious *kibbutzim* hosted Chabad families to experience a Shabbos.

said, “I don’t think anyone, including you my dear friend, besides the Rebbe can respond and answer this question of mine.

“As you know by now, I am a renowned professor and writer for a non-religious newspaper. I enjoy studying various philosophies and have studied many over the years. I said to myself, you have studied many heathen philosophies. Why not study those associated with Judaism? So I decided to study Chassidic philosophy and that is how I came to the *shul* around a year ago. However, before I began, I made a firm decision: This study, just as all of my previous studies, would remain academic and would not influence or interfere with my way of life. I am not religious and will remain so. That is the reason that, when you asked me to begin

would be the last. I would no longer come to study with you, even though I really enjoy it as an intellectual exercise. You obviously understood that yourself and thankfully never brought it up again.

The problem now is, notwithstanding this firm decision of mine, I feel that it is beginning to affect me. While I have not begun to observe any *mitzvahs*, when I do something the Torah prohibits, I have begun to feel a little uncomfortable. This week when I went to my favorite restaurant, I had a startling thought. Maybe I should try the kosher one across the street. Since I never had these doubts and feelings before; it must be a consequence of our study.

So now I am asking the Rebbe to guide me on an intellectual level and help me in this