



# INTERPRETING THE DEPTH

*The Rebbe's Teachings  
on his Father's Torah*

The story of Harav Levi Yitzchok's writings is a wonder. Of the thousands of pages he authored during his lifetime, precious little reached the free world to be studied by future generations.<sup>1</sup> When the first writings of Harav Levi Yitzchok reached the Rebbe in New York, the Rebbe published them in the set of Likkutei Levi Yitzchok. In the introduction, the Rebbe wrote, *"With gratitude to Hashem I have had a great merit, that a handful of my father's letters, along with several of his sefarim...*

*including sefarim... in which he wrote his commentaries on the margins, have reached me..."*

Alongside the publishing of these *sefarim*, the Rebbe dedicated many hours delving into them at farbrengens throughout the years. Usually, this was at the Shabbos farbrengen while the *sefer* Likkutei Levi Yitzchok was on the table in front of the Rebbe.

In previous editions of the *Derher*, we had various articles discussing the Torah of Harav Levi Yitzchok, including the story of how these

precious writings reached the Rebbe.

In this article we take a look at the *sichos* the Rebbe dedicated to teaching his father's writings, and how ultimately they were gathered together and were published in the first *sefer* to bear the name "*Toras Menachem*."

Much of the material for this article was prepared from *Derher* interviews with Rabbi Chaim Shaul Brook, Rabbi Asher Farkash, Rabbi Dovid Feldman, and Rabbi Eli Wolff.



CHOF AV 5739, YOSHI MELAMED VIA JEM 23114

לע"נ  
הרה"ח הרה"ת שמואל דוד  
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת יעקב יוסף ע"ה  
תנ"צ'בה'  
נדפס ע"י בנו  
הרה"ת מיכאל יצחק וזוגתו מרת חנה  
ומשפחתם שיחיו  
גורקאוו

### A Paralleled Approach

At the farbrengen of Chof Av 5739\*, about three and a half hours into the farbrengen, the Rebbe was about to begin teaching a segment of his father's Torah, as he had been doing for several years. This time however the Rebbe began with an introduction, in which he explained why he hadn't yet spoken of his father's Torah until this point in the farbrengen:

### Studies in Rashi

One of the most famous revolutionary learning methods the Rebbe introduced is his unique approach to understanding Rashi on Chumash.

In the middle of a lengthy explanation on the Zohar discussing the verses in Parshas Vayishlach where Shimon and Levi attack the city of Shechem, Harav Levi Yitzchok analyzes one Rashi<sup>3</sup>: On the words ואת חילם [they took] all their wealth," Rashi translates the word חילם as their wealth, bringing three different *pesukim* from Tanach as sources for this interpretation. Harav Levi Yitzchok comments: "[Why does] Rashi find it necessary to bring three sources and does not suffice with one? [Secondly,] why are these sources brought out of order? [Thirdly,] the source quoted from *kapitel* 49 in Tehillim is a later verse as opposed to the same word which is also found in an earlier verse in the same *kapitel*?"

Harav Levi Yitzchok goes on to explain this Rashi in a way of *drush*, learning that each source Rashi cites is telling us what happened with the wealth of Shechem. With this idea, he answers the above questions.

Although this isn't the typical *peshuto shel mikra* explanation (and perhaps can fit into the category of things Rashi mentions to answer the questions of a *talmid memulach*), it is fascinating to see how the Rebbe's father analyzes Rashi using the same method of analysis the Rebbe taught throughout the years.

*"It is customary on a yahrtzeit to discuss a Torah idea from the one whose yahrtzeit we are commemorating; yet in our circumstance this wouldn't be necessary, similar to the story told in the Gemara<sup>2</sup>:*

*"Rebbi Elazar said over a Torah passage during a discussion in the Beis Medrash, yet he did not quote his teacher Rebbi Yochanan while doing so. Rebbi Yochanan was troubled by this until he was told [by the students] 'Rebbi Elazar is your faithful student, whatever he teaches—everyone knows is your teaching!'*

*"This episode is told in the Gemara regarding an ordinary student, (i.e. Rebbi Elazar, who wasn't a son of his teacher Rebbi Yochanan). How much more so is this true regarding a faithful student who is also a son of his teacher... in such a circumstance it would be redundant to quote these teachings in his name [i.e. for the Rebbe to quote his father Harav Levi Yitzchok in the*

*previous sichos], for 'everyone knows it is your teaching!'"*

"We don't know much about the Rebbe's relationship with his father Harav Levi Yitzchok and their relationship through Torah study while the Rebbe was growing up, their learning together and so on," says Rabbi Eli Wolff, "for the Rebbe spoke very little of it. However, much of their correspondence from after the Rebbe left the USSR has been documented. The Rebbe held onto these precious writings he had from his father, and years later published them in the set of Likkutei Levi Yitzchok, together with the writings that Harav Levi Yitzchok wrote while in exile.

"In these letters, we discover various correspondences in which the Rebbe held discussions in learning. What becomes evident is the similar learning method the Rebbe shared with his father, offering us a window into the education the Rebbe received

while learning with his father in his early years.”

“One particular way this comes across,” says Rabbi Dovid Feldman, “is seen from the general approach of Harav Levi Yitzchok. In his notes on the Zohar, Harav Levi Yitzchok zeroes in on the smallest of details, through which he explains how the most abstract ideas that the Zohar is teaching us, express themselves through the most minute and (seemingly) irrelevant details, giving a whole new perspective on what the Zohar states.

“For instance, when the Zohar describes a conversation between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosi, Harav Levi Yitzchok comments in his notes why this conversation transpired with Rabbi Yehuda, for he represents *sefiras hachessed*, and Rabbi Yosi, who represents *sefiras hamalchus*, and then goes on to thereby explain why they each said what they said. Or, whether the passage is written in masculine

or feminine tense, and even on such (seemingly) trivial details as the time and place where the passage was said.

“Throughout the Rebbe’s Torah,” continues Rabbi Feldman, “the Rebbe teaches with a very similar approach. In the deepest *maamarim*, the Rebbe focuses on the details of how the previous Rabbeim said the *maamar*, for example the order different things were said, through which the Rebbe teaches a revolutionary idea. Additionally, the notion that the Rebbe explains a piece of *nigleh d’Torah* according to *its pnimius*, and again, every detail is exact, for it is the same Torah—this approach is parallel to Harav Levi Yitzchok’s. The Rebbe sees the whole Torah as one entity, with Torah’s ideas in all subjects weaving together with one another. The Rebbe always concludes with *hamaaseh hu ha’ikar*, the action is essential. The Rebbe takes the loftiest of ideas discussed and translates these concepts into action.”

## At Every Farbrengen

In later years, after publishing his father’s Torah, the Rebbe dedicated many hours delving into it at farbrengens.

The first of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s *sefarim* to be published contained notes he had written on Tanya, together with the first *sefer* of notes on the Zohar. These two *sefarim* were printed by Kehos in 5730\*.<sup>5</sup>

Here’s how the story began: On Chof Av 5729\*, the Rebbe asked that his father’s writings on the margins of his *sefarim* should be printed as soon as possible.

Rabbi Leibel Groner recorded in his diary: “When I entered, [the Rebbe] asked me if Schusterman[’s printing press] is working today. I answered ‘yes’, and [the Rebbe] said, ‘If so, please give this [the Zohar containing his father’s notes on the margins] to them and ask that they begin working on [preparing] it today...’”

Every day, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Groner for an update on where the work was holding, until one day Rabbi Groner notified the Rebbe that they were having great difficulty deciphering the text. Harav Levi Yitzchok had written in tiny script,

Harav Levi Yitzchok’s Torah is divided into a five volume set:

- *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok - He’aros L’Sefer HaZohar - Bereishis*
- *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok - He’aros L’Sefer HaZohar - Shemos-Devarim* (These two *sefarim* were written on the margins of the Zohar that he possessed in exile.)
- *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok - He’aros Al Sefer HaTanya* - (This was also originally written on the margins of his Tanya that he possessed in exile. As a side note, since the Rebbe received the original Tanya his father had written the notes on, it remained in the Rebbe’s room throughout the nesius.)
- *Toras Levi Yitzchok - Chiddushim U’Biurim L’Shas Mishnah U’Gemara*
- *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok - Likkutim Al Pesukei Tanach U’Maamarei Chazal; Igros Kodesh* (Including the letters and *reshimos* that were sent to the Rebbe during the years before his arrest and exile.)

Important to note is that these five volumes are a very small amount of writings in comparison to the vast teachings of Harav Levi Yitzchok, transcribed during his years as *rav*, which were tragically lost during the war, and to this day have not been found. Once at a farbrengen, the Rebbe stated that his father had written plenty of teachings comprising thousands of booklets!<sup>4</sup>







often keeping one paragraph going in long circles around the page and continuing on to other pages. This made typesetting an almost impossible feat.

At that point, the Rebbe said they should enlist the help of Reb Zalman Levitin (Haditcher), an expert on decoding old manuscripts and a great *talmid chacham* and *ga'on*. Reb Zalman pored over the *kisvei yad kodesh* and worked through them, writing out all the text consecutively and clearly. Oftentimes throughout his work, Reb Zalman would send his questions on Harav Levi Yitzchok's writings to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe responded with lengthy explanations. After one year, on Chof Av 5730\*, the first volume of Likkutei Levi Yitzchok on Tanya was finally published.

Beginning on Chof Av 5730\* the Rebbe started teaching a portion from his father's writings at each Shabbos farbrengen. At first, the Rebbe taught his father's notes on Igeres Hatshuva, and about a year later the Rebbe began teaching from his father's notes on the Zohar of that week's *parsha*.

Rabbi Asher Farkash relates: "On a typical Shabbos, the Rebbe would bring the Likkutei Levi Yitzchok with him to the farbrengen. During the *niggun* after the *maamar*, he would open a Chumash for a few minutes to look over the Rashi he was about to teach. Then, the Rebbe would open the Likkutei Levi Yitzchok and review it before teaching.

"In the following *sicha*, after the Rebbe asked the questions on Rashi, the Rebbe would quote the Zohar, then

Harav Levi Yitzchok's notes. Then, the Rebbe would go on to ask a handful of questions on what his father wrote, oftentimes concluding: *'Due to the lack of paper and ink, my father's writing was very limited, he therefore wrote in only a few words. As a result, he also omitted how this applies to our avodas Hashem, for he relies on us to learn and understand it...'*

"In the following *sicha*, after answering the questions on Rashi, the Rebbe would return to discuss his father's notes on the Zohar, answering the questions and then would explain how this is a lesson in our *avodas Hashem*.

"Usually, the Rebbe wouldn't speak of the actual idea Harav Levi Yitzchok wrote and discuss it on a deeper level, rather he would explain what was



written in a different context. For instance, where Harav Levi Yitzchok explains the names of the *tanaim* brought in the Zohar using Kabbalah terminology, the Rebbe explained it in the terminology of Chassidus and ultimately how it translates in *avodas Hashem*. What the Rebbe did was translate his father's ideas into a context most of us are more familiar with.<sup>6</sup>

"By doing so, he 'decoded' much of his father's writings, otherwise they would have been viewed as a *sefer* beyond the comprehension of those who don't study Kabbalah. Also, through these *sichos* the Rebbe taught *how* his father's writings must be learned, and thus 'opened the gates' to the study of his father's Torah. It is fair to say that without these *sichos*, the *sefarim* of Likkutei Levi Yitzchok would have been viewed as a set of closed books for those in the general public who aren't too familiar with Kabbalah."

(It should be noted that although the Rebbe printed over 700 pages of his father's Torah that were written at proper length in letters or *reshimos*, generally speaking, the Rebbe focused in his *sichos* only on the notes written on the margins of the Tanya and Zohar from exile. However, on rare occasions, in weeks that there were no *he'aros* from Harav Levi Yitzchok on the Zohar, the Rebbe discussed an idea from his father's letters, which were written with much greater length and explanation.)

### Collecting These Sichos

Rabbi Feldman relates: "When I came to learn in the yeshiva of 770 in 5734\*, I began attending *chazara* after the Rebbe's farbrengens, during which I would write down short notes for myself. Later, I would write up a *hanacha* of the farbrengen and send it to my family in Eretz Yisroel.

"I remember the first farbrengen after I came to 770. The Rebbe shared a section from the Zohar together with his father's notes on it, and then went on to teach it with a new explanation.

"At first I was a bit confused, so I asked one of the older *bochurim* to explain it to me. He said to me, 'Likkutei Levi Yitzchok? These *sichos* are very deep and complicated; not for most people to try and understand...'

"I was very disturbed hearing such rhetoric, and at that moment I said to myself, 'One day we will *bèzras Hashem* print a *sefer* collecting these *sichos*.'"

Rabbi Chaim Shaul Brook related:

"In the late 5740s\*, Rabbi Feldman approached me with his idea to print this *sefer* and shortly thereafter the work began. We started collecting old *hanachos* and began putting the *sefer* together. With so many new farbrengens, *sichos* and *maamarim* to transcribe on a constant basis, this process took quite a while. Once a week, we would set aside time to review these *sichos* and put them down on paper alongside the original Torah of Harav Levi Yitzchok.

"Just before Hei Teves 5750\*, we were finally at the finishing stages

### Where Does He Find Time?

Rabbi Asher Farkash relates:

"Soon after the first *sefer* Toras Menachem–Tiferes Levi Yitzchok was printed, I was *zoche* to be sent together with the group of Talmidim Hashluchim to Melbourne, Australia. On the way, we stopped over in Eretz Yisroel for a few days. Among the things we did there, we visited the chief rabbi, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, and we presented him with the new *sefer* as a gift. He opened it and skimmed through it briefly. Afterward he proclaimed with amazement, "*Ribbono Shel Olam!* How does the Rebbe have time for all of this?! He carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, and yet now publishes a *sefer* with explanations on the Zohar!"



HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK'S HANDWRITTEN NOTES ON THE ZOHAR

of preparing the *sefer* for print. At this point we submitted the draft to the Rebbe, together with a letter in which we wrote that we prepared this *sefer* and we are now asking for the Rebbe's approval for publication. The Rebbe answered that we should give it to someone who wasn't involved up to this point to review everything as a final editor. Rabbi Dovid Olidort reviewed the *sefer*."

Rabbi Feldman: "When we were about to print, I brought the first section prepared to Rabbi Leibel Groner to give to the Rebbe. Rabbi

Groner then suggested, given that this was days ahead of Yud Shevat *shnas ha'arbaim* (commemorating 40 years of the Rebbe's *nesius*), that it would be fitting for a new *sefer* to carry the title "Toras Menachem," just as it was with the *sefarim* Toras Shmuel and Toras Shalom which were given their respective titles by the Rebbe. [Until this point no *sefer* was published with the title Torah Menachem. -ed.]

"Although we were somewhat hesitant and worried that the Rebbe would turn down our request, we prepared the title page and

introduction carrying the name Toras Menachem–Tiferes Levi Yitzchok."

Rabbi Brook: "It was a Monday morning, 25 Teves when we received the Rebbe's answer. The Rebbe approved the *sefer's* title, as well as the introduction we wrote, and added the date for the publication at the end of the foreword. We were elated! The Rebbe had officially agreed to the title 'Toras Menachem.'

"In addition to approving the *sefer*, the Rebbe also requested that the *sefer* be printed by Shabbos, just five days later!



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“We got straight to work. Preparing a book for print in the days before computers was no simple task. Much of what can be done today by clicking a few buttons, then had to be done manually.

“Immediately after we received the Rebbe’s approval, I called Reb Yossi Laine from The Print House who agreed to do whatever it would take to have the *sefer* ready. Rabbis Feldman, Kalmanson, Laine and myself worked nonstop around the clock and *baruch Hashem* we got the first two *sefarim* printed by Wednesday night, eve of 28 Teves.

“In hindsight, I don’t know how we physically got the job done. The Rebbe gave us *kochos* that were supernatural, there’s no other way to explain it!

“Straight away we ran to give the first *sefer* to the Rebbe. We attached a letter to it in which we wrote ‘... in honor of the 28th of Teves, the

*110th birthdate of the Rebbe’s mother, Rebbetzin Chana...’*

“Shortly afterwards we received an answer. The Rebbe circled this line and wrote: נת'ח ודבר בעיתו והזמ"ג להזכיר (It was received with appreciation, and at the appropriate time, to be mentioned at the Ohel on this day [i.e. the Rebbetzin’s birthdate]). The next day the Rebbe went to the Ohel and took the *sefer* along with him.

“In the following days, 2,000 copies of the *sefarim* we printed arrived. It was a few days before Yud Shevat *sh’nas ha’arbaim* and the first *sefer* to carry the name ‘*Toras Menachem*’ was now available. Naturally, all were sold out in only a short few days.”

### *Volume Two and the New Picture*

Rabbi Brook: “The second volume (Shemos) was almost ready for publication in Elul 5751\*. That year

Chai Elul was on a Wednesday (Rosh Hashanah was two weeks later on Monday), and just about then we were getting ready to print.

“Around that time Rabbi Shlomo Cunin returned from Russia with the KGB file of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s arrest which was given over by the Russian government to Agudas Chasidei Chabad. In the file was a picture of Harav Levi Yitzchok, taken at the time of his arrest.” [Up until this point the only known picture of Harav Levi Yitzchok was the picture taken while he was in exile after years of suffering. -ed.]

“I wrote a letter to the Rebbe saying that we are printing the second volume of Tiferes Levi Yitzchok in honor of Vov Tishrei, and being that in Likkutei Levi Yitzchok the old picture was printed, we are asking the Rebbe’s permission to print this picture in the introduction to the new *sefer* (after editing to make it fit for print).



HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AT THE TIME OF HIS ARREST IN 5699\*



HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AFTER YEARS IN EXILE



"I approached Rabbi Krinsky and asked him if he would bring my letter to the Rebbe and discuss it with the Rebbe in person. He readily agreed, and I remember standing and watching the next day as the Rebbe got into the car together with Rabbi Krinsky to go to the Ohel. Rabbi Krinsky handed the Rebbe a piece of paper which I assumed was my letter.

"The next day Rabbi Groner notified me that there is an answer from the Rebbe. The Rebbe instructed us to print both pictures with copyright permission from Kehos, along with an explanation of the circumstances under which each picture had been taken.

"Now, we were running out of time. It was almost Shabbos, the following Monday and Tuesday were Rosh Hashanah, and we needed it before the following Shabbos, Vov Tishrei. I rushed to Manhattan where I located a professional artist who was able to edit the picture to make it fit for printing within a few hours.

"When I got the picture back from the artist, Rabbi Krinsky wanted to bring it right away to show the Rebbe. I told him though that we only have one copy and we would need it back for printing.

"It was after Maariv, Rabbi Krinsky went into the Rebbe's room and handed the Rebbe the picture. The Rebbe took one look at it and asked Rabbi Krinsky "דאס קען בלייבען בא מיר, זייע?—This can stay with me, correct?" He answered that we need it for the printing, so the Rebbe said, "בא נאכט, דרוקט מען דאך נישט. נון, אין דער פרי וועט עס זיין—During the night they aren't printing. *Nu*, in the morning they will have it." Indeed, first thing in the morning Rabbi Groner called me that the Rebbe gave him the envelope with the picture to give me.

"A few days later, on Thursday night while the Rebbe was distributing *lekach*, Rabbi Moshe Weiss who had



sponsored the printing, came by and handed the Rebbe the brand new *sefer* which had just arrived. The Rebbe smiled very broadly, then checked his pockets and said, "פאר א ספר דארף, מען צאלען, איך האב אבער נישט קיין געלט בא מיר—For a *sefer* one must pay, but I don't have any money with me." The Rebbe then gave him another piece of *lekach* (which was wrapped with a dollar bill), and said: 'In here there's also a dollar; and this *lekach* should be for the *sefer*.'

To date, five volumes of *Toras Menachem*—*Tiferes Levi Yitzchok* have been published, containing these *sichos*. At one farbrengen, while the Rebbe was speaking of the extent of his fathers *mesiras nefesh* for spreading *Yiddishkeit* in the Soviet Union, the Rebbe said:

*"Even while in harsh exile, aside for his personal study of Torah, he continued spreading Torah study and strengthening*

*Yiddishkeit, including through transcribing his Torah innovations despite the difficulty in obtaining paper and ink... mainly for the public to benefit from these writings... especially after they were published... which are studied by many until this very day!"* <sup>1</sup>

1. See *Precious Little of a Vast Treasure*, *Derher Menachem*-Av 5774.

2. *Yevamos* 93b.

3. See *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok* - *Hearos L'Sefer Hazohar* - *Bereishis* page 150.

4. *Hisvaaduyos* 5750 vol. 4, page 150.

5. To read the complete story of how these *sefarim* made it from Kazakhstan to the Rebbe, see *Derher Av* 5774.

6. For a glimpse into these unique *sichos*, see the *Dvar Malchus* section in the editions of *Derher* throughout the year 5780, where several of these *sichos* have been translated.

7. See the foreword to *Toras Menachem* - *Tiferes Levi Yitzchok*, vol. 1.