

a chossid's connection

A chossid's connection with the Rebbe is the most private, intimate part of the chossid's life. For this reason, Chassidim were often reluctant to share anything more than a tidbit from their *yechiduyos* and letters, and it is therefore difficult to get real insight into their personal connection with the Rebbe.

However, in many instances, especially in recent years, those privileged enough to have had personal interaction and correspondence with the Rebbe have been gracious to share their experiences with the younger generation. Especially considering the fact that all of the Rebbe's words are *divrei elokim chayim*, and are important for each and every chossid in his *avodas Hashem*.

From the time he was a young child, Rabbi **Yitzchok Meir Gurary**, *mashpia* of Tomchei Tmimim, Montreal, merited to have very personal guidance from the Rebbe. Through his years as a bochur and later as a member of *hanhala*, the Rebbe advised him, step-by-step, on how to live life as a chossid. Much of this wealth of guidance is especially pertinent to lives of yeshivah bochurim, their strengths, struggles, and endless capabilities.

The staff of the Chassidisher Derher extends most heartfelt thanks to Rabbi Gurary for sharing so much with us, availing these treasures to all our readers. Many of the letters and points of these yechiduyos were published in a family teshurah¹.

The Rebbe's advice to a bochur,

והנה ה' נצב עליו...

and a mentor to bochurim

An interview with Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Gurary, *mashpia*, Tomchei Tmimim, Montreal





GROWING UP

When Rabbi Gurary was growing up, in the early 5700s, it was normal for women and children not to be very involved in chassidic life. The conventional mindset in that era was that *darkei hachasidus* was principally for men, whereas women and children were perceived to occupy a lesser role.

Although he grew up in Crown Heights, young Yitzchok Meir only saw the Frierdiker Rebbe a handful of times; while giving *panim* on Erev Rosh Hashanah, and possibly a few times during davening. He never once witnessed a *farbrenge* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. This was because the Frierdiker Rebbe was not well at the time, and only select people were given access to the *farbrenge*s; his father, the famed *chossid* Rabbi Zalman Gurary, managed to get in, but he never brought Yitzchok Meir along.

He seldom went into *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe. In fact, he only went in to *yechidus* when his grandfather, the Kupishnitzer Rebbe, went in to *yechidus*

and took family members along with him.

Aside for the fact that he wasn't active in 770 life, the atmosphere in the yeshiva (Tomchei Tmimim on Bedford Avenue and Dean Street) wasn't the most chassidish either (many children from modern families attended the school at the time), and overall, the children in Crown Heights weren't involved in chassidishkeit.

"The Rebbe pioneered the idea that the entire family has a place in Chassidus," Rabbi Gurary says. "I felt this on a personal level, as the Rebbe was *mikarev* me from when I was a young child.

"When I was a child, the Frierdiker Rebbe told Rabbi Hodakov to spend time with me, and every so often to instruct me on the importance of *midos tovos* and the like. He would talk to me in his office for about half an hour, and then we would proceed to the Rebbe's room. The Rebbe would test me on the material we discussed, and he would give me a copy of the 'Talks and Tales' as a prize for knowing the information."

On Shabbos, Yitzchok Meir would daven with the main minyan at 770, and he sat directly across from the Rebbe. To get a picture of what 770 looked like in those years, one must realize that most Chassidim did not live in Crown Heights; they lived in Brownsville and other neighborhoods, and, until 5707, there were a grand total of three Lubavitcher children his age in all of Crown Heights!

Therefore, the minyan at 770 was small, and the shul was nearly empty of people, with the exception of *yomim tovim*, when Chassidim would walk in from other neighborhoods.

The Rebbe would enter the shul at around *borchu*, sitting in the seat that would later become his place for *mincha*. The Rebbe listened to *chazaras hashatz* and *krias hatorah*, and davened in his room afterwards.

In general, young Yitzchok Meir was more drawn to his grandfather the,

Kupishnitzer Rebbe. He wasn't overly involved in 770 life, whereas in the Kupishnitzer court he was the Rebbe's oldest grandchild, and they would spend much time together.

Rabbi Gurary explains:

"Every so often the Rebbe would ask me in a 'playful' way, '*Bistu a Lubavitcher Chossid, tzi a Kupishnitzer?*'—'Are you a Lubavitcher Chossid or a Kupishnitzer Chossid?' My standard reply was that 'I'm not sure.' (Keep in mind, that I was a child under nine.)

"This would happen every so often.

"Then, shortly after Yud Shevat 5710—before the Rebbe officially accepted the *nesius*—the Rebbe offered me his hand to say "good Shabbos." As you know, in Lubavitch, the Chassidim never shake the Rebbe's hand, so the Rebbe's offer to shake my hand connoted that he didn't consider himself Rebbe.

"Naturally, I refused. The Rebbe asked me, '*Bistu shoin a Lubavitcher Chossid?*' 'Are you a Lubavitcher Chossid by now?'

"This time, I replied, 'Yes!'"

NOT TOO YOUNG

After he grew up, Rabbi Gurary continued to visit his grandfather, the Kupishnitzer Rebbe, who would ask him to repeat something from the Rebbe's *farbrenge*. The Kupishnitzer was quite close to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe would send him *mishloach manos* every year. (The Rebbe would send *mishloach manos* to three Polische Rebbes: the Kupishnitzer, the Boyaner, and the Amshinover.)

"Although my father had a very close connection with the Rebbe," Rabbi Gurary says, "and he was privy to everything that was going on in *Beis Harav*, he felt that these were private matters, and he would never discuss them at home.

"One day, my friend told me that he had a secret to tell me. In order to ensure that no-one could possibly overhear us, we walked a block away from the yeshiva and hid behind some bushes. There he

told me the big secret, that the Rebbe's brother had passed away, and that the Rebbe was hiding it from his mother.

"That night, each of our parents received a phone call from Rabbi Hodakov. He warned them that their children were whispering about the story, and he cautioned them to ensure that we would cease gossiping about it.

"The phone call came as a shock. There was absolutely no natural way that the Rebbe could have found out about it; no-one had overheard us talking, and we hadn't mentioned it to a soul. It was clear *ruach hakodesh*.

"Interestingly enough, what amazed my father about this episode wasn't the *ruach hakodesh*—it didn't come as a surprise that the Rebbe had *ruach hakodesh*. What did shock him was that keeping this story secret was so critical to the Rebbe, that he was ready to demonstrate clear *ruach hakodesh* in order to ensure that the story not get out."

The Rebbe also took interest in Yitzchok Meir's progress in learning. The Rebbe was once giving a silver dollar as Chanukah gelt to bochorim who learned Chassidus, and he called in Reb Zalman to give him Chanukah gelt for his son. The Rebbe asked Reb Zalman whether his son was learning Chassidus, too. Reb Zalman replied that Yitzchok Meir was too young to learn Chassidus; that he was "a *kleine yingel*." The Rebbe answered that he should begin learning Chassidus with the boy, and that they should start with the *maamar* "Adam Ki Yakriv" in Likutei Torah. After they learn the *maamar*, he should give him the Chanukah gelt.

At one point, Yitzchok Meir was having a hard time finding a *chavrusa*. Since he was in a class with older boys, most boys weren't interested in learning with him, and the only person who *was* willing to learn with him wasn't the best *chavrusa*.

Around that time, the Rebbe asked Reb Zalman how his son's learning was going, and his father replied that Yitzchok Meir was having difficulties because he didn't have a *chavrusa*. The Rebbe said,

"Tell him, that מאדנע קראנקשאפט ט'איז א חברה קען מען נישט אין אמעריקע, אז אן א חבורתא קען מען נישט לערנען—It's a strange illness in America that [people think that] it's impossible to learn without a *chavrusa*." The Rebbe added, "I always learned without a *chavrusa*, and he can do it too."

One story, which illustrates the Rebbe's emphasis on *chinuch*, happened with Rabbi Gurary's father. There was once a situation when he had the opportunity to ask the Rebbe for a *brocha* for anything he wanted. At that time, he had lost a huge sum of money, so he asked the

During Yitzchok Meir's *yechidus* for his twelfth birthday, the Rebbe said that when a person turns twelve they become obligated to keep their vows, which signifies that he now takes responsibility for his actions. The Rebbe was emphasizing to him that he was becoming an independent person, and that it was time to start taking responsibility for himself.

Then, when he became bar mitzvah, he had a fascinating *yechidus*.

The Rebbe first instructed him to say over the beginning of the *maamar* that he was



Rebbe for a *brocha* that he should make the money back.

The Rebbe answered, "I'm surprised, because I thought that a *kluge* (wise) person like you would realize that when you have the opportunity to request anything you want, you should request that your offspring should be Chassidim, *yirei Shamayim*, and that they should grow up in the path of *rabboseinu nesieinu*."

to deliver at the bar mitzvah celebration. So he said the *maamar* "Isa bemedrash Tehillim" up to the words "*hapirush ma shehu oisse*." Then the Rebbe told him to say some of his *pilpul*, which he did. Most bar mitzva boys would say *pilpulim* from *seforim* like the Sha'agas Aryeh, whereas he said a *pilpul* based on the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe said that it's א גלייכע—an appropriate thing," and that other people should learn from this to say *pilpulim* from the Tzemach Tzedek.

Then the Rebbe began encouraging him to learn Chassidus. The Rebbe said, that on ואלה שמות בני ישראל—the *parsha* of the week—the Midrash says that the Yidden didn't change their names nor their clothing throughout their time in Mitzrayim. "Reuvein and Shimon [were their names when they] came down to Mitzrayim, [and] Reuvein and Shimon [were their names when they] went up from Mitzrayim."

Chassidus explains that Reuvain—ראיה—refers to seeing *elokus*; and Shimon—שמייעה—refers to understanding *elokus*. How does a Yid ensure that even though he is in *galus*, he won't change his name? Through seeing and understanding *elokus*—by learning Chassidus.

INDIVIDUAL GUIDANCE

The following year, on his fourteenth birthday, Yitzchok Meir went into *yechidus* with his father, as he had in previous years. The Rebbe asked why he had come in with his father? Considering that he was after bar mitzva, he should have come in himself! The Rebbe was telling him, in a powerful way, that he wasn't a child anymore; he was now a chossid in his own right.

Later, as a *bochur*, the Rebbe gave him much guidance in all areas of *avodas Hashem*. The Rebbe once told him that he should never daven without learning Chassidus; it doesn't have to be a lot, but it's important to always learn some Chassidus before davening.

"I wasn't a unique case," Rabbi Gurary says. "All of us *bochurim* were personally advised by the Rebbe in every aspect of our lives. In our *milchemes hayetzer*, in *avodas hatefilla*; in every issue that came up, the Rebbe would guide us. We wouldn't only ask the Rebbe about 'major' issues—we wouldn't only go to the Rebbe if we robbed a bank—rather, we would speak about all the ups and downs of *avodas Hashem*.

"We would speak about the areas in *avodas Hashem* where we felt we should

be better. We asked for *hora'os* about how to work on them, how to approach dealing with them, and so on. If we fell down, and needed help getting back up, the Rebbe was the one who would help us.

"This guidance came in many forms. We would often write questions to the Rebbe, and we would receive *tzetelach* with detailed responses to our questions. We also went into *yechidus* twice a year. We would have *yechidus* on our birthday, and at another point during year, which we would have after giving in a note from the *hanhala*. The Rebbe would also send us personal letters.

"The Rebbe showed a very personalized interest in us and in our struggles. Sometimes, the Rebbe would even refer to something he had told a *bochur* years earlier—'as I told you before'—demonstrating that the Rebbe remembered even minute details in the *avodas Hashem* of a *bochur*. The Rebbe was personally working with each of us and he expected good reports.

"One theme which the Rebbe constantly stressed to me in *yechidus* and letters was *shmiras hasdorim*. This was true with all the *bochurim*; the Rebbe was extremely *makpid* about *shmiras hasdorim*.

"Now, there are really two themes in *shmiras hasdorim*. First is utilizing your time during *seider*, and second is getting to *seider* exactly on time. Besides for the

emphasis on learning during *seider*, the Rebbe was very *makpid* that *bochurim* should arrive exactly on time.

"The Rebbe made no exceptions. In Lubavitch, *bochurim* who davened at length were given the leeway to come to *seider* a bit late. However, when *bochurim* asked the Rebbe if they could be late to *seider* because they were davening, the Rebbe said no. They had to come to *seider* on time. In fact, I've only heard of one exception to this rule; a *bochur* in Eretz Yisroel got permission from the Rebbe to come ten minutes late to *seider*. But otherwise, I have never heard of any other exceptions.

"Overall, this emphasis on *seider* is not a new thing: It's known that the *mashgiach* in Lubavitch would give a *k'nas* if you came איינץ אורף איינץ—one minute after twelve. The Rebbe explained in *sichos* that the reason for this emphasis is that *seider* is a הגבלה עצמית. Just like mitzvos must be performed in an exact way, and otherwise the השפעה does not come down, so too the Rabbeim's השפעה comes through *sidrei hayeshiva*, and they have to be kept in a precise manner.

"The Rebbe wrote about *seider* to *bochurim* again and again; the Rebbe always reminded my friends and me to come to *seider* on time. At one point, I had a *k'vius* to learn Chassidus with people in the evenings. The Rebbe told me that I was using too much of my time learning with other people, and I had to



THE REBBE'S APPROACH WAS THAT ONE SHOULD DAVEN TO THE UTMOST OF HIS ABILITY, BUT FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, THE EMPHASIS SHOULD BE ON REMEMBERING THAT HASHEM STANDS OVER YOU; BASED ON THE PREMISES LAID OUT IN TANYA PEREK MEM-ALEPH.

spend more time learning on my own.

Rabbi Gurary was once very sick with hay fever when he was in camp, and his father asked the Rebbe for a *brocha*. The Rebbe said to check two things: 1) Did he leave yeshiva without *reshus*? 2) Had he given the money that he had pledged for the *magbis* at the Yud Beis Tammuz *farbrengen*? He had indeed received *reshus* from the *hanhala* to go to camp, but he had not yet given to the *magbis*. He immediately gave the money to the *magbis*, and got better soon after.

“All of us *bochurm* felt,” Rabbi Gurary continues, “that the Rebbe appreciated and cared about our *avodas hatefilla* and *milchemes hayetzer*, and I would constantly talk to the Rebbe about my challenges in *avodas Hashem*.”

“One theme that the Rebbe always *kochid* in was *Perek Mem-Aleph* of Tanya. The Alter Rebbe speaks about contemplating the fact that הנה השם נצב עליי, Hashem constantly stands over the person watching what he does. The Rebbe said that always keeping this in mind would be a tremendous help to a person's *avodas Hashem*.”

“The Rebbe told this to me many times, and also to many other people who were in *yechidus*. It was a *seder avoda* the Rebbe always emphasized over and over, both to me and my friends. The Rebbe told me that this was also a way to deal with melancholy, since remembering that Hashem is always with you is a sure way to feel happiness.

“This is most definitely a *chiddush* of the Rebbe. In Lubavitch, the emphasis was on

davening for hours, and the influence of davening would last throughout the day.

“The Rebbe's approach, on the other hand, was that one should daven to the utmost of his ability, but for the rest of the day, the emphasis was on remembering that Hashem stands over you; based on the premises laid out in *Tanya Perek Mem-Aleph*.”

In a letter to the Rebbe, Rabbi Gurary wrote that it seemed that the *hisboninus* in *Perek Mem-Aleph* was not affecting him. The Rebbe answered: “It is impossible that it doesn't affect you. If afterwards the *le'umas zeh (klipa)* returns, this is already explained in Tanya, and in Torah Or *dibur hamaschil* “*Hayinu Kecholmim*,” and in several places.”

[In that *maamar*, the Alter Rebbe explains that *golus* is like a dream. In a dream, opposites come together; similarly in *golus*, at one moment a person can be at the ultimate level of *kedusha*, and immediately afterwards his *yetzer hara* can flare up with the greatest intensity. The fact that his *yetzer hara* was awakened is not due to a lack in his *avoda*—his *avoda* was real, his inspiration was authentic—but *golus* is a place where opposites come together.

Similarly, the Rebbe was telling him, *Perek Mem-Aleph will always have an effect*. If the effect abates afterwards, there is no reason to be discouraged, since that is not due to a lack in the *avoda*, rather to the nature of *golus*.]

Another issue that the Rebbe repeatedly stressed to Rabbi Gurary throughout the years was the importance of taking care

of his health. One has to understand the *seder* that the *bochurim* kept in those days. On a regular day Yitzchok Meir would daven somewhat *ba'arichus*, and coming late to *seder* was out of the question. So right before *seder*, he would take off his tefillin, rush to breakfast for a quick bite, then run back upstairs for *seder*. He therefore didn't end up eating very well. On Thursday night, they would stay up all night learning. But one can't miss Chassidus, so they would sleep very little. Friday night was also hectic; they would take a nap for a few hours, wake up very early Shabbos morning, and learn Chassidus until davening.

Overall, he wasn't careful with his health, and the Rebbe would constantly stress the importance of correcting this.

When he was learning in Eretz Yisroel, one random day he received a letter from the Rebbe; someone had told the Rebbe that they had seen him and that he didn't look healthy. The Rebbe wrote that it's a “*pelleh*” (wonder) that something like this could happen, being that the Rabbeim always insisted that the Chassidim take care of their health. It is clearly apparent that, as the Maggid of Mezritch said, א לעכעל בגוף איז א גרויסע לאך בנשמה—A small hole in the body is a big hole in the *neshama*.” The Rebbe added that there was no need for expounding on such an obvious matter, and that he was awaiting an answer in the mail.

Another time, when Yitzchok Meir was in Montreal, the Rebbe wrote to him: “You will surely fulfill, and in actuality, the command of all of the Rabbeim,

beginning with the Baal Shem Tov, until the Rebbe my father-in-law, about watching over [*the Rebbe made an arrow to the words in his letter*] health of the body. And it's poshut, that my words about this are not '*biderech tzachus*' [jokingly], rather in actuality—eating and drinking at the right times, sleeping, etc.”

He once asked the Rebbe about a conflict he was having due to his health. On the one hand, he wanted to join the farbrengens in the Yeshiva; but, on the other hand, the sleep that he would be missing would take a toll on his health. He asked the Rebbe whether he should avoid participating in these farbrengens. The Rebbe answered that since the farbrengens are important, but, at the same time, taking care of health is part of *avodas Hashem* (as the Rambam writes), surely there is no real conflict, and there must be a way that he could fulfill both at the same time.

Throughout the letters and *yechidus* with Rabbi Gurary, the Rebbe always stressed that if he was having trouble in learning, he should remember that יגעת ומצאת, if one toils, one will get there. In one letter the Rebbe told him that, “Also on you it says that if יגעת you do not toil, then לא מצאת you will not find, and why are you surprised [by the lack of success]? But [at the same time] it is self-understood, that also you were guaranteed that if יגעת, you do indeed toil, then ומצאת, you will find.”

On another occasion, Rabbi Gurary came to the Rebbe with a dilemma which is probably familiar to many. He would get inspired by farbrengens, taking upon himself good *hachlotos*, but the inspiration wouldn't last, and he wouldn't end up keeping his *hachlotos*. He asked the Rebbe what to do.

The Rebbe said that, generally, *hachlotos* don't last for one of two reasons. Either the problem is that the inspiration isn't immediately brought into something tangible; or the *hachlata* is simply too big of a step. One has to be sure to, 1) immediately do something tangible and

2) to take smaller, more manageable *hachlotos*—מעט מעט אגרשנו.

REPORT TO THE REBBE

During his first year of kollel, Rabbi Gurary got an offer to work in the yeshiva of Montreal. He would be a *mashpia* in the morning and evening, and during the day he would learn on his own. However, he was hesitant to leave the kollel in Crown Heights, since it is under the auspices of the Rebbe's *mazkirus*, and he wanted to learn in the Rebbe's kollel. So the *hanhala* at Montreal offered to arrange that his learning in Montreal would be under the *mazkirus* like the kollel in Crown Heights; just like the *yungelait* in kollel reported to the *mazkirus*, he would write a report to *mazkirus* from Montreal.

He wrote all of this in a letter to the Rebbe. He also wrote that, since he would be learning alone, he wanted his learning to be supervised by someone—i.e. that he would have someone to report to — which would better guarantee that he'll learn well.

On the general idea of going to Montreal, the Rebbe answered that he should take the offer. About being supervised by “someone”, the Rebbe made an arrow to the word “someone,” and wrote “[someone] in Montreal (Rabbi Greenglass), in order that he should send

a report here [to the Rebbe] every two weeks.”

In effect, the Rebbe himself was offering to supervise his learning!

Later on, Rabbi Greenglass asked him to start getting more involved in the yeshiva; to help him out with talking to *bochurim*, offering guidance, etc.

Still, Rabbi Gurary deliberated accepting this offer. First of all, the *bochurim* were only a few years younger than him, and he felt a bit uncomfortable being their *mashpia*. Second, he was concerned that if he would assist the *bochurim* instead of Rabbi Greenglass, it could possibly result in situations that would be disrespectful to Rabbi Greenglass. Third, he was nervous that he wouldn't always give the *bochurim* the right advice, fitting with the Rebbe's *kavana*.

Rabbi Gurary received an amazing answer. First, the Rebbe told him to do a certain thing every day which would serve as a *segula* to stay true to the Rebbe's *kavana*. [Due to the private nature of this *hora'a*, Rabbi Gurary has never shared it with anyone to this very day.] The Rebbe added that, in general, mistakes can always be fixed, so he shouldn't be overly anxious about not getting everything right the first time. Third, in order to avoid any disrespect to Rabbi Greenglass, he should always send





THE REBBE EXAMINES A LULAV ON EREV SUKKOS AS REB MORDECHAI ALTEIN STANDS BY.

bochurim to Rabbi Greenglass first; if it didn't work out with Rabbi Greenglass, then he should speak to the *bochur* himself.

"I would write to the Rebbe very often informing him about status of the *bochurim*," Rabbi Gurary says, "telling the Rebbe what advice I was giving them, and so forth. I would constantly write to the Rebbe about everything happening in the yeshiva. Once, I asked the Rebbe in *yechidus* whether he was satisfied with my work in yeshiva.

"The Rebbe replied, 'Yes, I am happy; but I want more.' Then, with a small smile, the Rebbe added, 'I have a strange *teva* (nature) that I always want more. And I hold that this is a *teva* that one need not want to change.'

LULAVIM FOR THE REBBE

Rabbi Gurary's father-in-law, Rabbi Mordechai Altein, used to bring *lulavim* and *esrogim* to the Rebbe. This custom started when his father-in-law, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, brought *lulavim* and

esrogim to the Friediker Rebbe, and Rabbi Altein later took him over. Because of that, the Rebbe bought specifically from Rabbi Altein. Other people used to bring as well, but Rabbi Altein was the main supplier.

For many years, Rabbi Altein would bring the *esrogim* to the Rebbe, and Rabbi Gurary would bring the *lulavim*. Since he was bringing the Rebbe's *lulav*, he wanted to ensure that he was getting the highest quality around.

The first thing he did was to go through the entire shipment of *lulavim* that his father-in-law received—several hundred *lulavim*—and took out the best twenty or thirty to be found. The big spenders who were interested in the top quality *lulavim* knew they couldn't come to him, because the *best lulavim* were reserved for the Rebbe.

However, Rabbi Altein's operation was relatively small, and he only had a few hundred *lulavim* to choose from. So Rabbi Gurary would arrange with other *lulav* distributors for him to check out

their inventory and pick the best ones he could find. The entire *aseres yemei teshuva* he was busy running around from distributor to distributor trying to find the best *lulavim* that they had.

Rabbi Gurary relates:

"Every year, I would present the Rebbe with the *lulavim*, and one year, I got permission to ask the Rebbe a few questions.

"In that time period, *yechidus* for *bochurim* had discontinued. *Yechidus* was a tremendous benefit for the *avodas Hashem* of the *bochurim*, both because they would prepare themselves in the time period before the *yechidus*, and, more broadly, because the *bochurim* knew that they would have to give a report to the Rebbe when they went in for *yechidus*.

"Now that *yechidus* had stopped, they would lose this aid. I asked the Rebbe if I could tell the *bochurim* to write a detailed report to the Rebbe from time to time as a substitute for *yechidus*, and this would be of great assistance in their *yiras shamayim*.

THE TALMIDIM THAT LEARN HERE, IN 770, AT LEAST THEY HEAR THE [THE REBBE'S] FARBRENGEN, AND GET HISORIRUS FROM THE FARBRENGEN ...

“The Rebbe spoke at length about the fact that I was putting the responsibility for the *yiras shamayim* of the bochurim on the Rebbe. The Rebbe said that this wasn't his responsibility, instilling *yiras shamyaim* in the bochurim is what the yeshiva is there for!”

RESPONSIBILITY

The following is based on a transcript of the *yechidus* that Rabbi Gurary wrote at the time:

Yechidus to *talmidim* is something that I established. Have you heard that bochurim used to go in to *yechidus* so often to the Rebbe Rashab? I was the one that established *yechidus* for *talmidim*, but it wasn't utilized as it should have been. I spoke about this issue many times at farbrengens, and it didn't help, so I was forced to stop *yechidus*.

Because what happened? Bochurim began asking me about every little thing, the types of things they should have asked *hanahalas hayeshiva*. They stopped getting a *seder* in learning from the *hanhala*, and instead asked me; every little issue that they had, from *birchos hashachar* until *krias shema she'al hamita*, they asked me.

The *hanhalos* don't do anything with the *talmidim*... An entire day can go

by without the *hanhala* knowing what's going on with the *talmid*! Many times, I have received letters from bochurim saying that they had asked a question to the *hanhala*, and the *hanhala* had said to ask me; regarding questions which the *hanhala* should have taken care of themselves!

A *talmid* has to know that he must receive everything from the *hanhala* of the yeshiva. If not, he has no connection to the yeshiva!

[A few days earlier, one of the *mashpi'im* wrote to the Rebbe the following suggestion:

Since Bochurim come from many places around the world to spend Tishrei in 770, and many of them don't have a *seder* and are just wandering around, he suggested that *mazkirus* should give out a directive to the bochurim that they should set up *seodorim* in learning for themselves.

He received the following answer: “אין מתפקיד המזכירות כלל - לנהל ישיבות—It is not the job of *mazkirus* at all, to operate Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim, nor to be a replacement for their *hanhala*.”

The Rebbe spoke about this issue at length.]

I'll give you an example:

I recently received a letter from a *mashpia* in one of the yeshivos, and he writes to me, that since *talmidim* from all of the yeshivos come here for Tishrei, and they “*drei*” around and don't learn, he therefore suggests that *mazkirus* should give out a command that they should sit down and learn.

When I read the letter I was shocked. I didn't know what to think; this is unheard of!! He is part of the *hanhala*, and he has the responsibility for the *talmidim*, and instead of taking care of them himself, he wants to put the responsibility on *mazkirus*!

Additionally, it seems from his letter that he supposes that *mazkirus* has no idea what's going on, and he has to reveal

the reality to *mazkirus*. Does he really imagine that I don't see what's happening outside my window?!

For example, what does a *mashpia* think when his *talmidim* come to New York for a month? Does he really think that he is relieved of his responsibility, and *mazkirus* will take care of them?

(In regards to the person who wrote me the letter, it shows on an *eidelkait* in him, because at least he thinks about this issue, others don't even think about it.)

[The Rebbe spoke at length with deep frustration about the fact the bochurim don't learn during Tishrei, and, above all, that the *hanhala* doesn't do anything about it.

I tried justifying the *talmidim*, saying that although the learning isn't so strong, the *talmidim* are “surrounded with mitzvos,” go on *mitvzoim* in the tanks, and so on.

[The Rebbe responded:]

Is that the *hanhala's* accomplishment?! The only reason they are doing *mitvzoim* is because I speak about it during the farbrengen. And this itself—that bochurim are going on *mitvzoim*—was not my intention. I'm not completely excluding them, but I really meant the *baalibatishe yungeleit*. In regards to the *talmidim*, I have said many times, in writing and orally, that they have to ask the *hanhala* for *reshus*, and the *hanhala* should explain to the *talmidim* that their main objective is *lig'n in lernen*—to be engrossed in learning.

[In regards to my original question, that bochurim should write reports to the Rebbe, the Rebbe said that it will turn into the same problem that has happened with *yechidus*; the bochurim will ask every little thing, *inyonim* that they should be getting from the *hanhala*.

The Rebbe continued, that people profess it as an issue of *yiras shamyaim*, that if someone doesn't ask the Rebbe every little thing, they are not a *mekushar*!

I tried to say that writing to the Rebbe is a big assistance to the bochurim.

[The Rebbe replied:]

Of course it helps, and if I tell people to say *birchos hashachar* it will also help. But is that the normal thing to do?! These are things that *bochurim* should get from the *hanhala* of the yeshiva!

[The Rebbe added:]

The *talmidim* that learn here, in 770, at least they hear the *farbrenge* [referring to the Rebbe's *farbrenge*], and get *hisorirus* from the *farbrenge*, and even they should not receive *hisorirus* **only** from the *farbrenge*. But those who are far from here and don't hear the *farbrenge*, what is the *hanhala* giving them?

"Throughout all my years," Rabbi Gurary says, "I personally saw the Rebbe's care and interest for the *yiras shamayim* and

kabolas ol of the *bochurim*. This is true with me personally, as well. From my first letter, where the Rebbe gave me a *brocha* for *talmud Torah biyiras Shamayim*; through my *yechiduyos*, where the Rebbe emphasized the importance of *ve'hinei Hashem nitzov olov*. As you see in the *yechidus* above, the Rebbe viewed this as the paramount duty of the *hanhala*: to instill *yiras Shamayim* and *kabolas ol* in the *bochurim*."

The following is a *maane* Rabbi Gurary received during his first year as *mashpia*:

"If it is impossible (for whatever reason) to bring about *kabolas ol* in all areas, it is obvious that this doesn't release one from the responsibility of doing as much as possible. It is shocking that you would connect the two, especially since in the vast majority of cases, the correct path

is מעט מעט אגרשנו, working slowly but surely. And another point is that the *avoda* should be מן הקל אל הכבד, starting from the easier areas and continuing with the more difficult aspects."



HAPPINESS

In Tammuz 5718 Rabbi Gurary received the following letter from the Rebbe with advice in *avodas Hashem*:

The path to this—and this is the true path—is that you should engrave in your memory the words of the Alter Rebbe in the beginning of *Perek Mem-Aleph* of Tanya: And behold, Hashem stands over him [...and searches his reins and heart to see if he is serving him as fitting], etc., and it would be best if you would study by heart from the beginning of *Perek Mem-Aleph* until the word '*hamelech*' (which is on the next page).

This naturally brings a person happiness, as Tanya explains with the *moshol* of a great king who is a guest in the home of a common and lowly person (*Perek Lamed-Gimmel*). [The Alter Rebbe explains that just like a lowly person would feel unimaginable joy when brought close to a great king, so too, and much more so, a person feels great happiness when he realizes that Hashem is close to him.]

It is self-understood, that the mere fact that Hashem is a 'guest' and 'lives' with the person, gives him the strength to behave according to Hashem's will, which is fully spelled out in *Shulchan Aruch*...²

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

After receiving the above letter, Rabbi Gurary asked questions, on the letter, and other issues, and he had a *yechidus*, which the Rebbe was *magiah*.

The highlighted words are the Rebbe's additions in his holy handwriting:

About the issue of *yeshus* and *chitzoniyyus*, there are two **paths inyonim** [to deal with it].

1) To utilize this negative character trait



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A GOOD SHPRACH

Mrs. Esther Sternberg relates:

Every day, Rebbetzin Chana A"H would spend a while standing on the street corner near her house to get fresh air and some sunlight. As she stood there, she would watch the people going by, studying their movements, manner of speech, and so on.

My husband, Rabbi Nochum Sternberg, and my brother, Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Gurary, would pass by her every day when they were walking home from kollel to eat lunch, and the Rebbetzin saw how they were always talking together. One time, she telephoned my mother, telling her that, "I am happy to see that your son-in-law has a good '*shprach*' (rapport) with his brother-in-law."

for the good: [Meaning, he should think to himself, that] **since he is a 'metzius' etc., he therefore has to be a chossid, a lamdan, a sharp individual, a boki etc.** (And over time, the negative traits of *yeshus* and *chitzoniyus* will disappear on their own **because light dispels darkness.**)

2) In a direct fashion: To memorize the first half-page of Perek Mem-Aleph, and to constantly remind yourself about what is written there – that Hashem stands over him and searches his reins and heart.

About learning well **and with diligence:** You simply have to learn more, and you should review your learning several times, and in this way you will learn the material in more depth. **You will also become accustomed to this** [diligent learning] – **and slowly but surely, habit becomes etc.** [nature].

And you should know – that sometimes since after learning **one subject** in depth, a person's mind can get fatigued. **And then** you should switch the subject you are learning **with** something else: from one *mesechte* to another *mesechte*; from learning *ligirsa* to learning *bi'iyun*, **or vice-versa or the like.**

[The Rebbe had written in a letter that it would make it easier for me to learn if I studied from inside a *sefer*, and that I should also learn out loud, as *Chazal* say למוציאיהם בפה, that Torah is life to those who speak its words with their mouth. The Rebbe follows up on this point:]

When I wrote about למוציאיהם בפה, I was referring to the simple meaning of the *gemara* in Eiruvim, to say the words aloud when learning—**and the intention is not to scream out loud, rather to “hear with your ears what you say with your mouth.”**

About [help with] *hiskashrus*: when I stop thinking [i.e. when you stop] **about what is not good, constantly about yourself, and** [instead] **involve yourself in Torah and mitzvos, and this** will help with *hiskashrus* **as well.**

On the issue that you feel that you speak

more than is needed, you should review the abovementioned, and it will help for that as well.

Regarding a specific *seder* in learning: for a *bochur* at your age it is impossible to set a specific *seder*, since **every few months from time to time** he changes. [On the other hand] it wouldn't make sense to give him a *seder* for only a few weeks. Instead, you should speak to the *mashpia* and *mashgichim* in the yeshiva where you are learning, and they will advise you based on your **ability situation at the time.**

This is about a very specific *seder*. But overall, you should keep the *sidrei hayeshiva*, and in your free time you

should study subjects that you enjoy. If basic *halachos* are not learned in *sefer*, then first and foremost **in your free time** you should learn basic *halachos*, so that you will know the *halachos* of what to do day-to-day: The *halachos* of *yomim tovim*, *hilchos birchas hanehenin*, the *halachos* of interruption during davening, *hilchos tefillin* etc.

[The Rebbe then gave the following *brocha*:]

You should have a healthy summer, and afterwards a healthy winter. You should have success in learning and in davening as you should, and you should have success in fulfilling mitzvos *bihidur*.³

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DESIRED EFFECT

After this, Rabbi Gurary wrote a letter to the Rebbe, asking for further clarification on some points from the yechidus, and the Rebbe answered on each point.

Today I am turning eighteen, and I ask the *brocha* of the Rebbe for success in everything, and for health.

On this occasion, I would like to resolve a few questions I had on several things that the Rebbe told me; and it seems to me that they are all connected to one another.

What can I do that I should feel that “*Hashem nitzav olov*,” that Hashem stands over me?

Regarding what the Rebbe said, not to think about myself, to what extent should I cease thinking about myself?

What is the *hisboninus* that I should think about, both before davening and during davening?

“The way I understood the Rebbe’s words to me was that I should completely cease thinking about myself, because it brings melancholy and bitterness. Instead, I should work on engraving in my mind that Hashem stands over me. Through this, I will automatically be how I should be, and this would also bring to happiness.

I had assumed that the way to accomplish this was by thinking before davening

about the themes written in *Perek Mem-Aleph* of Tanya, and during davening, to think about the *pesukim* that bring a person to fear of Hashem. I surmised that the rest of the day, the influence of davening would last, and I would feel that Hashem stands over me.

But all of this didn’t affect me at all, because I don’t understand the true *hisboninus*, which brings to *yirah*. And because of this, I am not in a good situation; on the one hand, I have ceased thinking about myself, and on the other hand, I still don’t feel that Hashem stands over me, and it’s not good from both directions [i.e. I don’t control myself through thinking about Hashem, and I also don’t control myself by focusing on myself].

The Rebbe instructed me that every time I realize that I’m doing something not good, I should repeat in my mind the idea that Hashem is standing over me. If I were to remember this throughout the day, it would be perfect. However, to my sorrow, I do not remember this throughout the day. Therefore I do not stop myself from doing what is not good.

I ask the Rebbe to explain to me these three things. If I understood the Rebbe’s intention correctly, I ask that the Rebbe instruct me in more detail. If I was mistaken in the Rebbe’s intention, I ask that the Rebbe tell me what to do instead.

The Rebbe’s Response:

On the general letter, the Rebbe wrote: **In all the above, the main point is missing: That a *talmid* in Tomchei Tmimim must keep *sidrei hayeshiva*, learn with dedication and diligence, etc.**

Next, replying to the first question, the Rebbe made an arrow to—and underlined—the part of the letter where I had written “**about the themes brought in *Perek Mem-Aleph* of Tanya, and during davening to think about the *pesukim* which bring a person to fear of Hashem.**”

In response to the second question, the Rebbe wrote “**until he ceases to bring**

“...ALSO YOU WERE GUARANTEED THAT IF תַּעֲבֹד, YOU DO INDEED TOIL, THEN תִּמְצָא, YOU WILL FIND...”

upon himself melancholy and *mara shechora*.”

For the third question, the Rebbe replied, “It is explained in Tanya, in Kuntres Hatfila, and in several other places.”

Later in the letter, he had written that it felt like all of the *hisboninus* about *Perek Mem-Aleph* in Tanya had no effect—“But all of this didn’t affect me at all”. On this the Rebbe wrote, “It is impossible that it doesn’t affect you. If afterwards the *le’umas zeh [klipa]* returns—this is already explained in Tanya, and in Torah Or *dibur hamaschil* “*Hayinu kicholmim*,” and in several places.” (See the main article for explanation).

Later in the letter he had written that “The Rebbe instructed me that every time I realize that I’m doing something not good, I should repeat in my mind the idea that Hashem is standing over me. Now, if I were to remember this throughout the day, it would be perfect. However, to my sorrow, I do not remember this throughout the day.” On this the Rebbe wrote, “The more you become accustomed to this *hisboninus*—the more you will remember this throughout the day.”⁴



IMPORTANCE IN THE DETAIL

After Rabbi Gurary had taken the post as *mashpia* in Montreal, he asked the Rebbe whether he should involve himself in *hafatzos hamaayanos* in addition to his work in the *yeshiva*. The Rebbe answered:

“In regards to getting involved in other activities other than the *yeshiva*, to be involved in only one *kav* is a conduct that we have never seen; you should be involved in other things. The only

question is how much to be involved in it, and in regards to this it is impossible to set hard rules, and [especially since] the situation changes from month to month and from day to day. Therefore, you have to assess to what extent your involvement in *hafatzas hamayanos* should be.

“Since Torah wasn’t given to *malachei hashares* [angels], rather to people who are liable to commit mistakes, your mistakes are also “part of the *cheshbon*,” and will not have any [longstanding negative] effect.”

He asked for advice on how to instill derech eretz in the talmidim. The Rebbe said:

In regards to advice about how to ensure that the *talmidim* have *derech eretz* for the *hanhala*, there are no hard rules regarding this either. Sometimes *kiruv* [a gentle approach] is necessary. On the other hand, it is written that one should “throw fear in the *talmidim*.” There are no set rules; each class and each individual is different. Rather, you have to evaluate this yourself.

In the letter he had written that although farbrengens are generally utilized to inspire chassidische hergeshim, and to tell stories of older Chassidim from generations before, there was also a clear need to address simple issues of yiras shamayim and minhagei Chabad. Rabbi Gurary asked the Rebbe how to go about talking about it, since a farbrengen, where one traditionally speaks about the highest issues, felt like the wrong venue to speak about such basic things. Additionally, he asked the Rebbe what words he should use to speak about this.

The Rebbe answered:

In regards to this that you write, that it is difficult to find the right words to explain

the necessity of simple issues in *mitzvos maasiyos* and *minhagei Chabad*: We spoke about this [at farbrengens] many times. It says in the Gemara in Kiddushin that a person should always view himself like his judgement is balanced on equal scales, and the entire world’s judgement is balanced on equal scales, and through one action he can tip the scales for himself and the entire world.

Or you can speak about what it says in Gemora: “In what [mitzvah of Torah] was your father especially careful in.”

You should also speak about the idea that due to the fact that the world, and a person as well, are constantly changing, sometimes there can be one simple issue that will affect his entire life, or a great portion of his life. Even though it is a very basic thing, his entire life, or a major portion of his life, is dependent on whether he accomplishes it or not.

For example, during times of persecution, there were times when a Yid had to give up his life not to wear red shoelaces, and it was *avoda zara* for him to wear red shoelaces—something that in regular circumstances is completely permitted! These are polar opposites: fully permitted vs. strictly prohibited.

This shows that it is possible that a seemingly basic issue can be extremely critical in certain times.

Regarding the question of how to speak about such basic issues in the venue of a farbrengen, the Rebbe answered:

Begin with more lofty areas, and bring it down into actuality.

[I.e. that I should start off the farbrengen talking about more lofty issues, and later on in the farbrengen, I should bring it down into the more simple, basic issues that needed to be addressed.]⁵ **D**

1. Gurary-Matusof-5772.
2. Igros Kodesh vol. 17 p. 227
3. Teshurah Gurary-Matusof p. 41
4. Ibid. p. 15
5. Ibid. p. 45