

“Do It!”

“המעשה הוא העיקר”



“המעשה הוא העיקר”

With these words, the Rebbe concluded hundreds upon hundreds of lengthy and deep explanations, whether of a mystifying story in the Midrash, a puzzling piece of Rashi on the *parsha*, or even a disturbing occurrence in the recent news. It all boiled down to one thing only: action! What lesson can we take from the above to implement in our *avodas Hashem*, and how are we going to act on it?

Over the years, this statement has become known as a trademark in the Rebbe's *sichos* and a hallmark of the Rebbe's approach.

Of course, the source of this statement is the *psak din* of the Mishnah in Avos:

“לא המדרש עיקר אלא המעשה”

“Not study, but the deed is the essential thing.”¹

The truth is, much of *Toras haChassidus* and its “*Torah*

Shebiksav”—the *Sefer HaTanya*, has come to impart this very point.

As the Alter Rebbe explains² in great detail: The fact that a *neshama* comes down to this world is an immense decline (“ירידה גדולה”) from the place it enjoyed on high. No matter how high a level it will reach through *avoda* in this world, it will never come close to the connection it had with Hashem before coming down here. The only reason the *neshama* has to make this long arduous journey is in order to refine the body and the surrounding physical world through Torah and mitzvos. The underlying reason being that Hashem desires a *dira b'tachtonim*—a dwelling specifically down here, in this lowly world.

This idea was further developed by the Alter Rebbe in many *maamarim* and letters, especially in Iggeres Hakodesh where he extolls the notion of actionable mitzvos—most notably the mitzvah of tzedakah.

But the real breakthrough came from a letter the Alter Rebbe wrote shortly before his *histalkus*, in the village of Piyenna.³

The letter was printed in Iggeres Hakodesh *siman* 20, and contains the groundbreaking idea that:

מהותו ועצמותו של המאציל ב”ה שמציאותו הוא מעצמותו. . הוא לבדו בכחו ויכלתו לברוא יש מאין ואפס המוחלט ממש בלי שום עילה וסיבה אחרת קודמת ליש הזה...

Only *Atzmus u'Mehus* itself, the very essence of Hashem which is not caused or preceded by any other entity, *chas veshalom*, can create the physical world which feels itself as a self-sustaining entity without any causation in sight.

This idea is life-changing. The Frierdiker Rebbe describes in great detail in a *sicha*⁴ how this *vort* changed Chassidim's perception and brought a previously unfelt excitement in fulfilling mitzvos with physical objects in this mundane world:

לע"נ
 מרת רחל לאה
 בת הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' ניסן ע"ה
 פעוונער
 נלב"ע כ"ו טבת ה'תשע"ג
 ת"נ צ"ב ה'
 נדפס ע"י
 משפחתה שיחיו



Until then it was understood that mitzvos were important because Hashem's desire for a *dira b'tachonim* can only be fulfilled in the physical world, but this idea did not give any credence to *gashmius* in and of itself. But in this new letter, the Alter Rebbe explains that the *gashmius* itself is precious, because by elevating the *gashmius* of this world through Torah and mitzvos we have a direct line connecting us with *Atzmus u'Mehus*, more than any spiritual pursuits could reach.

In truth, the Rebbe points out that this premise of "*hamaaseh hu ha'ikker*" is really a foundational concept in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov:

Many people are prone to believe that Chassidus came to overemphasize the role of the heart in serving Hashem. They take the statement of "רחמנא לבא בעי"—Hashem wants heart—to mean that the main thing is to have the right feelings and intentions in the heart. This is obviously mistaken.

In letters marking 200 years since the *histalkus* of the Baal Shem Tov, the Rebbe repeatedly asked that this notion be disputed:

The most important point to emphasize is to reeducate the mistaken who claim that the whole of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings was only about רחמנא לבא בעי—chas v'shalom, contrary to the clear ruling of the Mishnah that

המעשה הוא העיקר, which leads them to all types of mistaken beliefs.

We must emphasize that the Baal Shem Tov would not bend even one iota from the most minute detail of a mitzvah d'rabbanan. It is only that on top of that, he also stressed the importance of 'kavana'. Moreover, he taught that each and every single Yid (no matter what his or her intellectual capabilities may be) has the ability to be at one with Hashem through Torah and mitzvos...⁵

In this vein, the Rebbe cited the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov

countless times (as the Rebbe once remarked: More than one thousand times!): Every single thing that a Yid hears or sees, must teach him a lesson in *avodas Hashem*. This even includes every concept in Torah—every thing that a person learns must have a practical implication in strengthening his observance of Torah and mitzvos.

This is what Chassidus Chabad is all about: Allowing the intellect to understand the deepest concepts of *Elokus*, and from there to affect the feelings of the heart, and to manifest it in tangible action.⁶

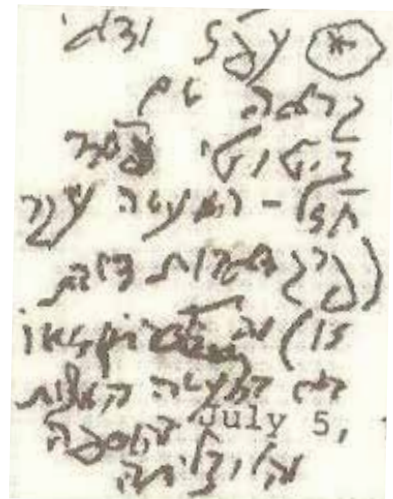
What's in Likkutei Sichos?


In the year 5748*, a woman wrote to the Rebbe that she felt inspired when learning the weekly "*likkut*" from Likkutei Sichos.

The Rebbe replied:

עפ"ז ודאי קראה שם ציטוטי פס"ד חז"ל - המעשה עיקר (פרק דאבות דשבת זו) והא - בא במעשה המצות בהוספה הוסיפה - וה' יצליחה.

If so, you have certainly read there citations of the ruling of Chazal that "*hamaaseh hu ha'ikkar*" (from this week's *perek* in Pirkei Avos) and the inspiration will also manifest in tangible action of increased mitzvah observance. May Hashem grant you success.





The Alter Rebbe explains this in his *maamarim* by way of the famous *mashal*: When one wishes to lift up an entire building, he uses what's called a "lever" (לייוויער), gripping the building from the lowest point possible. Only through this method can all the higher floors of the building be lifted too. The same is true with *maaseh*, the realm of action: Although it is the lowest of all the human faculties and it deals with the lowliest of creations—the physicality of *olam hazeh*—nevertheless it has the power to uplift all the spiritual realms above it.⁷

Credible Accusation

Over and over throughout the years, the Rebbe impressed upon Yidden who were not yet observant and did not understand the importance of mitzvos that the essence of Yiddishkeit lies in the act. Learning, contemplating, and feeling are all nice and fine, but nothing will bring you closer to Hashem than *mitzvos maasiyos*.

At one point, the Rebbe held a lengthy and fascinating correspondence with a secular Israeli author named Eliezer Steinman, who had taken interest in and was writing a series of books on Chassidus.⁸

The Rebbe's words to him in this letter speak for themselves:

"When one wishes to convey concepts from the Torah—which is a living Torah and a Torah of life—especially the area of Torah that deals more with emotions [i.e. Chassidus], and all the more so if he wishes to bring these ideas to a crowd that is unfamiliar with them, it is not enough for the author or courier of this message to merely read books about this Torah and examine the text carefully.

If he really wishes to convey the ideas accurately, he needs—to the extent possible—to "enter" the way and "spirit" of life of the proponents and leaders of this philosophy.

"...I do not know you personally, but I hope that you will not take offense if I allow myself to suggest that if you wish to truly reach the goal you set for yourself by writing these books, it would seem appropriate that you should adopt the way of life purported in the books, i.e. a life according to the Torah in practice, as explained in the sources for your books, in Chassidus. The approach of בעיי רחמנא לבא (Hashem wants heart) is not enough at all, even if it is needed as an entryway.

"...You may suspect me, that my true intention is to influence another Jew to become fully observant of Torah and mitzvos, as Chassidus would expect. And I must admit that Chazal's words would be appropriate in this situation: A person is never accused of something unless there is at least a grain of truth to it..."⁹

In another letter the Rebbe takes the matter one step further, explaining that when the feelings of the heart are manifest in concrete action, then we know that the feelings were indeed sincere.¹⁰

With time, Mr. Steinman did indeed grow closer to Torah-observant Yiddishkeit.¹¹

Action Above All?

But if action is paramount and is the only way to refine the world, why do we find that so much emphasis is placed on Torah study, with many sources in Chazal putting the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* above all else?

And what about the many mitzvos that are duties of the heart—mitzvos

connected to thoughts and feelings, like *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*?

In order to understand this issue, let us preface some context:

The Gemara¹² cites a debate between the *tannaim*: Which is greater, *talmud*—study, or *maaseh*—action?

Rabbi Tarfon maintained that *maaseh* is greater while Rabbi Akiva maintained that *talmud* is greater. The *tannaim* concluded that *talmud* is greater, since it ultimately leads to *maaseh*.

The Alter Rebbe explains in *Likkutei Torah*¹³ that even from this conclusion that *talmud* is greater we can deduce that ultimately *maaseh* is the most important thing for the only reason that *talmud* is considered greater is because it leads to *maaseh*!

In Chassidus it is taught that throughout most of history, *talmud* is the greater virtue because the *Elokus* that is found in the physical world is hidden. But in Moshiach's time, when *Elokus* will be revealed for all to see, it will be clear that *maaseh* is the main thing. Nowadays, as we come closer to the time of Moshiach, this virtue of *maaseh* already begins to shine.

The Rebbe points out that even while we usher in the coming of Moshiach through *hafatzas hamaayanos chutza*—spreading the teachings of Chassidus to the outside world, which is seemingly an element of "*talmud*," we still need to allow the part of "*maaseh*" in too. For this reason the Rebbe instituted the concept of "*tahalucha*"—walking far distances to shuls and spreading the joy of Yom Tov with other Yidden

along
with a *vort*
of Chassidus.

This brings the effort
of *hafatzas hamaayanos*
into action: all the way to the
movement of the feet!¹⁴

Additionally, Chassidus explains
that even the mitzvos that are thought/
feeling-based are essentially meant to
affect the physical body as well. For
example, *ahavas Hashem* is supposed
to penetrate and affect the physical
organ of the heart in the physical
body!

The Rebbe offers a number of
examples of this concept as seen in the
lives of great *tzaddikim* and others.

The Gemara tells the story of Rabbi
Yochanan Ben Zakkai meeting the
Roman general, how the arrival of
good news caused the general's foot to
physically grow in size!

Additionally, in Hayom Yom the
Rebbe cites the story of Reb Nochum
of Chernobyl who gained weight from
the joy of saying "*Amen, yehei shmei
rabba...*"¹⁵

But the Rebbe takes this matter one
step further:

Even *talmud* itself can be
considered *maaseh!*

The fact that a Yid sits down
to learn Torah—in and of itself—
is a great *maaseh*. One need not
understand why it is so important
to study Torah and all its spiritual
accomplishments. One needs only to
know that Hashem gave us the Torah
and therefore it is our job to study it!

When the Rebbe launched the
"*Ufaratzta*" campaign, he explained
that for *talmidei hayeshiva*, *Ufaratzta* is
to manifest in *limud haTorah*.

"For them, this is all they should
know. Just like we tell everyone else
that '*hamaaseh hu ha'ikkar*' and they
need to just do the action, so too,
yeshiva bochurim need to sit and
learn. This is their *maaseh b'poel*. In
fact, Hashem looked at the Torah and
created the world. Everything begins
from the Torah. The *bochurim* need
to sit and learn, *nigleh* and Chassidus,
both during *sedarim* as well as outside
of *seder*, in the spirit of *Ufaratzta*—24
hours a day!"¹⁶

The Rebbe would never cease
encouraging *maaseh b'poel* again
and again throughout the years. The
Rebbe famously derided the approach
of those who, before actually getting
anything done, first need to form
a committee and call a meeting to
discuss all the details, with the only
concrete decision of the meeting being
that another meeting still needs to be
called!

"Just start doing your shlichus," the
Rebbe insisted. "You'll already see how
many of the questions and problems
you thought you had will actually take
care of themselves!"¹⁷

Professor Velvel Green related a
fascinating story in this regard:

"In the 1960s, my field of research
was in epidemiology, getting to the
root of various viral illnesses, what
caused them to spread, how many
people were vaccinated, etc. Gathering
all the intricate details of the sickness
was paramount in order to figure out
the proper way to avoid its spread.

"In a *yechidus* I had with the Rebbe,
I told the Rebbe that my background
in epidemiology got me thinking
about the state of Yiddishkeit in the
United States. We all know that the
vast majority of immigrants from
Europe were extremely *frum*, yet
within one or two generations, almost
any semblance of Torah and mitzvos

You Do Yours; The Rebbe Does His

When a Yid goes out on the shlichus of the *nessi hador*, the most
important thing is to "do the do"—*naaseh*, and not to worry about
understanding and feeling—*nishma*. Your job is to find another Yid and
help them put on tefillin, do more mitzvos—*maaseh b'poel*.

In previous generations, when people's hearts were more refined and
their minds had greater capacity, perhaps then they were able to have
both *naaseh* and *nishma*. But today, if we were to tell a shliach to focus
on *nishma*, chances are it will diminish his ability to fulfill the *naaseh*
properly—at least partially. Every minute is precious! Use the time you
have to influence another Yid to do more mitzvos.

The Rebbe, *nessi doreinu*, himself personifies both *naaseh* and *nishma*
together. Since you are going out on *his* shlichus, all you should worry
about is doing what you have to do, and the Rebbe will take care of the
rest...

(*Sichas Shabbos Parshas Pinchas* 5737.
See also *Reshimas Hayoman* p. 369)




was all but gone from their families. What caused this to happen? Which mitzvos were the first to be dropped? I felt that if we could research these questions and come up with informed answers, the Rebbe's shluchim would have a much easier time doing their work in a targeted, results-based manner.

"I said, 'The Rebbe has hundreds of shluchim. [This was long before the army of thousands of shluchim that we know today was a reality.] Why not offer them this research-based approach of how to prioritize their efforts?'

"The Rebbe responded: 'If I do indeed have that many shluchim,

they need to do it all! There are no priorities or best approaches. They need to do it all!'

"I understood the Rebbe's answer in the context of his timeless approach to always prefer action over anything else. The Rebbe didn't have time to sit and strategize what seemed to be the 'best approach' and make a detailed 100-year plan. The Rebbe wants anyone who has the ability to influence others to use their capabilities and do whatever they can to bring Moshiach, now!"¹⁸ 

1. Avos 1:17. See also Tikkunei Zohar 52 (87a).
2. Likkutei Amarim *perakim* 35-37.
3. Derech Mitzvosecha, 170a.

4. Acharon Shel Pesach 5694; Likkutei Dibburim vol. 1, p. 309.
5. Igros Kodesh 20 Tishrei 5720, et. al.
6. Purim 5723.
7. Torah Ohr, Bereishis 4a.
8. See *Kovetz L'Chizuk Hahiskashrus*, issue 47 (Tishrei 5773), Vaad Hatmimim Haolami.
9. Igros Kodesh vol. 12, 26 Shevat 5716.
10. Ibid. vol. 16, 24 Teves 5718.
11. 'My Encounter' interview with Rabbi Chanoch Glitsenstein, Living Torah disc 128 program 509.
12. Kiddushin 40b.
13. Parshas Acharei-Mos 26d, et. al.
14. Acharon Shel Pesach 5720, et. al. See *Tahalucha*, Derher Sivan 5776.
15. Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, p. 31.
16. Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim 5719.
17. Yud Shevat 5746, *se'if* 8.
18. *Professor Green, Shalom U'bracha*, p. 40.