

Broad Perception & Meticulous Precision

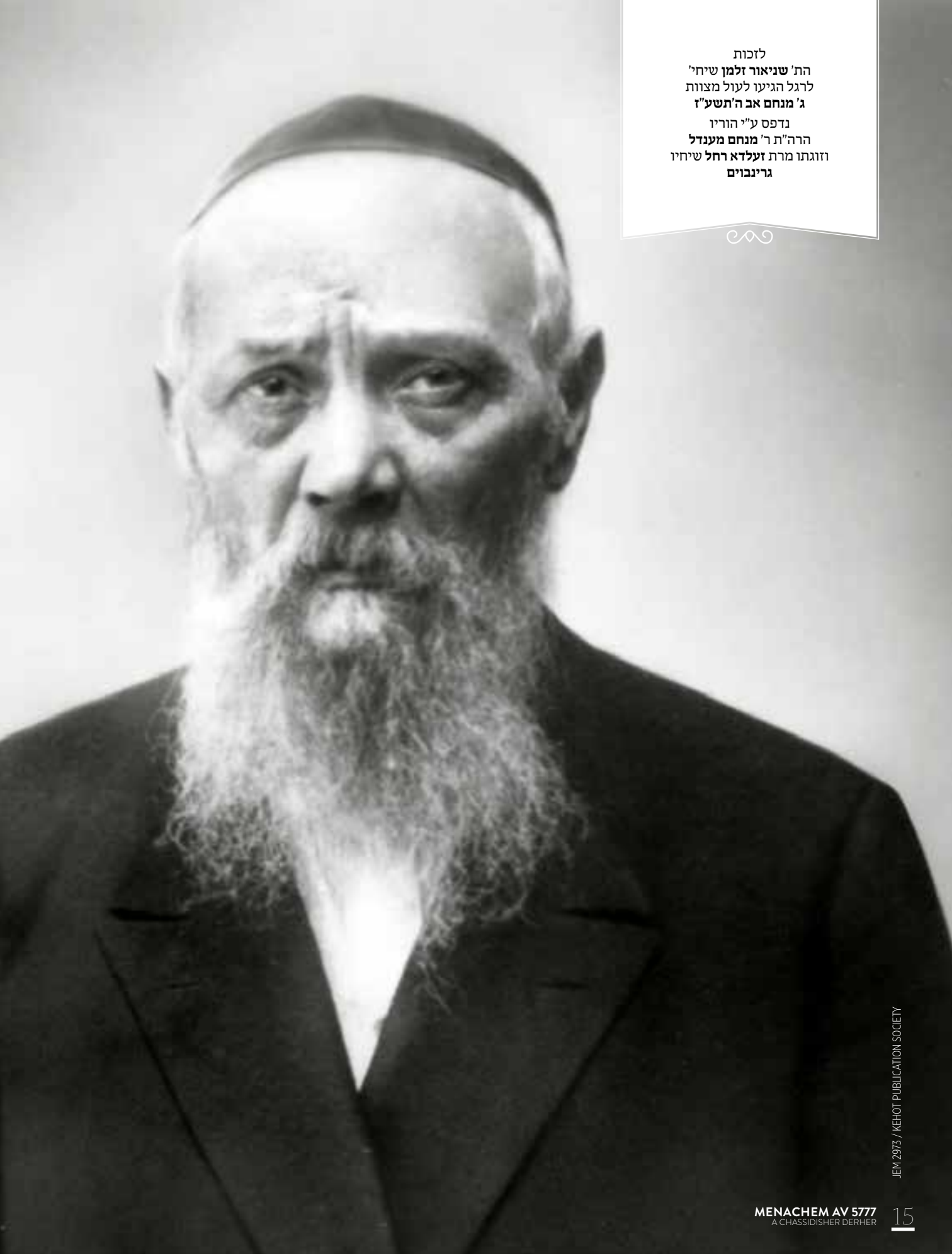
The Torah of HoRav Levi Yitzchak

In the Av editions of past magazines, we have written about multiple aspects of Horav Levi Yitchok's life: his courageous years of *rabbonus*¹; his tremendous *mesiras nefesh* in the face of tyranny²; personal encounters with him³; and his final years in exile⁴.

In honor of this year's Chof Av, we endeavor to approach Horav Levi Yitzchak's life from perhaps the most challenging perspective of all: his Torah. Like their Creator, *tzadikim* instill their essence into their Torah, "*Anna nafshi kesavis yehavis*," and although the Rebbe told stories about his father on many occasions, the primary focus was always his father's Torah. The

Rebbe discussed this at almost every farbrengen from when it was published in 5730—an honor reserved for nothing else other than Rashi *sichos*, Pirkei Avos in the summer, and, in the later years, Rambam.

In this review, we have relied heavily on a series of articles and interviews published by Reb Yoel Kahan throughout the years; an overview of Horav Levi Yitzchak's writings by Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine; and an exclusive interview with Rabbi Dovid Dubov, author of *Yalkut Levi Yitzchak Al Hatorah*, selections of Horav Levi Yitzchak's *pirushim* on the Chumash with notes and explanations.



לזכות
הת' שניאור זלמן שיחי'
לרגל הגיעו לעול מצוות
ג' מנחם אב ה'תשע"ז
נדפס ע"י הוריו
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל
וזוגתו מרת זעלדא רחל שיחי'
גרינבוים



What is a Gaon?

In his introduction to the articles he wrote shortly after Horav Levi Yitzchak's *sefarim* were published, Reb Yoel Kahan writes:

"I once heard from a *chassidische* Yid the following: Before accepting the *nesius*, the Rebbe once spoke at a farbrengen in Riga about the meaning of the title "*gaon*." The Rebbe explained that regular people have no concept of what a *gaon* truly is. They assume that a *gaon* is someone whose mind is much greater than that of a regular person—a hundred times better, a thousand times better, or even more; but, in reality, the true meaning of a "*gaon*" is something completely different. His talents are not only immeasurably greater than those of a regular person—they are on an entirely higher level.

"It's not the type of intellect that can be measured against, or compared to, regular intellect, great or small. A regular person's mind is not only smaller—or much much smaller—than a *geon'ishe* mind, they simply cannot be weighed on the same scale.

"Thus," Reb Yoel writes, "it is difficult—or, better said, impossible—for a person with regular faculties to analyze or give any type of a review on the *geonus* that lies in the *sefarim* of true *geonei Yisroel*. These are the types of *sefarim* of...Likkutei Levi Yitzchak."⁵

Throughout his lifetime, Horav Levi Yitzchak wrote many works containing his innovative Torah thoughts, but, tragically, most of them were lost upon his arrest by the KGB.⁶ Despite the unspeakable pain and torment he underwent, he managed to transcribe hundreds of pages of Torah in the short period that he was in exile, with the assistance of his wife, Rebbetzin Chana.⁷ Using homemade ink prepared by Rebbetzin Chana—which is why they are written in many different colors—he wrote mostly on

the margins of the very few *sefarim* she managed to bring him from home, in addition to some other papers or notebooks. This constitutes the majority of Horav Levi Yitzchak's writings that are published today in 4 volumes.

Rabbi Dovid Dubov, author of *Yalkut Levi Yitzchak Al Hatorah*, explains: "Horav Levi Yitzchak would draw one or two tiny circles on top of the words that his *pirush* was discussing, and then he would begin writing on the margin of the page. When he inevitably ran out of room, he would generally go *backwards*, to the page *before*, and continue the *pirush*. (Presumably he went backwards in order to avoid filling the later pages and running out of room.) In order to show that it was a continuation of the other *pirush*, he would rewrite the last three words from where he left off, and continue on from there. For example: If the last words on page *reish daled* was וּכְמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּלִקּוּטֵי תוֹרָה, he would rewrite on page *reish gimmel* וּכְמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּלִקּוּטֵי תוֹרָה, and continue on from there.

"This could continue over many, many pages. Being that the margins were often full with previous writings, he would have to find every space available to squeeze in his new *pirush*. His longest single *pirush*, on the Zohar of parshas Tzav, fills *fifty-four pages* of the *published* version Likkutei Levi Yitzchak—over a hundred pages of margins on the Zohar!

"Since he was such a *ma'ayan hamisgaber*, a gushing fountain of Torah, he would often delve into side-points, elaborating on various concepts at length—and then there were sometimes parentheses within parentheses—until he would finally write: "This is the end of the parentheses that began on page...; now, we will return to the original theme..."

Horav Levi Yitzchak only possessed a few *sefarim* in exile: a set of Zohar (an edition with unusually large margins); a Tanya; and a pocket-

...Regular people have no concept of what a gaon truly is. They assume that a gaon is someone whose mind is much greater than that of a regular person—a hundred times better, a thousand times better, or even more...

sized Mishnayos with Ikkar Tosfos Yom Tov. Of his five published *sefarim*, three were written on the margins of the Tanya and Zohar.

“People don’t realize this, but the utter *bekius* that Horav Levi Yitzchak reveals in his writings is mind boggling. We’re not even talking about the entirety of the Bavli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashim; right off his fingertips he could quote all types of seforim in *nigleh*, Chassidus and Kabbalah, as if he were sitting before a computer. This is clearly evident in his writings from exile, where he quotes or cites dozens upon dozens of *sefarim* that he clearly did not possess.”

The Rebbe’s father was known as a *gaon olam* in all circles of Yiddishkeit, both Chassidim and *minsagdim*. “For certain reasons, my father went to receive *semicha* from *olamische* rabbonim, including Reb Chaim Brisker, the Lodzer Rov, and others,” the Rebbe once related at a farbrengen. “Reb Chaim Brisker was aware that my father was ‘from the family’ [i.e the Schneersohn family]—and he was dressed as Chassidim did in those days—so he gave him a very hard time, trying to find a way out of giving him *semicha*. When, following all the tests, Reb Chaim was forced to give my father *semicha*, he pronounced: ‘Gevald Reb Leivik!

[You have] such a good mind—and what do you invest it in...?!’ He meant to say that my father had put his mind too much into Chassidus and Kabbalah...”⁸

Horav Levi Yitzchak’s method

But what, exactly, *is* Horav Levi Yitzchak’s approach? Being that his Kabbalah/*remez* approach is so different than the usual styles of learning most people are accustomed to, this question is somewhat shrouded in mystery.

To over-simplify, Horav Levi Yitzchak’s approach to learning is generally a mix of two levels of *limmud haTorah*: *sod* or kabbala; and *remez*. He quotes a passage of Torah—it could be a Zohar, a *sugya* in Gemara, a *posuk* in Tanach, a line of Tanya, or anything else—and asks a few questions. Then he explains the inner dimension of the passage according to Kabbalah—*sod*—and how every step and word in the passage is exactly accurate according to this explanation, showing how this resolves many more questions than he asked in the outset. Along the way, he zooms in and shows how this kabbalistic explanation works perfectly in the *remez* of the passage, how it’s reflected even in the most

Horav Levi Yitzchak’s writings are divided into a five volume set:

- Likkutei Levi Yitzchak-Haaros L’sefar Hazohar—Bereishis
- Likkutei Levi Yitzchak-Haaros L’sefar Hazohar—Shemos-Devarim —These were written on the margins of the Zohar that he possessed in exile.
- Likkutei Levi Yitzchak-Haaros al Sefer Hatanya —A small *sefer* originally written on the margins of the Tanya in exile.
- Toras Levi Yitzchak-Chiddushim Ubiurim L’shas Mishnah u’Gemara —These were also written in exile.
- Likkutei Levi Yitzchak-Likkutim al Pesukei Tanach u’Maamarei Chazal; Igros Kodesh —Including the letters and *reshimos* that were sent to the Rebbe.



minute details, in the words and expressions, in the *gematriyaos*—and even the *nekudos* and *trup*.

(It should be noted that these *remazim* and *gematriyaos* are not your run-of-the-mill, cute *vertelach*. The Ramban writes that it is forbidden for a person to concoct *gematriyaos* on his own. The *remazim* written by true *tzadikim*, like the Baal Haturim, are based on a very specific set of rules and guidelines, and only a true *gaon* who knows the truth of the concept is able to see how it is reflected in the words as well. For this reason, every single part of the *remez*—what type of *gematria* it is, whether it's the *roshei teivos*, *sofei teivos*; which word its in; and so on—is perfectly accurate to the theme, and this was sometimes the subject of the Rebbe's *sichos* on his father's Torah. A full treatment of this subject is far beyond the scope of this article.)

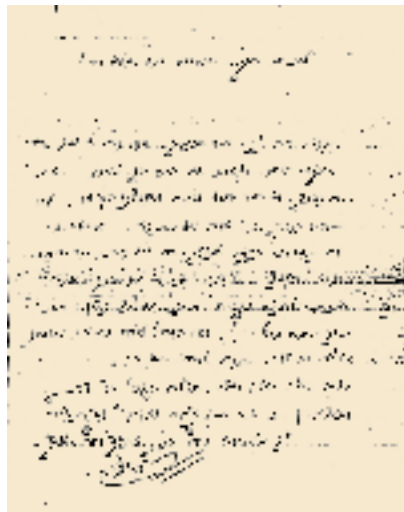
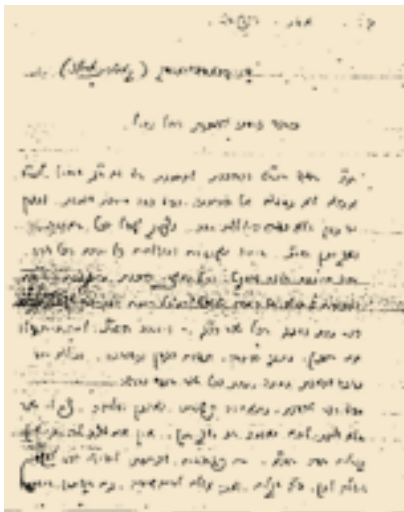
Now, Horav Levi Yitzchak's approach to innovating in Kabbalah was not an entirely new one. Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine writes, "When we compare Horav Levi Yitzchak's *sefarim* with the famous Kabbalah *sefarim* throughout the generations, we find precedents to even his most innovative methods in explaining the earlier works." However, he took it further than anyone did before him. "These *sefarim* anticipated his writings in a general vein," Rabbi Mondshine continues, "but not in the breadth of explanation, in the way he explains even the most minute details. We find ourselves standing before a new phenomenon that has never been seen before."⁹

Take, for example, his works on the Zohar, where he analyzed it line by line, word by word, and even letter by letter, innovating stunning insights. He had many predecessors in this approach, including our holy Rebbeim, the Arizal and the other great mekubalim, and especially the Ramak, who, as one Kabbalah *sefer* records, "toiled in the Zohar to explain all its *remazim*, and analyzed its details literally like a *sefer Torah*."¹⁰

In fact, the Rebbe compared his father's method in Zohar to that of the Alter Rebbe's, and, as the Mittlerer Rebbe writes, the Alter Rebbe had profound reasons for learning Zohar in this manner. "I heard from his holy mouth... that the passage that says...'with this work *sefer haZohar*, the Yidden will go out of *galus*,' refers to studying Zohar with great intensity, depth, and toil; analyzing how each word is accurate according to the true wisdom of Kabbalah. This was the approach of the Arizal, and this is how he merited the revelation of Eliyahu and *ruach hakodesh*—by toiling greatly in the passages of the *Zohar hakadosh*."

But although there were many forerunners to analyzing the Zohar in such a manner in a general way, Horav Levi Yitzchak took this approach to an entirely new level.

Perhaps the most innovative of Horav Levi Yitzchak's Torah sections are his kabbalistic explanations on *sugyos* in Gemara. His approach is based on the cardinal precept that *nigleh* and *nistar* are not two separate fields of study—there are no two Torahs *chas v'shalom*—rather they



A LETTER IN THE HANDWRITING OF THE REBBE'S FATHER HORAV LEVI YITZCHOK.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

Why was Rebbi Yossi the one who was found thinking about worldly matters, and not any of the other tannaim? What does it mean that he lost a letter in his name? How is it possible that one of the greatest tannaim started thinking about worldly matters in the midst of a discussion about the secrets of the Torah?

are mirror images of each other, like body and soul. Just as the 613 limbs of the soul are bound with the 613 limbs of the body, *nigleh* and *nistar* complement and complete each other—one cannot be truly understood without the other. Under Horav Levi Yitzchak's hand, the utter unity of these two elements is revealed and illuminated—to the extent that they become one and the same: the *sugyos* in Gemara are illuminated by Kabbalah, and kabbalistic principles are learned from Gemara.

This method applies not only to the *aggada* section of Gemara—where “most secrets of the Torah are buried”—but also to pure *nigleh-sugyos*. In this arena, Horav Levi Yitzchak stands largely alone in history, as Rabbi Mondshine writes: “Although many *halachos* in Shas were explained according to Kabbalah, as the Arizal would do, I do not believe that there are any other *sefarim* like this—works that illuminate *sugyos* of Shas down to the very last detail, explaining every element of the back and forth of the *sugya*.”¹¹

Stunningly Innovative; Eminently Accessible

In all of Horav Levi Yitzchak's writings, one finds two elements. On the one hand, the *remazim* and *gematriyaos* are spectacular in their accuracy and detail; but one can appreciate the innovations on a much simpler plane as well. Even the layman can (often) understand the service he does to the *sugya*, how each twist and turn of the Gemara—which seemed problematic before—works perfectly according to the kabbalistic explanation. “Reb Yoel Kahan once told me,” says Rabbi Dubov, “that in the *reshima* on the *sugya* in Pesachim that begins *Reb*

Simlai—a nearly fifty-page *reshima* which Horav Levi Yitzchak sent to the Rebbe—he resolves a hundred questions on the *sugya*!”

The Zohar, for example, records many different types of stories and teachings from *tannaim*, and it is often difficult to comprehend what it's trying to say—it can seem repetitive, random, or simply strange. This is a vignette from the Zohar describing an event that occurred when Rashbi was learning with his *chevraya*:

...[Rebbi Shimon] saw that Rebbi Yossi was thinking about worldly matters [in the middle of learning]. He said to him “Yossi! Stand up and complete your image, for you are now missing one [letter in your name]!” Rebbi Yossi rose, and said original words of Torah, and stood before him. Rabbi Shimon looked at him, and said “Rebbi Yossi! Now you are complete before *atik yomin* and your image is complete.”

On the face of it, it's not a particularly difficult story to understand. But Horav Levi Yitzchak explains what it *means*, what the Zohar is *really* trying to say. Why was Rebbi Yossi the one who was found thinking about worldly matters, and not any of the other *tannaim* who were present? What does it mean that he lost a letter in his name? And, perhaps most importantly—how is it possible that one of the greatest *tannaim* started thinking about worldly matters in the midst of a discussion about the secrets of the Torah?

Horav Levi Yitzchak explains that this story is, in fact, far from mundane, and reflects the levels of the *neshamos* of these *tannaim*, whether they were connected to *malchus*, which must be plugged into the world, or to higher levels which are far beyond this mundane reality. The

explanation, though kabbalistic, illuminates the simple meaning of the Zohar in a stunning yet simple fashion, accessible even to the layman.

Hashem says “Teiku”

Horav Levi Ytitzchak’s method in learning, that every iota of Torah is of the highest level of accuracy, was based on his general approach to Torah, which he articulated in a striking letter to the Rebbe. “Do not imagine,” he writes, “that the learning, intellect, and analysis of the *chachamim* of the Mishnah and the Gemara—as well as those who studied Torah *lishma* in later generations—is at all comparable to the study and analysis of regular human intellect...There is no doubt whatsoever, that everything recorded in *Torah Shebichsav* and *Torah Shebaal Peh*, both in *halacha* and *aggada*, and all the *sefarim* authored by *chachamim tzadikim* who studied Torah *lishma*; and even the *halachos* that the Gemara itself calls a *bedusa*, a mistake—all of them were said by Hashem himself, and He said it exactly as it is written; Hashem himself said the *halacha* and He himself said that it is a mistake. [The same is true regarding] all the questions that remain in *teiku*, unresolved, and all the things that were refuted (a *tiyuvta*)—all of them were said by Hashem, and He also said the *teiku* or *tiyuvta*...”

A Status Unto Its Own

“In Lubavitch throughout the generations,” Reb Yoel Kahan says, “Chassidim would avoid studying Chassidus authored by other Chassidim. This included even the most respected *geonim* and *tzadikim* like Reb Aizik Homiler, Reb Pesach Molostovker, and so on. Even Reb Hillel Paritcher’s writings, which Chassidim did read, were never really *studied*, and even this was only due to Reb Hillel’s profound *hiskashrus* to the Tzemach Tzedek.

“This is because there is big difference between the Chassidus of the Rabbeim and the Chassidus written by Chassidim: The Rabbeim “saw” *Elokus*, and transmitted this light and brought it down for their followers through their *sichos* and *maamarim*. They are *divrei Elokim*

JEM 2968



chayim, words of the living *Aibershter*, and when a Yid learns the Rabbeim’s Torah, the light of *Elokus* shines into him. It affects this person’s *neschama*, bringing him closer to *Elokus* and inspiring him to *avodas Hashem*.

“Chassidim, on the other hand, no matter how lofty a level they may be, are physical beings

Handwritten text in the top left margin of the left page.

Handwritten text in the top margin of the right page, including the page number 32.

שבת

Handwritten text in the left margin of the left page.

Main handwritten text on the left page, starting with 'ולא יאמרו כי אחרת'.

Handwritten text in the right margin of the right page.

וזהו סודו

בגדי אהרן

Handwritten text in the right margin of the right page, starting with 'בגדי אהרן'.

Handwritten text in the left margin of the left page.

Main handwritten text on the right page, starting with 'ויקח'.

Handwritten text in the left margin of the left page.

with limited minds. They learn about Elokus through their intellect—but they cannot reach the light of Elokus itself. "And yet—Horav Levi Yitzchak's writings are the exception. I do not believe that there is any other sefer—other than the sefarim of the Rabbeim—that is treated in the same manner.

"The Rebbe spent countless hours delving into his father's Torah at farbrengens, discussing them at great length. The Rebbe elaborated on his father's words, explained their profound meaning in Chassidus, and showed how even a few words contained fundamental concepts in Chassidus. [The way in which the Rebbe taught

Every element, big or small, is worthy of scrutiny, to the extent that he focuses literally on every word—whether it is written in male or female tense, whether it is written with or without a yud—and even on such seemingly irrelevant details as the time and place where the passage was said.

and elaborated upon his father's Torah—thus creating a three-level structure leading from the Zohar or Gemara, to Horav Levi Yitzchak, to the Rebbe—is a fascinating subject for itself, well beyond the scope of this article, and will be included in a future article *iy”h*. –Ed]

“In fact, there are even *maamarim* where the Rebbe analyzes a single word from his father, and bases the entire *maamar* on it!¹² (Although all words of the Rebbe are utterly true and exact, a *maamar* is unique, as it is a time when *Shechina medaberes mitoch gerono*, the *Shechina* speaks through the voice of the Rebbe.)

“In addition, for many years, in the *maamarim* where the Rebbe would mention all the Rabbeim, he would also mention something from his father. I even remember a *farbrengen* on Chof Av where the Rebbe said that this is a time to connect to the *ilana dichaya*, the tree of life!

“All of this shows that the Rebbe saw something in his father's writings that goes far beyond the writings of a regular Chossid. I'm not sure what it means, exactly, but such matters are not for people like us to figure out. It is clearly evident, however, that Horav Levi Yitzchak's Torah has a very special status. [It is important to note that *Sefer Ha'archim*, the encyclopedia on Chassidus initiated and guided by the Rebbe, and authored by a team of Chassidim lead by Reb Yoel Kahan, incorporates topics and concepts from a very specific selection of sources - only the Rabbeim's Torah - and it also includes Horav Levi Yitzchak's writings. In fact, because Horav Levi Yitzchak innovated so many ideas in Kabbalah, many of the entries are based solely on his writings.]

“It is obvious that this cannot be explained by the fact that Horav Levi Yitzchak was the Rebbe's



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

HORAV LEVI YITZCHOK UPON HIS RELEASE FOLLOWING HIS IMPRISONMENT, SHORTLY BEFORE HIS PASSING ON CHOF AV 5704.

father, simply because of *kibbud av*. In addition to the fact that this does not explain how the Rebbe could base a *maamar* on his father's Torah, there's a deeper point: The Rebbe once mentioned at a *farbrengen* that there are some who say that Rashi began his *pirush* with the words “Rebbi Yitzchak said” in order to mention his father, Rebbi Yitzchak. The Rebbe said that this explanation cannot suffice, for Rashi was a true, *p'nimiyisdike* Yid, and surely he would not use his *pirush* to hint to a personal matter. The same is very true regarding the Rebbe, especially considering the extent to which the Rebbe hid and covered up his personal life.”

in Depth

For a bit of a deeper perspective on Horav Levi Yitzchak's Torah, we bring an excerpt from an article by Reb Yoel Kahan:

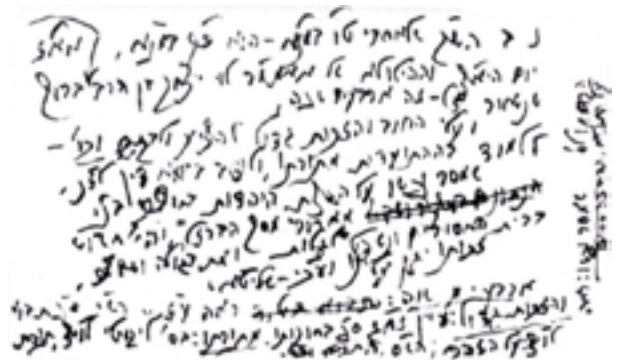
Overall, there are two fundamental ways to approach a subject in Torah. Many people use a mix of these two approaches in any given subject, but when you truly analyze all the various styles of learning, it boils down to these two:

1. **Prat/Element.** To emphasize and focus on the *prat*, every element on its own. Each element is analyzed and weighed, and even details that seem to have no direct connection to the central subject matter are investigated and scrutinized; the analysis will encompass even the wording and grammar of the *sugya*. Every distinct element adds to the comprehension of the overall subject matter—but the *emphasis* is on each element for itself.
2. **Klal/Overall:** To focus on the overall theme of the *sugya*, the crux of the subject matter. *How* this theme is brought out in the details of the *sugya* is not as important as understanding the theme *itself* and exploring its depths. When someone uses such an approach, he immediately discovers how each element is connected to the essential theme—not how it is on its own. [In the Mishnah of *shnayim ochazin*, for example, the focus will not be on the concrete example cited in the Mishnah—that two people are fighting over a tallis—and it definitely will not be on the *details* of the language—like why the Mishnah seems repetitive when recording the litigants' arguments. The attention will be on the essential theme of the *sugya*: the legal concept that *mamon hamutal besafek*, that money

whose ownership is in doubt must be divided.]

Just as a person can only be complete with both a body and a soul, true Torah-learning must include both of these elements: 1) The soul, the essential theme. 2) The body, all the many elements.

Anyone who gives even a cursory read to Horav Levi Yitzchak's *haaros*—which often span dozens of pages—is stunned by the vast range and infinite richness contained therein, how he uses a single concept to astutely explain so many disparate elements and details within a single



THE REBBE'S HANDWRITTEN POSTSCRIPT TO A LETTER DATED MOTZOEI TISHA-B'AV 5744, PERSONALLY REQUESTING OF CHASSIDIM TO MARK HIS FATHER'S YAHRTZEIT BY STUDYING OF HIS TORAH.

נב.
הש"ק שלאחרי ט"ו במנ"א - הוא כ"ף במנ"א, יום היא"צ וההילולא של אאמ"ר לוי יצחק בן הרב אא"ז ברוך שניאר ז"ל - זה ארבעים שנה.
ועלי החוב והזכות גדול להציע ולבקש וכו' - ללמוד בהתועדות מתורתו, ולנדב ביומא דין לז"ג.
שמסר נפשו על הפצת היהדות בתוככי בני "מאהורי מסך הברזל", ועי"ז הי' חבוב בבית האסורים ונשפט לגלות ומת בגולה ושם מ"כ.
זכותו יגן עלינו ועכ"י - שליט"א.

P.S.
THE SHABBOS FOLLOWING THE FIFTEENTH OF AV IS CHOF-AV, THE YAHRTZEIT AND HILULA OF MY FATHER, HORAV LEVI YITZCHAK BEN BORUCH SCHNEUR Z"L - FORTY YEARS NOW.
I FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY AND A GREAT PRIVILEGE TO SUGGEST AND REQUEST THAT EVERYONE SHOULD LEARN TOGETHER FROM HIS TEACHINGS, AND TO CONTRIBUTE [TZEDAKA] ON THIS DAY IN HIS MEMORY; FOR HE GAVE UP HIS LIFE TO SPREAD YIDDISHKEIT TO JEWS BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN, RESULTING IN HIS IMPRISONMENT AND SENTENCE TO EXILE, WHERE HE PERISHED AND IS NOW INTERRED.
MAY HIS MERIT PROTECT US, AMONGST ALL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, SHLITA.

maamer Razal, and, “on a side note,” many other *maamarei Razal* as well.

On the one hand, one finds a treasure of profound logic and intellectual breadth that knows no boundaries; the single concept that Horav Levi Yitzchak innovates is so abstract that it knows no intellectual limits, and can be applied across *sugyos* and disciplines. From this perspective, his Torah is all “*neshama*.”

But on the other hand, Horav Levi Yitzchak focuses his attention on the tiniest of details, to an extent that is difficult to find by other authors. Every element, big or small, is worthy of scrutiny, to the extent that he focuses literally on every word—whether it is written in male or female tense, whether it is written with or without a *yud*—and even on such seemingly irrelevant details as the time and place where the passage was said.

And the point here is not that Horav Levi Yitzchak’s style *encompasses* both approaches—a laser-focus on detail, *together* with an eye for the essential theme—which, by the way, would be innovative on its own. Rather, Horav Levi Yitzchok has a wholly different approach, where both approaches are fused together as one, meaning that while focussing on the tiniest of details, he reveals the ultimate breadth of the essential theme.

You might even say, Reb Yoel adds, that this is what happens when one finds the *nekuda atzmis*, the quintessential point of the subject matter—the level which transcends both *klal* and *prat*; body and soul; abstractness and concrete—where both approaches come together as one.

The Sefiros, Neshamos, the Hours, and the Numbers

In the following, we include one example from Horav Levi Yitzchak’s Torah, excerpted from an article by Reb Yoel Kahan.¹³ We cite it to show a little bit of why it is that anyone who delves into Horav Levi Yitzchak’s Torah comes away with descriptions bordering on the miraculous. The subject is the first Mishnah in Brachos (published in *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak, Likkutim Al Maamarei Chazal*, in the *haaros* to *Maseches Sukkah* p. 160), and it should be noted that only the lighter elements of Horav Levi Yitzchak’s writings on the subject were included in this

article; for the full treatment, the original should be consulted.

Before we begin: a basic concept in Chassidus and Kabbalah is that when the *tannaim* and *amoraim* have a difference of opinion in *halacha*, when one person rules leniently (*lekula*) and the other rules strictly (*lechumra*), their difference of opinion lies in the spiritual levels from which their *neshamos* come from. (See Horav Levi Yitzchak’s letter to the Rebbe in *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak–Igron* p. 263, for a fuller treatment on this topic.)

These levels are generally divided in three: *chessed*, *gevura*, and *tiferes*. The *neshamos* that come from the *sefira* of *chessed*, kindness, will lean towards leniency in their halachic rulings (*patur*, *mutar*, and so on); the *neshamos* that come from *gevura* (severity, discipline) will lean towards stringency. The most famous example is from Hillel and Shammai (as well as their students, Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel): in almost every single one of their arguments, Hillel, who came from *chessed*, was lenient, and Shammai, who came from *gevura*, was stringent.

Then there are the *neshamos* that come from *tiferes*, the middle-ground between *chessed* and *gevura*, and they rule down the middle.

Now to the Mishnah:

מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית. משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן. עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה דברי ר' אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים עד חצות. רבן גמליאל אומר עד שיעלה עמוד השחר.

From when may one recite Shema in the evening? From the time when the Kohanim go in to eat their terumah, until the end of the first watch—so says Rabbi Eliezer. And the Chachamim say: Until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says: Until the break of dawn.

The Mishnah cites three opinions about the time until when a person may recite *krias shema* in the evening. Rabbi Eliezer holds that one may recite it only until the end of the first “watch,” or section, of the night—which is either a third or a quarter of the way through the night. (This depends on an argument in a *Beraisa* whether the night is divided into three sections or four.) Rabban Gamliel holds that one may recite *krias shema* all the way until the end of the night—dawn. The *chachamim* hold that a person may recite it until *chatzos*, the middle of the night.

The result is that Rabbi Eliezer, who gives the least amount of time, is the most stringent, and Rabban Gamliel, who gives until dawn, is the most lenient. This works out perfectly with the level of their *neshamos*: Rabbi Eliezer comes from *gevura*—he was from the students in Beis Shammai (a “Shamuti”)—and he is therefore stringent in this case as well; and Rabban Gamliel was from *chessed*—he was a descendant of Hillel—and he was lenient in this case as well.



Horav Levi Yitzchak shows that this is hinted in a slight difference in the way the Mishnah records their opinions: when it records Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion it says “*divrei Rabbi Eliezer*” [so says Rabbi Eliezer], whereas by Rabban Gamliel it says “*Rabban Gamliel omer*” [Rabban Gamliel says]. The terms “*dibbur*” and “*amira*” are synonyms in Lashon Hakodesh for speaking or saying, but there is a difference between them. “*Dibbur*” connotes a harsh tone, while “*amira*” is softer.

This is what the Mishnah is emphasizing: the strict ruling of Rabbi Eliezer is derived from the fact that it is “*divrei Rabbi Eliezer*”—it comes from the harshness and strictness which is characteristic of Rabbi Eliezer in general. And Rabban Gamliel is lenient in this case because “*Rabban Gamliel omer*,” because he himself, as a person, leans towards *chessed*, leniency.

All this, Horav Levi Yitzchak writes in a few lines. But he mostly dwells on the middle opinion, of the *chachamim*, which corresponds to the level of *tiferes*.

It is explained (in the Mishnah and *mefarshim*) that the reasoning behind the *chachamim*’s opinion, that one must say *krias shema* by midnight, is this: They agree that according to Torah law, *mideoraisa*, one is allowed to say *krias shema* until dawn. However, the *rabbanan* instituted a *gezeira* that one may

only recite it until midnight because people might push off *krias shema* and then forget about it and fall asleep.

Here we see something very interesting: If you consider the opinion of the *chachamim*—the middle ground in this Mishnah—you find that on the one hand it’s closer to Rabbi Eliezer, and on the other hand it’s closer to Rabban Gamliel. When you compare the opinions on a *theoretical* level, the opinion of the *chachamim* is almost identical to Rabban Gamliel’s, for they both agree on the fundamental Torah law that one may recite *krias shema* the entire night. The only difference is that the *chachamim* hold that there is a *gezeira* to recite it by midnight so that people wouldn’t push it off too much. In this, they completely disagree with the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer.

However, when you compare the opinions on a *practical* level—on the clock—the *chachamim*’s opinion is closer to Rabbi Eliezer. While the time of *chachamim* (midnight) is a full half of the night away from the time of Rabban Gamliel (dawn), it is only several hours away from the time of Rabbi Eliezer, the end of the first section of the night. (Depending on the opinions in the Beraisa, it’s either a sixth of the night or a quarter of the night away).

Horav Levi Yitzchak explains that this phenomenon can also be found in the relationship between *chessed*, *gevura*, and *tiferes*.

These three *sefiros* are expressed in the *avodas Hashem* of the *avos*, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The *avodah* of Avraham Avinu was *chessed*, which is expressed in *ahava*, love for Hashem; for this reason Hashem referred to him as “*Avraham ohavi*”²¹⁴—Avraham who loves me. Yitzchak Avinu’s *avodah* was *gevura*, which is expressed through *yira*—fear of Hashem; for this reason it says “*pachad yitzchak*,”²¹⁵ referring to Yitzchak’s fear of Hashem. The *avodah* of

This is what happens when one finds the nekuda atzmis, the quintessential point of the subject matter—the level which transcends both klal and prat; body and soul; abstractness and concrete



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

HORAV LEVI YITZCHOK'S TIGHTLY WRITTEN NOTES ON THE ZOHAR.

Yaakov Avinu was *tiferes*, which includes and unites *chesed* and *gevura*. It therefore says regarding Yaakov אֱלֹקֵי אָבִי אֲבְרָהָם וּפְחָד־לִי אֱלֹקֵי אָבִי אֲבְרָהָם וּפְחָד־לִי, meaning that the *avodas Hashem* of “my father Avraham” and the *avodah* of “the fear of Yitzchak,” were there for him, they came together in his *avodah*.

Now, in *tiferes* we find two opposite characteristics. On the one hand, on an inner level *tiferes* has more of a connection to *chesed* than to *gevura* (as Chassidus explains). On the other hand, when it comes to the order of the *sefiros* and the way they are linked to each other, *tiferes* is closer to *gevura*.

This is expressed in the relationship between Yaakov (*tiferes*), Avraham (*chesed*), and Yitzchak (*gevura*). On a practical level, in the order of the *avos*, Yaakov was closer to Yitzchak—he was his son, whereas Avraham was his grandfather. But on a deeper level, Yaakov had more of a connection to Avraham. (This is why we find that in Yaakov’s dream, Hashem mentions both Avraham and Yitzchak, but while Hashem refers to Avraham as Yaakov’s father, Yitzchak is mentioned without a title¹⁷.)

And this is the same dynamic we see in our Mishnah: Rabbi Eliezer is stringent because of his connection to *gevura*—Yitzchok; Rabban

Gamliel is lenient because he is connected to *chessed*—Avraham; and the *chachamim* have the middle opinion because of their connection to *tiferes*—Yaakov.

And the similarities continue. On a practical level, the time of the *chachamim* is closer to Rabbi Eliezer's, just as *tiferes* is closer to *gevura*, just as Yaakov is closer to Yitzchak. But on a deeper level, in the *rationale* of the *halacha*, the *chachamim* are closer to Rabban Gamliel, just as *tiferes* is conceptually closer to *chessed*, just as Yaakov is to Avraham.



Horav Levi Yitzchak takes it even further. The connection between the Mishnah and the *sefiros*—and how it compares with the *avos*—isn't only true on a general level. It is reflected in the smallest details as well, and the explanation astounds the reader:

Horav Levi Yitzchak explains that the fact that Yaakov is closer to Yitzchak than to Avraham is reflected in the *gematria* of their names. The *gematria* of Yaakov is 182, Yitzchak is 208, and Avraham is 248. Obviously, 182 is much closer to 208 than 248.

But how much is the difference, exactly? The difference between Yaakov (182) and Yitzchok (208) is 26, which is the *gematria* of the *Shem Havaya*; while the difference between Yaakov (182) and Avraham (248) is 66, which is associated with the *Shem Adnai*—the *gematria* of which is 65, and when you include the *kolel*, the word itself as a whole, you get 66.

The result is that the distance between Yaakov and Avraham, which is connected with the name *Adnai*—65—is two and half times the distance between Yaakov and Yitzchak, which is 26, *Havaya*. ($2 \frac{1}{2} 26=65$).

This is exactly what we find in the Mishnah. The distance between midnight (the opinion of the *chachamim*—Yaakov) and dawn (the opinion of Rabban Gamliel—Avraham) is two and half times the distance between midnight and the end of the first section of the night (the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer—Yitzchak), as we will see:

As mentioned above, there are two opinions as to when, exactly, the “end of the first watch”—Rabbi Eliezer's time—is. According to one opinion, the night is divided into three sections. According to this, the time of Rabbi Eliezer is a third of the way into the night—which is a sixth

of the night before midnight. According to the second opinion, the night is divided into four parts—which means that “the end of the first watch” is a quarter of the way into the night—and a quarter of the night before midnight.

As we said earlier, the distance between midnight and dawn (Rabban Gamliel's opinion) is an entire half of the night. So when you compare the two distances (between “the end of the first watch” and midnight; and between midnight and dawn) the result is as follows: According to the first opinion, the second distance is three times as much as the first, because a half is equal to three sixths; and according to the second opinion, the second distance is two times as long as the first, since a half is equal to two quarters.

Since both of these opinions are true, and especially since the Gemara does not rule one way or the other, we must calculate the average of both opinions. When you average three times as much and two times as much, it comes out to two-and-half times as much. Thus, the distance between the time of Rabban Gamliel (dawn) and *Chachamim* (midnight), is two and a half times as long as the distance between Rabbi Eliezer (“the end of the first watch”) and *Chachamim* (midnight)—exactly the same difference as between the *avos*. **T**

1. A Chassidisher Derher Magazine Av 5776 (47).
2. A Chassidisher Derher Magazine Av 5774 (22).
3. A Chassidisher Derher Magazine Av 5774 (34).
4. A Chassidisher Derher Magazine Av 5773 (11).
5. Di Yiddishe Heim issue 46.
6. Rabbi Dovid Dubov counted over two hundred instances where Horav Levi Yitzchak cites an earlier work that is now lost.
7. See A Chassidisher Derher Magazine Av 5773 (11).
8. Sichos Kodesh 5711 p. 278.
9. Introduction to Likkutei Levi Yitzchok (published in Likkutei Levi Yitzchak on Tanya) p. 6.
10. See Ibid p. 8-9.
11. Introduction to Likkutei Levi Yitzchok (published in Likkutei Levi Yitzchak on Tanya) p. 9.
12. See, for example, sefer Hamaamarim Melukat vol. 4 p. 188.
13. Di Yiddishe Heim issue number 59 p. 4.
14. Yeshayahu 41,8.
15. Bireishis 31, 42.
16. Ibid.
17. Bireishis 28, 13.