



# Tell it Like It Is

## Sippurei Chassidim

אין דעם יציאת מצרים פון חסידות, איז פאראן די מצוה פון סיפור יצ"מ בדבור, דערציילען חסידישע ספורים און דערהערען דעם סיפור אין א פנימית דפנימית. מ'בעדארף וויסען אז יעדער סיפור איז א הוראה בחיים. יעדער ספור בעדארף בריינגען א מדה טובה און א חיות פנימי אין א הידור מצוה און דערהערען דעם דרכי נועם פון תורת החסידות.

In the "yetzias Mitzrayim" of Chassidus there is the mitzva of recounting the story of yetzias Mitzrayim verbally, to tell chassidishe stories and to feel and sense ("דערהערן") the story in one's deepest pnimius. One must know that every narrative is a guidance for living. Every story must bring forth [in the listener] a fine character trait, an inner enthusiasm for hiddur mitzvah, and should enable the listener to sense the "ways of pleasantness" of Toras haChassidus.

(היום יום כ"ו מנחם-אב)

Hand-in-hand with the teachings of Chassidus and the *chassidishe* way of life, come the stories of our Rabbeim and their Chassidim.

In fact, in many respects, *chassidishe* stories from the Rabbeim even take precedence over *Toras haChassidus* itself.

The Alter Rebbe once said: "When we heard a Torah from our Rebbe [the Mezricher Magid], we considered it as *Toras She'baal Peh*. But when we heard a story from him, we considered it as *Toras She'biksav*."<sup>1</sup>

### Chassidic Training

When new *yungeleit* arrived in Lubavitch to learn the ways of Chassidus, the Tzemach Tzedek would often send them to the famed Chossid, Reb Hillel Paritcher for training.

Reb Hillel would assign to veteran *yungeleit* to teach the newcomer the basics of *darkei haChassidus*.

"In addition to that," the Frieddiker Rebbe explains, "their main task was to tell stories to

the newcomers; stories of the Rabbeim and elder Chassidim. Each story was repeated over and over again, until the newcomer understood it well and was proficient in all its details.

“Then they would ask the newcomer what lesson he learned from the story; about fixing one’s *middos*, *yiras Shamayim*, understanding *Elokus*, etc. They compelled the newcomer to exert his mind in this subject as if he was studying a deep concept. They would assist him with this task, and they would tell him what they had heard from their teacher, Reb Hillel about this subject...”

Reb Hillel himself would say stories in honor of the newcomers as well, and then explain the lessons to be learned from them.

“The first thing one must do in *avodah* is bring himself close—אדם כי יקריב מכם, as explained in Chumash Vayikra,” Reb Hillel would explain. “But first, in order to know what an אדם is—what it means to be a person—the Torah prefates the two *sefarim* of Bereishis and Shemos; composed mostly of stories. First come the stories, then you can learn Torah...”<sup>2</sup>

## Stories First

The Frieddiker Rebbe often quoted the words of Chazal: גדולה שימושה של תורה יותר מלימודה—[the lessons learned while] serving [*talmidei chachamim*] is greater than learning Torah itself. In our instance,



the stories that we hear and relate about the lives and times of Rabbeim and Chassidim are more important than merely learning Chassidus. These stories carry real-life lessons and they teach us how to actually live. They serve as the “*neshamah*,” the life of our *avodas Hashem*.<sup>3</sup>

In a famous letter written in honor of a *siyum sefer Torah*, there is a story told by the Frieddiker Rebbe about a visit paid by Reb Aizik Hummiller to the *tzaddik* Reb Yisroel Ruzhiner; a *shlichus* on behalf of the Tzemach Tzedek.

While there, Reb Aizik witnessed an incredible occurrence:

Two Chassidim of Reb Yisroel came to Ruzhin to receive his approbation for the *sefarim* they were each publishing. The first Chosid was a renowned *rav* who had compiled a *sefer* of his intricate *chiddushei Torah*. The other was a simpler individual who had collected stories of *tzaddikim* and planned to publish them in book-form.

After having his *gabbai* read from each of the *sefarim*, Reb Yisroel began to extoll and expound on the importance of stories of *tzaddikim* and the profound impression they create in the *tzaddikim*'s chamber on High. Then he turned his attention to the other *sefer*, expounding on the *chiddushei Torah* and adding comments of his own to the *pilpulim*.

Reb Aizik was quite fascinated by the conduct of Reb Yisroel and how he related to each of his students, but he was a bit puzzled by the precedence Reb Yisroel gave the *sefer* of stories over *chiddushei Torah*.

Two days later, while sitting at a *seuda*, Reb Yisroel explained:

“I know that the ‘*Litvisher gaon*’ [Reb Aizik] is puzzled by the fact that we gave precedence to the stories over *chiddushei Torah*.

“In truth, this question is an age-old one. It was asked by Rashi in his first comment on the Torah: Why did Hashem start with Bereishis and not with the first mitzvah of *לכם הזה הזכר*? The reason, explains Rashi, is to demonstrate *כח מעשיו הגיד*—the strength of His deeds, the true *chayus* and life of this world, the *neshama* of the world. Hashem’s ever present hand always creating the world.

“We follow the order that Hashem used in Torah: first *Sefer Bereishis* with the stories of *tzaddikim*, then *Sefer Shemos*, containing the mitzvos.



“Both authors are great Chassidim. The first one’s compilation tells us of the *chiddushim* that he himself composed in Torah. The second one tells us of Hashem’s *chiddushim* in the world; stories of *tzaddikim*...”<sup>4</sup>

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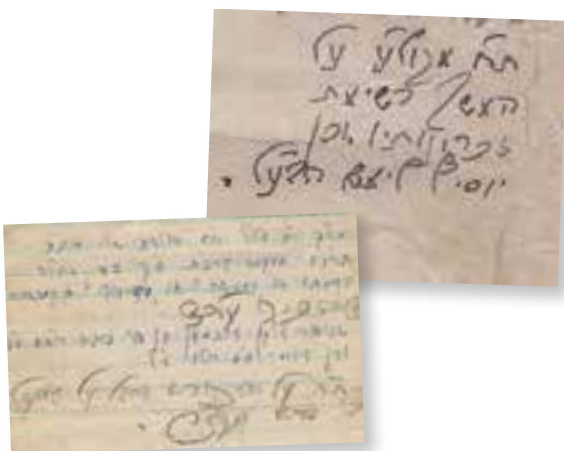
## MOST PRECIOUS

I once brought a *sefer* of stories to my father [the Rebbe Rashab]. They were not transcriptions of [talks by] the Rabbeim; they were heard from the “princes” [i.e. members of the Rabbeim’s household]. My father was very pleased, and told me: “I cherish this collection, more than if you’d have brought me a *ksav* from a Rebbe.”

My father’s esteem for a manuscript of the Rabbeim is well known. He went on *mesirus nefesh* to acquire a *ksav yad* from the Alter Rebbe.

Nevertheless, the *sefer* of stories was even more precious to him.

(*Sefer Hasichos* 5704 p. 63)



## It’s All in the Details

Chassidic storytelling is an art, the Frierdiker Rebbe explains.

“When one tells a story, he needs to prepare himself even more than when reciting a deep *maamar Chassidus*. Also the one hearing the story needs to prepare himself more than when listening to a deep *maamar Chassidus*... The storyteller needs to relate it with all its accompanying details, so that the listener will feel as if he is living in that particular state.

“My father [the Rebbe Rashab] taught us how to cherish a story...”<sup>5</sup>

Even the order of the details is of utmost importance:

“Our Rabbeim taught that any story of *tzaddikim* or Chassidim, no matter what the content is, must be related in utmost detail. Even part of a story must be related in the proper order. Even those stories that seem trivial actually carry so much meaning...”<sup>6</sup>

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## BRIGHTER LIVES

*The Frierdiker Rebbe’s sichos and letters are filled with vivid descriptions of his youth. Fond memories of the life and times of Chassidim of old; both the ones he witnessed as a child, as well as the stories he was told by the elder Chassidim.*

*These stories bear much significance to our lives as Chassidim, as the Frierdiker Rebbe once explained in a sicha:*

All these stories and recollections, although they mostly account for the personal life of an individual, at the same time they also carry so much Chassidic life with them. They describe how the Chabad *chassidisher* lifestyle illuminated the ordinary good, old-time Jewish homes; during the week, on Shabbos and yom tov, and during Elul and the Yomim Nora’im.

...When telling a story, one who is blessed with eloquent speech and clear delivery arouses the imagination of his listeners, enabling them to envision a real live picture before their eyes.

For Chassidim in general, and Chabad Chassidim in particular, whose words are illuminated (both in the privacy of their homes and in public, at farbrengens) with stories of Rabbeim and elder Chassidim—their homes are brighter and more refined (ליכטיקער און איידעלער).

(*Sefer Hasichos* 5710 p. 357)

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## The Chassidishe “*Lachluchis*”

The Rebbe often spoke of the importance of *chassidishe* stories, especially when talking to educators about instilling the proper values in their young students.

In *yeichidus* with the mashpia Reb Abba Pliskin in 5723, the Rebbe explained the importance of stories of Chassidim in particular:

“The *bochurim* are lacking a לחלוחית [lit. moisture, i.e. chassidishe vitality and *chayus*]. They need to be told *chassidishe* stories about real *chassidishe* Yidden.



"I specifically say Chassidim; not Rabbeim. Because when they hear about the Rabbeim, they don't relate to the concept; they think it's not within their reach. But from a story of Chassidim, they'll actually learn something and apply its lessons!"<sup>7</sup>

Reading the Rebbe's letters, especially in the years before the *nesius*, one finds that time and again, the Rebbe begs of the elder Chassidim to record their memories and stories they heard on paper, saving it for posterity. At times the Rebbe puts out his request quite passionately, and expresses dissatisfaction when the Chassidim would not come through.

After a group of *temimim* settled in Montreal in the 5700s, the Rebbe relentlessly requested that they write down the stories they witnessed and heard. In one letter the Rebbe writes:

"For more than a year's time now, we've been trying to get you to write the recollections, and after all our effort, they were able to send only one installment and that's it! You explain in your letter that he [...] didn't have time for it!

"Imagine if someone else was the writer and you were the reader, how well would that excuse be accepted?"<sup>8</sup>

One of the Chassidim who did fulfill the Rebbe's request and write down his recollections was Reb Zalman Duchman. (These were later printed in book-form as "*L'sheima Oizen*.") The Rebbe constantly thanked him for his writings, and on one occasion, he revealed a startling fact:

"Obviously, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe knows that you are sending your written recollections here, and he told me that this is 'a very appropriate thing.'

From time to time I convey the content of some of your stories, and each time this brings him great *nachas*..."<sup>9</sup>

## Not Just Arum

Stories are often referred to as the "*arum*" of Chassidus - that which surrounds Chassidus itself. But the Rebbe explains that in fact, the stories are actually a part of *toras haChassidus*. This is why the Frierdiker Rebbe invested so much effort in disseminating these stories; because they are to be studied and hold lessons just like Chassidus itself.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the Rebbe explains that the practice of giving over stories of past generations is nothing new to Jewish tradition. Moshe Rabbeinu himself told the Jewish people to listen to the tales of members of the previous generation: *שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו* - even though he was talking to the generation of people who stood at Har Sinai, still, they were told to ask of their elders to relate their memories of days gone by.

This is why the elder Chassidim have been asked to record their memories, the things they heard from elder Chassidim, which carry lessons for us all. Moshe Rabbeinu already taught us how important this is.<sup>11</sup> **T**

## STORIES HEAL

Regarding what you write about the thoughts haunting your grandmother, how she imagines disturbing things in her mind:

The mezuzos of her room should be checked and she should also give a few pennies to *tzedakah* every morning.

Before she goes to sleep, she should read or be told stories of our Rabbeim and stories of Chassidim...

(*Igros Kodesh* vol. 15 p. 13)

1. *Igros Kodesh* Admur HaRaYYaTz vol. 4 p. 65
2. *Ibid.* p. 51
3. See *Sefer Hasichos* 5701 p. 88
4. *Igros Kodesh* Admur HaRaYYaTz vol. 6 p. 76
5. *Sefer Hasichos* 5704 p. 134
6. *Igros Kodesh* *ibid.* p. 220
7. *Heichal Menachem* vol. 2 p. 221
8. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 1 p. 234
9. *Ibid.* vol. 3 p. 34
10. *Sichas Shabbos* parshas Vayeshev 5729
11. *Sichas Yud Shevat* 5725, *Toras Menachem* vol. 43 p. 163