

The Life of a Chossid

Reb Zalman Zeizmer

Reb Zalman Zeizmer was a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe and the Mittlerer Rebbe. He was born in Vilna circa 5523. He served as a rav in Deneburg and in Krislaviva.¹

He had a tremendous grasp of Chassidus, and his *avoda* was amazing and awe-inspiring. He was *mekarev* Reb Hillel Paritcher to the Mittlerer Rebbe, and Reb Hillel Paritcher said of him, “Before him, there were none like him, and after him, I have not seen any like him—an *oved Hashem* with mind and heart. His heart was like a lion’s and his knowledge of the depths of G-dly light was wide-reaching.”²

“When I was young,” Reb Zalman Zeizmer related, “I learned by the wizened *gaon*, Reb Elimelech Shaul in Polotzk. When I was 16, about four years before he passed away, he revealed to me that he had been to the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid many times, and learned *b’chavrusa* with the righteous rabbonim, Reb Yisroel and Reb Ezriel of Polotzk. From then on, he taught me the ways of *avodas Hashem* according to the Baal Shem Tov’s Torah.

“In 5543, my teacher Reb Elimelech Shaul passed away, but before he passed away, he instructed me to go to Liozna to the Alter Rebbe, and in 5544 I was accepted into the third *cheder*³ of the Alter Rebbe.

“From time to time, I would see Reb Elimelech Shaul in a dream, and he would tell me words of Torah and give me direction in *avodas Hashem*.

“When the Tanya was published, one night I saw Reb Elimelech Shaul in a dream, and he told me, ‘You should know that the book of Tanya of your Rebbe—with its 53 *perakim*—corresponds to the 53 *parshiyos* of the Torah. Each *perek* corresponds to a *parsha*. And just as *Parshas Bereishis* is a general *parsha*, so too the introduction to Tanya is general, and corresponds to *Parshas Bereishis*.’ And I awoke.

“From then on, I began learning one *perek* of Tanya each week, on every day of the week, just as one learns the weekly *parsha*.

“When the Alter Rebbe emerged from the danger [i.e. the imprisonment -Ed.] of 5559⁴, a call went out among the elder *chassidim* to study a *perek* of Tanya each week, just like the weekly *parsha*.”⁵

When Reb Zalman wished to bring himself to great emotion to enhance his *avodas Hashem*, he would tell the following story: In his city there lived a Yid who was a tremendous *lamdan* with good *midos*, but he had no knowledge of Chassidus. This Yid once asked him, “What did Chassidus accomplish?” Reb Zalman answered, “Chassidus elevated logic over emotion.”

This *lamdan* then traveled to the Alter Rebbe and asked the same question. The Alter Rebbe replied, “Animals also have emotions, but they are instinctive. A raven is cruel and

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 שיקויים בה
 ברכת כ"ק אדמו"ר אליה
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“BEFORE HIM THERE WERE NONE LIKE HIM, AND AFTER HIM I HAVE NOT SEEN ANY LIKE HIM: AN OVED HASHEM WITH MIND AND HEART. HIS HEART WAS LIKE A LION’S AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEPTHS OF G-DLY LIGHT WAS WIDE-REACHING.”

an eagle is merciful. But human emotions are based upon logic. In truth, human emotions should also have been instinctive, but, as Chazal tell us, Hashem wanted to give the Yidden merits, so He increased [Torah and *mitzvos*]. So too, Hashem wanted to give the Yidden “merits” [i.e. opportunity] for *avoda*, therefore the emotions are based upon logic, not part of their nature; they need to be worked on.”

When the Yid heard this, he contemplated it, and realized that with all his *avoda* throughout his life, he had only attained *midos* like those an animal has. This caused him to faint. When he regained consciousness, he asked the Alter Rebbe further, “*Nu*, and what is Chassidus?” Until then, he had only heard what Chassidus was not. The Alter Rebbe answered, “Chassidus is ‘*Shema Yisroel*.’ ‘*Shema*’ stands for ‘*Se’u marom eineichem*’—‘Lift your eyes On High.’⁶ The word used is ‘*Marom*’—‘On High;’ not ‘*Shamayim*’—‘Heaven.’ As Ibn Ezra explains, ‘*Marom*’ means higher and higher—to reach a level that is higher than logic, and to understand this itself logically, as the *possuk* continues ‘And see who created these.’”

And with this story, Reb Zalman Zezmer would be brought to great emotion.⁷

After the Mitteler Rebbe passed away, a number of elder Chassidim took upon themselves the responsibility of encouraging Chassidim to be *mekusharim*. They split up the areas in which Chassidim lived, and Reb Zalman Zezmer

took responsibility for the Minsk region, as well as Borisov and its surrounding area.

The Rebbe Rashab told the Frierdiker Rebbe that this is true *hiskashrus*—to encourage Chassidim to be *mekusharim* even though the elder *chassidim* knew that they themselves had not yet attained the level of *hiskashrus* that they should have.⁸

There were two classes of Chassidim of the Alter Rebbe, both of which were *maskilim* and *ovdim*. For example, Reb Aizik Homeler and Reb Zalman Zezmer.

Reb Aizik began with *haskalah* and eventually arrived at *avoda*, while Reb Zalman began with *avoda*.

Haskalah is cold; *avoda* is warm. The difference between the two [classes] is that for a *maskil*, the coolness of *haskalah* is felt even during *avoda*. For an *oved*, the overflowing emotions are felt even during *haskalah*.⁹ **T**

1. *Beis Rebbi* part 1 chapter 26 p. 140.
2. *Beis Rebbi* part 1 chapter 26 p. 140.
3. The Alter Rebbe’s *talmidim* were divided according to their talents into several *chadorim*, with the first being the highest.
4. The story of Yud-Tes Kislev.
5. *Reshimos of the Rebbe Rayatz* p. 265.
6. Yishayahu 40, 26.
7. *Sefer Hasichos 5701* p. 34.
8. *Sefer Hasichos 5688-5691* p. 245.
9. *Sefer Hasichos 5709* p. 313.