

Timely Titles

לזכות
החיילת בצבאות ה'
פייגא מלכה תחיל' בת בת שבע
תחיל'
לאורך ימים ושנים טובות

KUNTRES ETZ HA'CHAIM



Chassidus often explains the significance of *Chamisha Asar B'Shevat*, the new year for trees, to be related to Torah study. From the classic metaphor that compares man to a tree, we learn several lessons in regard to our Torah study, which is also compared to fruits. It follows that *Chamisha Asar B'Shevat* was a fitting platform that the Rebbe used as a prelude to launching *mitvza Torah*, a campaign to conquer the world through Torah study. Accordingly, we will explore the Rebbe Rashab's charter for the characteristic approach to Torah study of Tomchei Temimim—Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim.



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The Establishment

of Tomchei Temimim in 5657* was heralded as a revolutionary move, a trailblazer of sorts. At the time, Europe was a bastion of Torah learning, with successful yeshivos in Slabodka, Minsk, Babroisk and Warsaw, among many other cities. Still, the network of yeshivos under the umbrella of Tomchei Temimim was altogether different.

When the Rebbe Rashab founded Tomchei Temimim, he did so with a vision. Given the flourishing state of Torah learning at the time, an additional institution seemed redundant. But Tomchei Temimim wasn't only about academic excellence and rabbinical training. The objective was to instill faith and fear of Hashem in the hearts of its students and to provide a complete rounded education for the body and soul alike, one that inspires their davening, learning, and performance of mitzvos. This way, they will be empowered to protect their religion and display tremendous self-sacrifice to fight for their Jewish identity.

Naturally, this yeshiva differed from its peers in its character, curriculum, and overall learning approach. Although it garnered widespread acclaim, there were some who did not understand its merit. When its unique identity was challenged, the Rebbe Rashab responded by writing a document that addressed the necessity of the study of Chassidus, outlining the ethos and methodology of Chabad's learning approach, titled "Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim."



OVERVIEW



Kuntres Etz Ha'Chayim contains 33 chapters, each closing with a brief synopsis. Broadly, the *kuntres* can be divided into two general sections: In the first 20 chapters, the Rebbe Rashab conveys the importance and necessity of studying Chassidus, while in the latter 13 chapters, he addresses the implementation of these ideals. The first section is written in the familiar *maamar* format and often utilizes heavier Kabbalistic language, as it frequently references a text from Rabbi Chaim Vital's original *sefer Etz Chaim*. Conversely, the second section employs a simpler matter-of-fact instructional tone. Our classic edition of the *kuntres* includes several prefaces and appendices added by the Friediker Rebbe and a brief introduction by the Rebbe.

👉 **An Introductory Letter From The Frierdiker Rebbe:** In this introduction, the Frierdiker Rebbe explains the background to the publishing of the Rebbe Rashab's *kuntreisim* in light of the current climate. He maintains that these *kuntreisim* are just as timely and relevant as ever before and expresses this in a poignant poem that illustrates our generation's thirst for tangible direction instead of self-reassuring toxic positivity.

👉 **Preface - A Letter From The Frierdiker Rebbe:** In this letter from Tammuz 5692*, the Frierdiker Rebbe bemoans the state of today's *yeshiva bochurim*, who suffer from the need to conform to cultural norms. Using rich descriptive language, he nostalgically writes about the positive influence *yeshiva bochurim* used to wield and how the situation has drastically deteriorated since then. Quoting a passage from the *kuntres*, he presents the road to recovery and urges all to follow that path.

👉 **Chapters 1 - 4:** The Rebbe Rashab opens by elaborating on the impact Torah has on the material world, how Torah is the vital antidote to heal the disease of *kelipa* and prevents one from succumbing to its temptations through rousing the G-dly soul to overpower the animal soul.

👉 **Chapters 5 - 12:** In these chapters the Rebbe Rashab introduces the idea that while Torah could be a vital antidote, it can also be a deadly poison. This occurs when it is studied in a manner devoid of any G-dly sensitivity, i.e. when the student lacks the requisite feelings of love and fear of Hashem. Such learning will not only not impact the world and not protect the student from succumbing to its temptations; worse still, such learning may lead to hubris and allow the student to reach mistaken conclusions and determine incorrect laws.

👉 **Chapters 13 - 15:** Here, the Rebbe Rashab turns his attention to another element of Torah which was only made accessible in recent generations: the inner dimension, *pnimiyus HaTorah*. Unlike its outer counterpart, *pnimiyus HaTorah* doesn't have a potential for negative consequences, as it always remains pure and

is unsullied by the world we inhabit. The interplay between the two dimensions is akin to that of a soul which breathes life into a body. Similarly, the study of *pnimiyus HaTorah* enlivens the study of the revealed dimension and inspires the requisite feelings of love and fear, thus preventing its otherwise inevitable ruin.

👉 **Chapters 16 - 20:** The Rebbe Rashab continues to expound on the theme of love and fear of Hashem and explains that everybody is capable of attaining these feelings. This is accomplished through the study of *pnimiyus HaTorah*, for when one studies a concept in-depth and contemplates its meaning, he is naturally attracted to it. Accordingly, everyone is expected to strive to develop these feelings, as only then can one study Torah and perform mitzvos with the correct intentions and ambitions.

👉 **Chapters 21 - 26:** At this point the Rebbe Rashab pivots from an abstract scholarly discussion to the practice and implementation of this discipline. After explaining how the study of Chassidus is an imperative prerequisite to the study of *nigleh*, he sternly warns against the students who have been shirking their responsibilities in that field. He proclaims that those who don't adhere to the schedule and curriculum of Tomchei Temimim are profiting illicitly and will be punished for their ill-gotten gains. He then details the appropriate daily and weekly schedule and structure for the study of Chassidus in yeshiva in clear and precise terms. He also advises the students not to be pedantic with their timetables rather to allow themselves to get carried away in their learning, this way they will enjoy it and won't see it as a burden.

👉 **Chapters 27 - 32:** Here the Rebbe Rashab digresses to discuss the ideal methodology for the study of *nigleh*. He counsels the students to avoid the common pitfall of pursuing innovative intricate interpretations instead of simply striving to understand the material thoroughly and systematically. He then delineates the proper formula for studying a passage of Gemara with Rashi and Tosafos (see sidebar "A Leaf From The Book"), while providing an alternative option for more advanced students. In addition, he

assures the students that if they pay heed to their study of Chassidus it will also enhance their study of *nigleh*.

👉 **Chapter 33:** In this closing chapter the Rebbe Rashab urges the students to dedicate themselves to the Kuntres HaTefillah and to attempt the strategies detailed there in their personal davening.

👉 **Appendix A. Rabbi Chaim Vital's Introduction To Shaar HaHakdamos:** This text discusses the prevalence of the study of *pnimiyus HaTorah* and its essentiality, especially in the generations closer to Moshiach. As this text is referenced several times within Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim, and since it wasn't especially accessible at the time, the Frieddiker Rebbe included it here for necessary context.

👉 **Appendix B. A Letter From the Rebbe Rashab:** Here, the Rebbe Rashab thanks Hashem for allowing him to be sensitive to the winds of enlightenment that were affecting the youth and granting him the ability to combat it by means of establishing the educational institution of Tomchei Temimim.

👉 **Appendix C. A Letter From the Rebbe Rashab:** In this stirring letter, the Rebbe Rashab reiterates many of the themes discussed in Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim. He passionately urges Chassidim to increase their study of Chassidus and encourages the undertaking of several Chassidic practices.

BACKGROUND

Shortly after its establishment, Tomchei Temimim had made quite a name for itself in the yeshiva world. This stellar reputation attracted many prospective students, some already accomplished scholars in other prominent yeshivos. Now, in order to be accepted to Tomchei Temimim, the prospective student would first undergo a rigorous test to ascertain if he was sufficiently qualified and would then enter for a two month trial period. Only once he had proven himself capable of maintaining the adequate standards, by fulfilling his duties in both *nigleh* and Chassidus, would he be formally accepted. This procedure would weed out students who were only attracted to the prosperous *nigleh* curriculum, ensuring that only serious applicants who were interested in the full gamut of what Tomchei Temimim had to offer remained.

In 5664, a group of talented students, who had initially met the expectations and excelled, began to slack off in their study of Chassidus. The Frieddiker Rebbe, as *menhael*, relayed this unfortunate news to the Rebbe Rashab, who then counseled him on how to address this issue. In response to this saga, the Rebbe Rashab penned Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim, to clarify the purpose of Tomchei Temimim and to reaffirm its rules. Like all Chassidus of the Rebbe Rashab, the *kuntres* was not formally published, rather the contents were copied and dis-

seminated by designated scribes. A resounding success, the *kuntres* succeeded in restoring equilibrium, and the learning of Tomchei Temimim resumed as the Rebbe Rashab had envisioned.

Two years later, a storm of controversy erupted in the wake of the publishing of Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim. Several *roshei yeshivos* were particularly irked by its content, specifically chapter 22 in which the Rebbe Rashab casts aspersions on the corrupt manner of Torah study employed by many of the youth at the time, proclaiming it destructive and deadly, and that Tomchei Temimim was established to rectify this erroneous approach. The aggrieved *roshei yeshivos* were split into two factions; some of the more extreme voices insisted that a public outcry to condemn Kuntres Etz Ha'Chaim was in order, while the more moderate among them felt that instead they should send delegates to greater Torah leaders and urge them to take a stand against this affront to the Torah.

As it happens, the more moderate group prevailed and a delegation arrived to the Chafetz Chaim¹ to protest the great injustice. Much to their chagrin, the Chafetz Chaim responded, "We all know the Lubavitcher Rebbe to be a lover of Yidden, who honors Torah and is a truthful person. From what I have heard about the students of Tomchei Temimim,

they are mostly genuine G-d fearing Torah scholars, and the Rebbe and his supporters should be blessed for all they do to promote Torah.”

From there, the delegation went to Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski² and repeated their complaints. Reb Chaim Ozer duly dismissed them and directed them to go to Reb Chaim Brisker (Soloveitchik),³ as the Rebbe Rashab generally took heed of his opinion and they usually had similar positions in regards to communal matters.

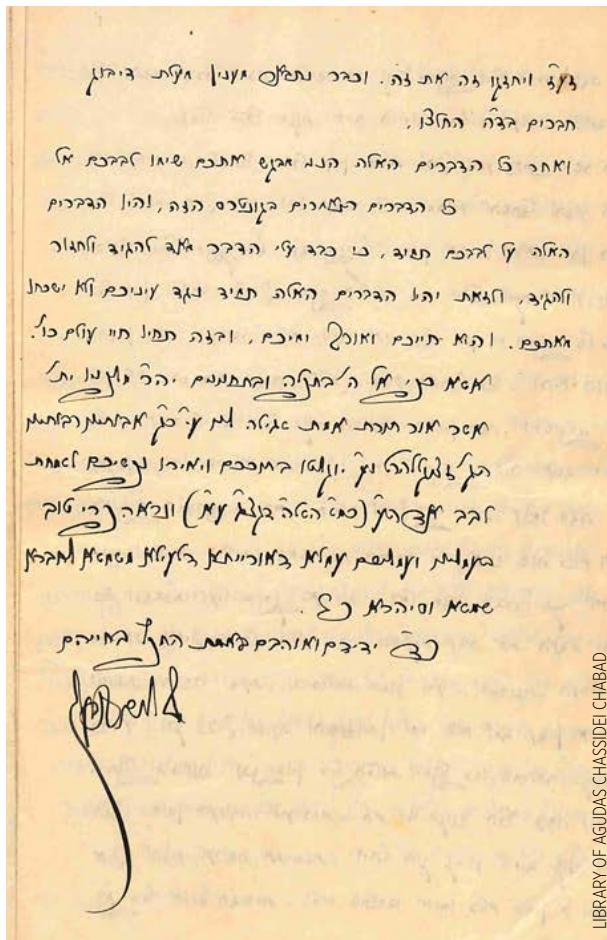
So they proceeded to Reb Chaim Brisker and presented their case. Since he was not familiar with the *kuntres* he declined to comment but instead suggested they leave the *kuntres* with him and return later that evening. When they returned he graciously welcomed them and gushed, “I am immensely grateful to you for exposing me to this Kuntres Etz Ha’Chaim from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Its words are true and fair, and regarding the allegations against different *yeshivos*—he didn’t mention those *yeshivos* by name and it will certainly open the eyes of those *roshei yeshivos* to the travesty in their midst and spur them to correct their approach. The Rebbe is doing us all a great public service.”⁴

In 5706*, six years after the Frieddiker Rebbe relocated to America, he republished Kuntres Etz Ha’Chaim, explaining in an introductory letter how its message is still pertinent today (see above in “Overview”). In this edition he included the supplementary material described above, as well as sources and footnotes compiled by the Rebbe.

Oft-referenced in countless letters and *sichos*, the Rebbe encouraged many to learn the *kuntres*. In 5751*, a special reprint was published to commemorate Chof Cheshvan, the Rebbe Rashab’s 130th birthday, and the Rebbe distributed copies to the public. In the subsequent *farbrengen* of Parshas Chaye Sarah, the Rebbe explained that the distribution was not a mere sentimental gesture, rather a call for it to be studied and taken to heart.

More recently, Kuntres Etz Ha’Chaim has been translated into English by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger and published by Sichos In English with the title “The Tree Of Life.” Another resource is a revised edition of the *kuntres* with explanation and commentary by Rabbi Dov Lieberman, published by Maayonotecha. Just this year, Maayonotecha has released a newer edition with commentary by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirschenbaum.

In the final paragraph of the



THE FIRST HALF OF THIS PAGE IS IN THE FRIEDDIKER REBBE’S HANDWRITING, CONCLUDING HIS COPY OF THE KUNTRES. THE REBBE RASHAB THEN ADDED A FINAL PARAGRAPH AND AFFIXED HIS SIGNATURE.

kuntres, the Rebbe Rashab closes with a prayer and beseeches the reader to take his message to heart. In the first copy of the *kuntres*, this paragraph was handwritten and signed by the Rebbe Rashab, something out of the ordinary for a text of Chassidus. Chassidim have said that this indicates that Kuntres Etz Ha’Chaim is a signed contract to all students of Tomchei Temimim, in which the Rebbe Rashab outlines his commitment to them as well as his expectations of them. **1**

1. Reb Yisroel Meir Kagan of Radin, author of the Mishnah Berurah.
2. Rav and *av beis din* in Vilna.
3. *Rosh yeshiva* of Volozhin Yeshiva and later the Rav of Brisk, author of Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim al HaRambam and founder of the “Brisker *derech halimmud*.”
4. This saga was recorded in a letter of the Frieddiker Rebbe to Reb Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, printed in the Frieddiker Rebbe’s *Igros* vol. 8 pg 515.

A LEAF FROM THE BOOK

CHAPTER 28

THE CORRECT MANNER OF STUDYING THE GEMARA, RASHI'S COMMENTARY, AND TOSAFOS.

קונטרס עין החיים

54

ימצא בו חיות. וגם לפי שהיא כתי' עין החיים בעצם כגיל פייג לכן בנקל למצוא בזה חיות. וצריכים ללמוד בקול ודבור שהקול מעורר כוונת הלב ומוסיף חיות בהלימוד) וזאת היא הכתיבה מי שאינו מדקדק כ"כ בחוסן הוא שהכיב עליו לימוד הדא"ה ותפעול עליו לחאיר נפשו באור החיים: **קיצור**. יוהר שלא יהי' הלימוד כמשוי ולא ידקדק בחוסן (בנקל לפעול בעצמו חיות בלימוד דא"ה. צ"ל בקול).

כזו) והנה הרוח הור הנזיל הרוח הור הרה וילד אפילה, היינו שמצא מקום כביהמ"ד אופן לימוד כזה שאינו נרצה כלל אשר גדולי הראשונים והאחרונים מאסו והרחיקו את אופן הלימוד הזה בתכלית המיאוס והרחיקו, וכל הלומדים תורה כדכתי נהררים מזה כנפשותם שלא ישלחו בם. הלימוד הנרצה הוא אשר תכלית לימודו יהי' לידע את הדבר שלומד ידיעה טובה ומאשרת על מקומה, ולא להשתדל לחדש חידושים ולבנות בנינים כיא לידע את הדבר שלומד (וכאשר יעשו איוה מהלומדים שאינם מהונגי' השבון כנפשמ ימצאו אשר תכלית רצונם הוא לחדש חידושים ולהיות משפיעים בהענין שלומדים, (ועושה את ההלכה למקבל את השפעת שמותיו, אוי ואבוי לו, ה' ישמרנו) ויש להם חשק ותשוקה גדולה בלימוד, אבל תשוקתם הוא באופן לחדש דוקא, ובתשוקה זו הפת ננשים אל הלימוד, ואם לא ימצאו לחדש דבר מתבטל תשוקתו מהלימוד הזה. ובאחת משתי פנים או יקח לימוד אחר היינו ענין אחר אולי ימצא שם לחדש דבר או תשוקתו המסאה בוקעת ויוצאת לדבר ולחדש שמותים שמש אשר לא תוכל האון לשמט) ויהי' הוא מקבל סן ההלכה שלומד ולא שיהי' משפיע בה (וסוף הכבוד לכוא שיהרש בה חידושים אמיתים אבל דוקא לאחר שידע את ההלכה לאמיתתה):

קיצור. יבאר אשר תכלית הלימוד לידע את הענין, ולא — להשתדל לחדש חידושים.

בה) והנה הידיעה ע"פ פשוט היא לידע את ההלכה ע"פ פרשיי לידע את המשמ ולא ימעה א"ע. ובדיעות תנאים או אמוראים בענין אחד ידע מעם ומכרא של כא"א ובשקלא ומריא דנמרא בקושיות ופירוקים צריכים לידע הימב מה היתה סברתו תהלה בההלכה שמשו"ו הוקשה לו. ומה נתחדש עתה ע"י התירוץ. ואם התירוץ מבטל סברת המקשן לגמרי או מקיים סברת המקשן אלא שסמיר קושייתו, אם שמראה לו שאינה קושי' או שמחדש לו דבר בההלכה ומכארה יותר שכזה סרה קושייתו. וא"כ צריך לידע איך הוא כוונת ההלכה לאחר התירוץ. ובד"כ צריכים לשמור סדר וקישור הקושיות והתירוצים ולפעמים משתנה הענין ע"י הקושיות, ובפרט כשמקשין לתרי תנאי או אמוראי דפליגי צריכים לשמור מאד הסדר כזה והמתחדש מהפירוקים בעצם הדין לכל אחר וא' ובסברתם ובמעמיהם. והשקלא ומרי' דנמרא כדון המשנה לידע איך הוא משמ וכונת המשנה לפי האוקימתא דנמרא ומה שנתחדש בזה. והכלל הוא שידע כל פרטי הסוגיא כל דיעה וכל סברא שתהי' כרוזה אצלו היינו כל

Simply put, to know something means to comprehend the *halacha* with Rashi's interpretation, to know the simple meaning without fooling oneself. One should understand the motivating principles and rationales for the positions of every Tanna or Amora; and regarding the give and take in the Talmud, one should understand the initial assumptions behind every question and what new concept was introduced by the resolution, whether it negated the principle behind the question entirely, or whether it accepts the motivating principle, but diverts the question, either by showing that it is not a question, or by developing a new insight regarding the *halacha* and explaining it in a manner which removes the question. He must then determine the intent of the *halacha* once the resolution has been offered.

In general, one must keep in mind the order and connections between the questions and their resolutions, for sometimes a concept is changed because of questions. Especially when questions are asked of two Tannaim or Amoraim who differ, as the resolutions often furnish new insights with regard to the essence of the approach of each of the sages, revealing their motivating principles and rationales. Similarly with regard to the reasoning of the Gemara for a law stated in the Mishnah, understanding the simple meaning and the intent of the Mishnah as it develops through the situations presented by the Gemara and the new insights it brings out.

The goal is to have a clear knowledge of every detail of a Talmudic passage, each opinion and its motivating principle. They should all be clearly defined and ordered in his mind, each one having its place.

After one has completed the entire passage from the text, he should review it by heart (by speaking it over), reviewing every opinion, the questions, resolutions, and the conclusions reached.

He should grasp these thoroughly and not consider it wearisome to review the subject by heart several times in the above manner until he understands it well.

After the interpretation of the subject according to Rashi's commentary is clear, he should study the interpretation Tosafos offers of the passage. He should analyze whether Tosafos are further clarifying the subject according to the explanation offered by Rashi, or providing a more particular breakdown of the subject. It is necessary to understand which new insights their commentary uncovers.

Sometimes they take a different perspective than Rashi, and explain the passage according to their understanding. Sometimes this difference relates to the entire passage, and sometimes it involves only one detail. Since he has grasped the passage thoroughly, it will not be difficult for him to comprehend the matter, nor will he be confused because of the difference in approaches and explanations. He will be able to explain that according to Rashi, the passage can be understood in this manner, while according to Tosafos, it can be understood in another fashion.

It is common for Tosafos to raise questions from other Talmudic passages. It is then necessary to check that source to understand the question they are raising. And when Tosafos presents a *pilpul* concerning a subject with regard to the passage at hand—and certainly, with regard to other passages—much composure is necessary. To understand the subject, he must focus his mental energy on knowing the fundamental intent and rationale of Tosafos. Afterwards, he must know the question they are raising with regard to this rationale, and why they come to a new rationale or a deeper understanding of the first rationale itself.

Having mastered the flow of thought, he should then review the *pilpul* by heart until it is clear and structured in his mind, and then appreciate the new insight their *pilpul* gave to the passage as a whole.

55 קנטרם עץ החיים

סברא בפ"ע תהי' ברורה וכולם יהיו מסודרים אצלו שכל א' על מקומו יבוא, ואחר שנמר את הסוגי' בפנים יחזור עלי' בפ"ע (הנקרא איבער-ריידען) כל דיעה ומה שהקשו עלי' ומה שתירצו ואיך הוא מסקנת הדבר. ויקלוט כ"ו היטב כמוהו, ולא יכבד עליו להזור בע"פ כ"פ באופן הנ"ל עך שיוקלט אצלו הדבר היטב. ואח"כ ילמוד את התוס' על הסוגיא ולאחר שהסוגי' ע"פ פירש"י מסודרת ומסודרת אצלו ונקלמה היטב כמוהו. יראה אם התוס' בפירושם רק מכארים יותר הענין והוא נ"כ ע"פ שיטת רש"י רק שמכארים או מפרטים פרטים כזה. וזוהו הוא קשייתם ותירוצם עך שיוצא ברור הדבר או פרטי הדברים שרצונם לפרט, וצריך לידע מה שנתחדש לו ע"י פירושם. ולפעמים מפרשים בענין אחר, ומכארים מה שלא ניהא להו לפי שיטת רש"י ומפרשים לפי שיטתם הם. ולפעמים גונע חילוק הפירושים בכל הסוגיא. ולפעמים רק בפרט א' מסנה, ולאחר שהסוגיא מסודרת אצלו לא יקשה לו לידע את הדבר ולא יתבלבל בחילוקי השיטות והפירושים וידע דלפי פירוש רש"י הסוגיא כך וכך ולפי פי' התו' כך וכך. ומצוי ושכיח הדבר שמקשים התוס' במקומות אחרים בש"ס. ויש לפעמים שנוחין לעיין הגמרא שמקשים ממנה ככרי לידע היטב כמוהו. וכאשר מפללים התוס' בהענין הן בהסוגיא במקומה וכ"ש אם במקומות אחרים נחוץ לזה מתינות גדולה ולקשר שכלו (צו מראענן ויך) לידע כוננתם היינו עצם הסברא שלהם להבין הדבר ואח"כ מה שמקשים על סברא זו וכאם לירי סברא אחרת, או לעומק יותר בסברא זו עצמה, ואח"כ להזור נ"כ בע"פ כל הפלפול שלהם שיהי' מסודר ומסודר ובקליטה טובה וידע מה שנתחדש בהסוגיא הזאת מהפלפול שלהם.

קיצור. ירש אופן הלימוד בנפ"ת.

בט) ומי ששכלו טוב וחזק ודעתו רחבה יוכל ללמוד בעסק יותר וכמו לדקדק בל' המשנה בעצם הלשון ומה שניראה לכאורה יתור לשון או אפי' ייתור תיבה אחת ובסדר דברי המשנה. וכשיענין ככ"ו ליינע א"ע בעומק שכלו ימצא בזה כמה חידושים בכירור כוונת המשנה ונמ יכול להוציא מזה כמה דינים. אמנם להשפר ולהזור מאד שיהי' בדרך האמת, כי בזה יוכל לענות דרכו ח"ו ולילך בדרך עקלתון אשר יפסיד בזה כל לימודו ח"ו ונח לו שנתפכה שלייתו כי וכמשי"ת. ודרוש יגיעה גדולה יגיעת נפש ויגיעת כשר ושכל ישר והתקשרות מובה, ועל כולם שירצה את האמת דוקא. ותכלית לימודו באופן כזה הוא לפי שוהו עיין התורה אשר מי שהגנו ה' כשכל טוב צריך ללמוד כפי שיר שכלו סגנת, אבל לא ירצה ח"ו להקיש חידושים כמשנת"ל כ"א לעיין כנ"ל, וירצה את האמת וכל דבר לשקול בשכלו היטב. ולפ"ד ביותר שייך אופן הלימוד הזה במשנה דוקא לפי שהוא קיצור שאחר האריכות, והיינו לאחר אריכות הפלפול שהי' להם בתושבע"פ העמיד רבינו הק' כל האריכות וכלם בדברי המשנה שקיצורי דברי המשנה נושאים את כל האריכות אחר הכירור והליבון הטוב. והלשון וכל התיבות סכונים מאד כפי אמינות