

# Captivated!

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**I**n his first Maamor of Bosi Legani on Yud Shevat 5711, the Rebbe laid out the mission statement of Dor Hashvii; in virtue of our generation being the seventh from the Alter Rebbe, we have to complete what he had begun – making Elokus a reality in our world.

Though the job is yet to be finished, the world has seen considerable change. Through the Rebbe's work over the years, the world is far more refined than it was before.

The Rebbe, through his sichos and maamorim, bridged the gap between the spiritual and the material, bringing the light of Torah closer to all Yidden. He simplified the complexities in understanding Hashem's relationship with the world, and translated the deepest concepts into a practical language.

As is true with the Rebbe's every gesture, his maamorim spell a revolution in the making, the footsteps of Moshiach are clearly audible in his teachings. What is only a taste now will then be reality; we will hear and see Elokus.

Until then, however, we must dedicate ourselves to learning the maamorim, with their every nuance and subtlety. Through the study of Chassidus we invite Hashem into our lives and, although we may not turn saintly and pious overnight, we are given perspective of what is true and real. Learning Chassidus trains us to find Hashem within our being and, independent of how much this discovery affects us, it leaves an important imprint – once we taste the truth, we never forget it.

## **A DEBATE IN THE HEAVENS**

An old anecdote often heard among Chassidim has it that the sun and the wind once challenged one another to see who could compel a man to take off his coat first.

The wind began blowing with great force but the man pulled his coat closer, attempting to stave off the blustering wind. Determined to win, the wind persisted, but the

man only held his coat tighter.

The wind retreated and the sun arrived for her turn.

The sun began shining and the man, growing uncomfortable in the increasing heat, unbuttoned his coat and took it off.

The parable conveys the core difference between the teachings of Chassidus and Mussar. When you tell a person he must wrestle with evil indefinitely, he's likely to close himself in and refuse to negotiate with it. When, however, the light of truth shines, one naturally feels, albeit in a distant way, that there's a truth, and that already changes him.

It takes deep commitment and work to internalize this feeling, yet the mere diligent study of Chassidus is a powerful dose of exposure to it.

## **BASIC UNDERSTANDING**

Moreover, with regards to Hiskashrus too, the first step begins with understanding Chassidus.

Comprehending the true depth of a maamer requires commitment and honesty. We must imagine we are learning with someone else (or better yet, actually learn with a chavrusa), and verbalize each word and detail of the maamer. Each paragraph should be questioned for its purpose; how does it add on the previous paragraphs, and what does it teach us that we didn't already know? When learning an answer of a maamer, we must ask ourselves with honesty; did I truly understand the question in the first place? For of what value is an answer if there is no question?

Similarly, navigating through a maamer can prove difficult; there are many side points and questions that can easily lead to exhausting tangents and veer the learner off track. We must bear in mind that a maamer is like a structure where each brick is one part of its formation; when learning, we must find the central theme in the maamer and stay true to its course.

The Rebbe once explained the importance of gaining a thorough understanding of what

In the spiritually dark times of our generation, are we capable of appreciating and internalizing Chassidus as it demands we should?

*Adapted from a treatise by the Rebbe's Chief Chozer,  
Rabbi Yoel Kahn*



one learns. Because man was created with a balance of emotion and intellect, he maintains a general composure, and thus, to be influenced from an outside source, man must connect with it first. If we only study on a superficial level we remain detached and indifferent from the subject, but when we probe deeper and build a genuine understanding, the concepts become real to us – in a way that we can comprehend them, and develop a feeling for them.

#### **SO LOW?!**

Reb Shaul Ber Zislin<sup>1</sup>, the first alumnus of Tomchei Temimim to be appointed by the Rebbe Rashab as a Mashpia in the Yeshiva, once recounted a conversation of several chassidim of the Mittlerer Rebbe. Discussing how dark the golus would be before the arrival of Moshiach, one of the Chassidim warned that Chassidus would be learned just like Gemoro – as an intellectual pursuit devoid of spirit or feeling. Hearing this, his fellow Chassidim paled. “That bad? Will people really learn Chassidus as though it were Gemoro?”

The Chossid nodded, confirming their fears.

So refined were they that this was their wildest nightmare.

This story is a stark reminder of our responsibility today. Although we are not like the Chassidim of this story, we nevertheless face the same goal. We may not have the genius and intellectual capabilities of the ‘olden days’, but neither is it expected of us. But what is expected is a dedication in learning Chassidus; to be honest and serious about our learning, be willing to invest our time and effort, and try to truly understand.

In order to have true Hiskashrus to the Rebbe, we need to learn his Sichos and Maamorim and interpret their every nuance and subtlety.

This is what the Rebbe wanted of us.

#### **THINKING CHASSIDUS**

Some twenty years ago, I hosted a guest who came to be by the Rebbe in honor of Yud Beis Tammuz. We started speaking and he told me how he had become frum and close to Lubavitch.

“In 5701, there were many ‘Rebbs’ and Rabbis in America who had come from war-torn Europe. They would bless their congregants and make appeals, to which everyone would respond generously.

“One day, I read in the newspaper that a new Rebbe had recently arrived – the Lubavitcher [Friediker] Rebbe. But the article said that he wasn’t like any of the other Rebbs. He spoke about the impending arrival of Moshiach and of the necessity to keep Shabbos.

“How weird!” I thought.

“Out of curiosity, I decided to fly to New York and see this ‘strange’ Rebbe. I arrived in 770, went into Yechidus, and what do you know, the Rebbe doesn’t ask me to make a donation at all! A strange Rebbe indeed!

“The Rebbe just gave me a brocho and since then I kept on coming back.

“After his passing, my visits continued and slowly the Rebbe influenced me to start keeping Shabbos. Everything else just fol-

lowed.”

He paused before continuing.

“Some people promise you rewards for keeping Shabbos and guarantee you to lose nothing from it: I received no guarantees nor promises. I actually lost out from keeping Shabbos; my busiest day in the week used to be Shabbos, so I lost a lot of money, but who needs money anyway? I’m by the Rebbe for Yud Beis Tammuz! I’m happy!”

My guest carried on to tell me that over his frequent visits the Rebbe would often speak to him and began demanding that he learn Chassidus. “It’s all good and well, but you’ve got to learn Chassidus,” the Rebbe said.

“Boruch Hashem, I am now fluent in five Maamorim by heart. One of them is the Maamor ‘Sholom Rav’<sup>2</sup>, by the Frierdiker Rebbe – wich tells the story of the Baal Shem Tov, when he visited the Porush – and I know it by heart!” He bragged goodheartedly.

I sat in front of him amazed. “Here is a man,” I thought to myself, “who cannot even read Hebrew (he was only able to learn in Yiddish), and he’s excited about Chassidus. He’s alive!”

Certainly those weren’t the deepest Maamorim, but he spoke about it with such fervor, such passion, that I was ashamed of myself! His business responsibilities didn’t allow him to think Chassidus every morning before Shacharis, but every Shabbos without fail, he would meditate through a different Maamor.

The idea struck me; surely this fellow wouldn’t compare to Reb Gershon Ber Pahar as far as depth and intelligence were concerned, but on the other hand, his whole being was taken over by Chassidus. And all I could think of was: “What did this mean to me?”

1. Reb Shaul Ber was born in Krāslava, Latvia, in the year 5641. He served as the Mashpia and Menahel of Tomchei Temimim in the city of Szedrin for many years and was the Rabbi of several towns. In 5694, he moved to Eretz Yisroel and passed away in 5724, at 83 years old.

2. Sefer Hamaamorim – Yiddish pp. 215.