

BY: RABBI ZELIG KATZMAN

A Labor of Love

The Rebbe's Call to Toil in Torah

לע"נ
מזכיר כ"ק אדמו"ר
הרה"ח ר' ירחמיאל בנימין בן
מנחם הלוי ע"ה קליין
נלב"ע י"ח סיון ה'תשע"ה
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'
נדפס ע"י משפחתו שיחיו

“Rebbi Elazar said: Every person was created to toil, as it says ‘For man was born to toil’; I do not know whether he was born for toil of the mouth or toil of work, when [the possuk says] ‘For his mouth presses upon him’; I can deduce that it is for toil of the mouth.

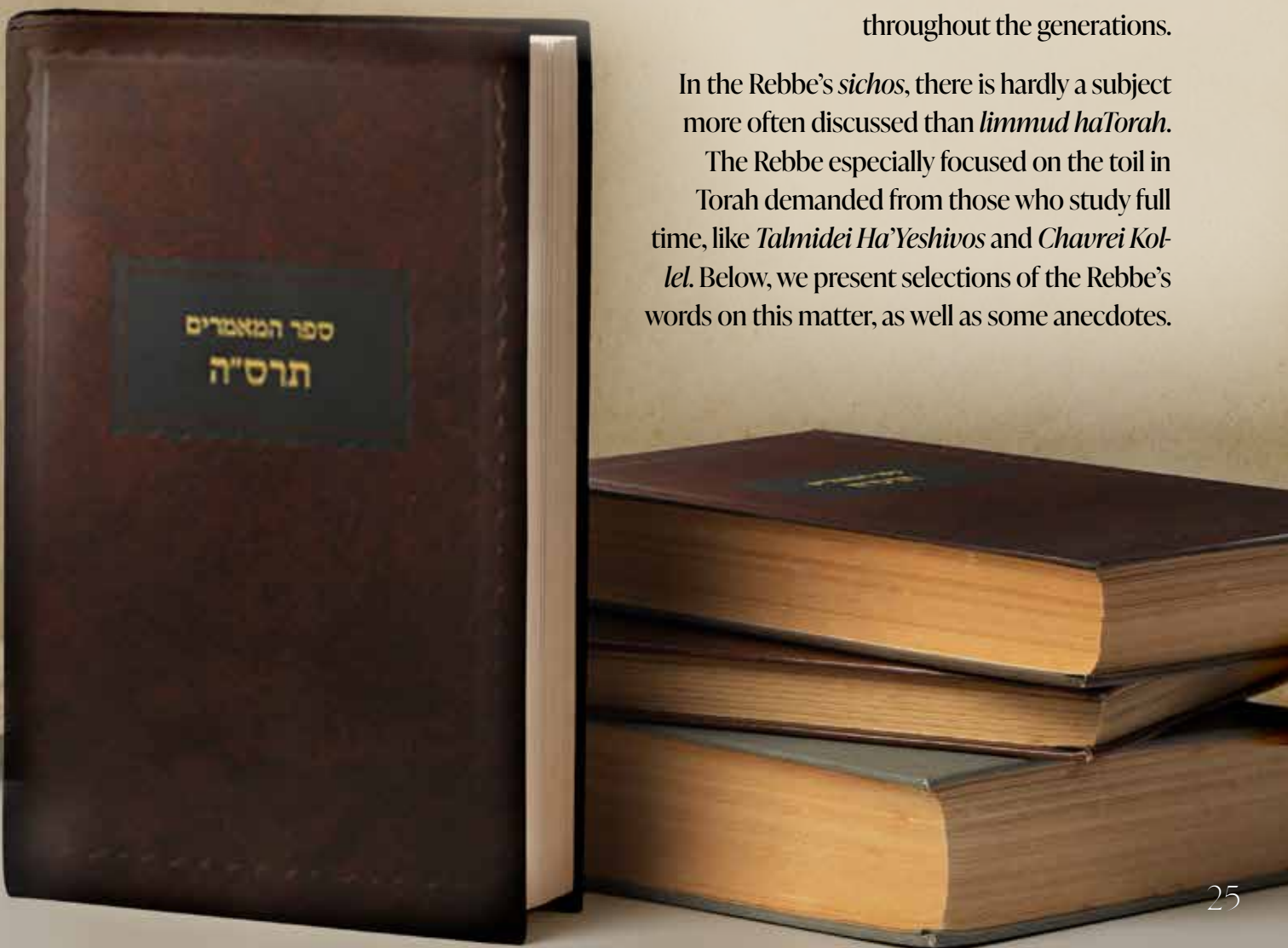
I still do not know whether [man was created for] toil of speech or toil of Torah, when [the possuk] says ‘This book of the Torah should not depart from your lips’ - I can deduce that it was for the toil of Torah that man was created¹”.

Ever since the giving of the Torah, 3,336 years ago, the Jewish people have displayed a single-minded devotion and commitment to studying it, earning our reputation as “People of the Book.”

The importance of toil in Torah is underscored in statements of *Chazal* and the Torah sources throughout the generations.

In the Rebbe’s *sichos*, there is hardly a subject more often discussed than *limmud haTorah*.

The Rebbe especially focused on the toil in Torah demanded from those who study full time, like *Talmidei Ha’Yeshivos* and *Chavrei Kollal*. Below, we present selections of the Rebbe’s words on this matter, as well as some anecdotes.



What Keeps You Up at Night?

“Seemingly, one can claim: Why does it matter if I understand the Torah or not, and what is the big deal if I don’t...? [The Torah] is Hashem’s Wisdom and Will! On the contrary, the pretension of understanding Hashem’s *Chachmah* and *Ratzon* with one’s own [human] intellect is chutzpah that stems from *gaavah*!

“The response to this comes from the concept of *Zman Matan Toraseinu*: The Torah is indeed Hashem’s *Chachmah* and *Ratzon*, “a hidden treasure”, but nevertheless, at Matan Torah Hashem gave it to *Bnei Yisroel*, so they could, and should, learn Torah and understand it with their own intellect.

“Therefore, every year, when the time of Matan Torah comes, a Yid must accept the Torah upon himself...to the point that Torah becomes something that is important to him...

“This applies to every Yid, from the smallest of the small to the greatest of the great, irrespective of their varying levels of Torah study, beginning from a ‘*Ben Chamesh Lmikra*’...up until the level of ‘*Yagdil Torah Veyaadir*’, because in regards to the essence of Torah, when you grasp part of an essence, you grasp the whole!

“...How do you know if Torah is important to you? It’s simple. When you go to sleep, see what it is that disturbs you and does not allow you to fall asleep!...”

This applies even to children, the Rebbe continued, who should be bothered when they don’t understand *peshat* in a *possuk* of Chumash or in a Rashi! It applies, in fact, to people in every stage of life:

“A Rav, whose duty it is to instruct regarding practical Halacha must, in addition to studying in order to know Halacha, as well as his toil to ascertain the truth of Torah, also study Torah on his own in a way that has *no* practical application. For example: The study of Kodashim, which is not practically relevant today, and the like. This study must be important to him, to the point that when he doesn’t understand something, it causes him distress to the point that he cannot fall asleep!

“A Rosh Yeshiva, who needs to say shiur to his *talmidim* in a way that they can understand—in addition to preparing his shiur with *charifus* and *pilpul*, the very study of Torah needs to be important to him, not only that which is relevant to the preparation of the shiur...

“A *menahel* of a Yeshiva, whose job it is to strengthen the Yeshiva, to gain supporters for it... must obviously be entirely...committed to his job. But at the time of *Matan Torah*...the *avodah* of the day is to ‘take’ the Torah, meaning that it should bother him that he doesn’t understand the meaning of Tosfos! True, there are thousands of other *Tosfos*’n that he doesn’t understand, but nevertheless, when he studied

a specific Tosfos today and does not understand something, he cannot sleep at night!

“A *Mashpia ruchni*, whose job is to concern himself with the *Yiras Shomayim* of the *talmidei ha’Yeshiva*... There is nothing greater than the concern and dedication to [inculcating] *Yiras Shomayim*: But nevertheless, the demand of “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*” is that he should care about the study and understanding of Torah, meaning, that he cannot sleep... because he does not understand *peshat* in a Maamar Chasidus or in Nigleh...

“A Shliach, whose occupation and entire *chayus* is in spreading the wellsprings of Chasidus, which is the greatest pursuit, as it brings about the fulfillment of Moshiach’s promise that he will arrive... together with this, the demand of “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*” is that the study and understanding of Torah should matter to him to the point that he cannot fall asleep because he does not understand something in Torah.

“A public activist whose involvement in communal needs has a certain advantage over ‘*Torosam Umnasam*’...*Matan Torah* must also affect him, that he should care about Torah, to the point that he cannot sleep because he does not understand something in Torah!

“The same is true regarding every Yid, according to his circumstances, and there is certainly no need to bring additional examples, for this matter is obvious and understandable to all, and therefore everyone can find the appropriate example that applies to him...

“However, one can still ask: How can this be accomplished? It is a very difficult *avodah*!

“There is an *eitzah* for this, according to the saying of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai to his students that “You should fear Heaven as you fear mortals.’ For example:



“An elderly Yid, with a long white beard, is approached by a small child who asks him the meaning of a *possuk* in Chumash with Rashi. Even if he is not a Rosh Yeshiva, but rather a businessman, he will be deeply ashamed if he cannot answer...”

“Therefore, this should be the reason for which he should be bothered that he doesn’t understand something in Torah... and ‘*Mitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma*’ – he will begin to care about the Torah for its own sake. And it is understood that it will not take a long time to reach the level of *Lishma*, being that the “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*’ assists him.”²

The Rebbeim Demand: Become a Talmid Chacham!

The Rebbe once spoke about the *din* that an *am ha’aretz* is believed on Shabbos regarding matters in which he would not be trusted during the week. The Rebbe said that it is not because he receives the status of *talmid chacham* on Shabbos, “Because in order to become a *talmid chacham*, there are no ‘tricks’; you must toil in learning, because ‘*Lo yagati u’matzasi - al ta’amin!*’”

“This applies to every student of Tomchei Temimim; you must toil in learning to become a *talmid chacham*. This is true even of someone who is no longer a student of Tomchei Temimim, and is now busy with matters of *parnassa* and so on...”

“Once you enter Tomchei Temimim for even a moment, the Rebbeim have become your masters and demand of you to become a *talmid chacham!*”

“You must indeed have help from above, say Tehillim, daven and give tzedakah before learning, do *maasim tovim*, and perform mitzvos *b’hiddur*... but afterward you must sit down and toil in learning, because only by [doing this] will you be able to become a *talmid chacham!*³”

The Rebbe continued that since a Rebbe is like a king, this demand of the Rebbeim must be obeyed as such!

The Importance of Nigleh

From the beginning of his *Nesius*, the Rebbe made it clear to his Chassidim that he wanted them to be deeply involved with, and well-versed in, Torah. At the farbrengen of 24 Teves 5712, the Rebbe spoke⁴ at great length about the importance of learning:

“The Alter Rebbe [whose name was ‘Shneur’] demands of each of us the study of both *Nigleh* and Chassidus, as he paskens in Hilchos Talmud Torah...”

“Therefore, when there are ‘*Shpitz Chassidim*’ who wish to exempt themselves by learning one part of Torah [Chassidus], or alternatively, ‘*Pareveh Chassidim*’ who wish to exempt



themselves by learning another part of Torah [Nigleh], they are told: Neither of you are correct, but rather there must be ‘*Shnei Or*’ [‘Two lights’], the dual lights of *Nigleh* and Chassidus, specifically as they come together...”

“Therefore, the Rebbeim demand this of all of Chassidim, and especially those in the ‘tent of Torah’, and more specifically, *talmidei ha’Yeshiva*, that they should engage in *limmud ha’Nigleh* with diligence and excitement (not merely the excitement of your own understanding, but also excitement) that Chassidus adds to the study of *Nigleh*.”

Reb Meir Tzvi Gruzman a”h, who served as Rosh Yeshiva of Tomchei Temimim in Kfar Chabad, related:

Several decades ago, when I entered *yechidus*, the Rebbe spoke to me about the fact that the *bochurim* in our Yeshivos don’t have the same *chayus* and excitement in learning that exists by *bochurim* in other Yeshivos. When I answered that perhaps it is because they have the motivation of learning ‘*Shelo Lishma*’ of becoming a *lamdan*, a Rosh Yeshiva, or the like, and therefore they continue to grow, the Rebbe responded that by Chassidim there could also be a sense of ‘*Shelo Lishma*,’ but a *Chassidishe* ‘*Shelo Lishma*.’ The Rebbe explained, “When *bochurim* go on Merkos Shlichus, if they ‘know how to learn’, they can go to the local Rov and ‘talk with him in learning’, which will bring more success in their *Hafatzah* work.”

“The Rebbe said that there are *bochurim* who appreciate the *haskalah* of Chassidus. They must know that one can only understand Chassidus properly if one understands *Nigleh* well. The Rebbe added that although there were great Chassidim in Lubavitch who did not know *Nigleh* well, this is an exception to the rule...”



“Before my return trip, I went back into *yechidus*, and [on my note] I wrote two points [to confirm with the Rebbe]: 1) That I should speak with the *bochurim* about learning *Nigleh* ‘*Shelo Lishma*’, in order to succeed in *Hafatzah* and to understand Chassidus well. 2) That since *Hiskashrus* is an idea that *bochurim* connect with, perhaps I should encourage the *bochurim* to learn *Nigleh* for this purpose?”

“The Rebbe read my note for a long time (despite the fact that the Rebbe generally read the notes very quickly) and then commented: ‘*Shelo Lishma*? They must learn *Lishma*! Rather, when they are unsuccessful in learning *Lishma*, they should at least learn for this [the reasons mentioned above].’

“Regarding what I wrote about *Hiskashrus*, the Rebbe answered: The concept of *Hiskashrus* is to fulfill the desire of the one to whom you are connecting. And my desire is that *bochurim* should *koch zich* in learning *Nigleh*...”

“The Rebbe expressed himself in various ways regarding this desire, and when I left [*yechidus*], I could not remember all of them. The Rebbe used language such as ‘*Ratzon Pnimi*’, ‘*Ratzon Atzmi*’, and similar expressions—terms that convey his deep desire that *bochurim* should learn a lot of *Nigleh*...”

The Rebbe’s desire to see Chassidim studying *Nigleh* diligently is evident from the following story, related by Reb Yehuda Leib Shapiro, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedolah of Greater Miami:

“Once, someone came to Yeshiva for Shabbos. He told me that he is a businessman who travels around the world, and that every time he travels, he writes a detailed *Duch* to the Rebbe about his trip.

“That Shabbos, I gave a shiur Chassidus before davening in Yeshiva. After the shiur, one of the *bochurim* approached me with a question in *Nigleh*, and a heated discussion ensued.

“After several months, I met this person in 770, and he

told me that in his *Duch* to the Rebbe, he reported that he saw people in the Yeshiva discussing *Nigleh* on Shabbos, and the Rebbe responded to this in big, bold letters: ‘Thank you for the good tidings...’

In a letter to the famed Mashpia of Tomchei Temimim in Lod, Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, the Rebbe wrote: “With regard to the content of your *farbrengens*: *Yasher koach* for speaking about *Avodas Ha’Tefillah* and study of Chassidus. The notion that this is now unnecessary is surprising. However, on the other hand, the study of *Nigleh* diligently and in-depth is imperative. Even if there is no one else discussing this with the *bochurim*, the *psak* of our sages applies ‘Where there is no man, try [to be a man],’ etc. “There is sufficient room on the head” [to lay two pairs of Tefillin, i.e. accomplish all of the above]...”

Choose Your Toil Wisely

The Rebbe often cited the Alter Rebbe’s words in Torah Or, based on the Zohar, that toil in Torah is equivalent to the hard work of our forefathers in Mitzrayim. On one occasion, the Rebbe highlighted this point emphatically, pointing out the striking imperative inherent in this comparison⁵:

“If someone was asked which *golus* they would choose, the *golus* of hard labor in the physical sense or the *golus* of toiling in a difficult concept [in Torah] — even if he was the laziest person, and he does not want to learn, if he is a normal person, he would certainly choose to toil in Torah... over ‘hard work with material and bricks’ in the literal sense, under *Pharaoh Melech Mitzrayim!*”

The Rebbe continued to explain the great advantage of toil in Torah, which is a cause for joy and celebration, despite the great exertion it requires, and especially because we are promised that we will see success in our toil, and ‘there is no

joy like the resolution of doubt.’

On a practical note, the Rebbe concluded, “This simply means that you should sit and learn Torah, *Nigleh* and Chassidus, and toil in your learning.

“You should not be a *bochur* in Yeshiva who thinks he is a “*Rashkebehag*” (major Torah leader) who has already learned the whole Torah, and can now learn Torah between one tea and the next, between lunch and Shalosh Seudos, which you can then learn calmly, with pleasure and rest, because since it is Shabbos, you do not need to exert yourself...

“On the contrary, we tell you: If on Shabbos you will ‘sweat over a Maamar Chassidus’, you will get Gan-Eden, and not *chas v’shalom* the opposite!

“[Rather] you must reach the point where you will physically sweat from your toil in Torah, as it says regarding the Arizal: ‘He would be engrossed in Halacha to the point...that he would sweat profusely.’

“Even though he was unique...[But] from the very fact that this was recorded in *Torah Shebaal Peh*...It is clear that this is relevant to everyone who hears this...”

The importance of toil in Torah is also underscored by the oft-cited *vort* on the Mishna in Megillah, that one should “Interrupt the study of Torah to hear the reading of Megillah.” The Rebbe explains⁶ that although the Megillah is also part of Torah, being that the mere reading of Megillah does not involve the same level of intellectual exertion and investment as other forms of Torah learning, one who can learn at a deeper level and suffices with “reading the Megillah” is considered to be “Interrupting the study of Torah”...

“How Many Bochorim Are Proficient in Hundreds of Blatt of Gemara?”

In the summer of 5729, the Rebbe addressed an incident that had recently occurred with one of the *bochorim* that demonstrated a lack of diligence in *limmud haTorah*, and said as follows:

“It has been 19 years since 5710, and they still do not write to me how many *bochorim* know hundreds of Blatt Gemara *baal peh*. I do not think that there are no such *bochorim* who know hundreds of blatt Gemara and *maamarim baal peh*, but if they would report it to me, the *bochur* would hear a good word [of encouragement] which would give him *chayus* in his learning. But being that no one writes to me [about this], and therefore he doesn’t get encouragement...this *bochur* sees that it is not important to anyone...”

“Why do they not want to write about this? They do not want to cause the *bochur* to feel *yeshus* as a result. In the past, in Lubavitch, they were very careful to ensure that a *bochur*

should not have feelings of *yeshus*, and therefore, this must also be ensured now...”

The Rebbe pointed out that this is flawed logic: “In Lubavitch, they did not read newspapers, and the Rosh Yeshiva did not wear a tie, and same goes for the Mashpia... But now that all these things exist, one must learn Torah, even if this causes feelings of *yeshus*...”

“In the past, a Chassidische bochur took pride in how many hundreds of blatt Gemara and tens of *maamarim* he had memorized. Nowadays, however, nobody wants to take pride in this so as not to succumb to feelings of *yeshus*...”⁷

The Rebbe’s desire to see his Chassidim involved in *limmud haTorah* was also the driving force behind another innovation of the Rebbe - Kollel. In a *yechidus* with Reb Chaim Sholom Deitsch, the Rosh Kollel of Tzemach Tzedek in Yerushalayim, the Rebbe pointed out that “In Lubavitch and Kremenchug, there was no Kollel. The Kollel was founded so that those who *koch zich* in learning should be able to continue. The indicator of this is that a *yungerman* comes early and leaves late...”

The Rebbe described what real *chayus* in learning would look like: “When he walks in the street and meets another Yid, he should say ‘Today I thought of this *sevara*...’” The Rebbe repeated this, and added, “A *sevara* in [the words of the *Tanna*] Sumchus”. The Rebbe’s words were expressed so passionately that they were audible outside...

The Rebbe expressed bewilderment at the lack of *chayus* in learning among the *yungeleit*: “How could this be? Someone who deals with diamonds, and does not have a *koch* in it!? ...”

In closing, we will cite the last *Yechidus Klolis* with the *bochorim* to date, on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5752, when the Rebbe demanded that “Every student in Yeshiva that is here, as well as every student of Yeshiva wherever he is, should add in study of the entire Torah [beginning with the study of Rambam, which encompasses all the laws of the Torah within it]...”

“Moreover, his study of Torah should be above any measure, to the point that the first thought he has when he wakes up should be in Torah, and, even in his sleep he should be dreaming concepts in Torah and *pilpul* in Torah!

“When one looks at a true Yeshiva *bochur*, it should be apparent that his true identity, his whole world, and life is Torah.” **T**

1. Sanhedrin 99b.

2. Shabbos Parshas Nasso 5745; Hisvaaduyos p. 2256.

3. Shabbos Parshas Pekudei 5741; Sichos Kodesh p. 565.

4. Toras Menachem vol. 4 p. 241.

5. Shabbos Parshas Matos Maasei 5740; Sichos Kodesh seif 25.

6. Likkutei Sichos vol. 35 p. 204.

7. Shabbos Parshas Chukas-Balak 5729; Toras Menachem vol. 57, p. 30. Hisvaaduyos 5752 vol. 1 p. 212.