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ליובאוויטש770 איסטערן פארקוויי
ברוקלין, נ. י.By the Grace of G-d
24th of Marcheshvan
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Shalom uBrocho:

After the very long interval, I was pleased to receive your letter, with the good news about G-d's benevolences to you. I believe I already had occasion to refer to the saying of our Sages (B.B. 12b) to the effect that when one receives G-d's favors, more are to follow. It is also well to remember the teaching of our Rabbis and Nesiim, "Think well, and all will be well," as explained at length also in the Zohar (II, 184b), introduced by the words To chazi ("Come and see"), note there.

Now to refer to the question of the need to learn Chassidus which you raise in your letter. You do not mention what Shiurim you have in Chassidus, though I had suggested to you the following courses: Kuntres UMaayan; Igteres haTeshuvo (part III of Tanya), Shaar haYichud vahaEmuno (part II of Tanya), followed by Derech Mitzvosecho of the Tzemach Tzedek.

You quote me as having written to you that there are many who have learned and know a great deal of Gemoro, yet lack in knowledge of the practical dinim. To which you remark that you know people who know a great deal of Chassidus and likewise lack knowledge of the dinim. But as I recall, I did not make that statement as an argument in favor of learning Chassidus. I merely pointed out the need of learning the practical dinim apart from ^{all} other studies. For unfortunately it is a fact that in most Yeshivoth the need of learning dinim is not given sufficient attention. Therefore, your attempt to challenge my statement is quite irrelevant, וזהו כבודי.

As for the general necessity of learning Chassidus, this is amply explained in Kuntres Etz haChayim, by the father of my father-in-law of saintly memory, and elsewhere. Above all, it is based on the Halocho itself, which sees the proof of a theory in its applicability and in its actual results in practice. Let me give you an illustration, which I trust you will not take amiss, especially as you can verify it through other sources. I do not have to tell you under what terrible conditions the Jews have lived in Soviet Russia under the Communist regime, and how it affected Jewish religious life,

especially of the younger generation who had no opportunity to anchor themselves firmly ^{or at all} in Yiddishkeit. When the Iron Curtain temporarily lifted after the war and many Jews managed to get out of Soviet Russia, it became clear that of the various classes and types of Russian Jews only those who had learned in Chabad Yeshivoth and were brought up in Chassidic homes and in the Chassidic way of life were able to survive those terrible trials and difficulties and remain faithful and practising Jews, not only themselves but also their sons and daughters with them. This should convince even the most sceptical as to the power and efficacy of Chassidus as a living force and practical means of the preservation of Yiddishkeit even under the utmost difficulties.

But since you question the need of learning Chassidus according to the authority of the Shulchan Aruch, I will answer you, as briefly as possible, on the basis of your own criteria.

As you know, there are various kinds of Mitzvoth. There are, for example, compulsory Mitzvoth, and there are Mitzvoth which become incumbent under certain conditions only, the performance of which become compulsory when the specific conditions prevail; and one is not obligated to create those conditions (e.g. Megillah).

Among the so-called compulsory Mitzvoth, there are, again, such Mitzvoth which depend on the time element, and they may be occasioned once a year, or once a week, or daily, as the case may be.

There are however six Mitzvoth which are not merely incumbent in one way or another, as the other Mitzvoth, but their incumbency (Chiyuv) is a constant one, and they are obligatory on all Jews without exception, or, to quote: "Their incumbency is constant, of which ~~no~~ man is ^{not} free for a moment, all his life." They are mentioned in Sefer haChinuch, in the Introduction (פתיחה): (1) To believe in G-d, (2) Not to believe in any other ~~thing~~, (3) To affirm His Unity, (4) To love Him, (5) To fear Him, and (6) Not to go astray after the temptation of the heart and the vision of the eyes.

The first five of the above obviously demand intellectual preparation. Even the sixth can be properly fulfilled only after the acquisition of certain doctrines and knowledge.

It is clear that to obtain the essential knowledge (without which these six constant Mitzvoth could not be fulfilled ^{properly}) by an effort to glean it from different sources, would require an enormous amount of time and effort, and even then one could not be sure whether or not the sources were rightly understood, and the right opinions and beliefs were formulated.

On the other hand, Chassidus has done just that. It has gleaned and collected from various sources the necessary knowledge, and it presents it ~~in~~ in a pure and concise form to all who wish to avail themselves of it.

Consider those six Mitzvoth. What does it mean, To believe in G-d? If we come to define belief in G-d, we will have to admit that a child's belief in G-d is adequate for him, though he imagines G-d to be a big, strong man, with powerful arms, something like his father, but perhaps more so. But what would we think of a grown up person who has such an idea of G-d? For this is the very contradiction of one of the basic principles of our faith that G-d is neither a body, nor a form in a body, etc.

Or, consider the Mitzvah of being constantly aware that there is no reality outside of Him. This involves the principle that "there is no place devoid of Him" (as the Zohar states), for if one would admit that there is a place devoid of Him, one would admit a separate, independent existence, which again would be in direct conflict with our faith, as explained also in the Rambam, in the beginning of Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah.

Similarly in regard to the commandment always to bear in mind that G-d is one and unchangeable, a belief which must go hand in hand with the belief that G-d created the world 5720 years ago, and that prior to that date our world was non-existent, yet G-d remained the same after Creation as He was before Creation, and that the plurality of things do not imply, וְאֵין אֵין, plurality in Him, and so on.

Suppose Mr. A. comes to Mr. B. and offers to give him a deeper understanding and insight into these highly abstruse subjects which are so remote from the ordinary mind, yet which have to be borne in mind constantly, and Mr. B. does not wish to be bothered, being quite content to remain with his childish image of G-d, etc. - this would not be a case of merely foregoing a Hiddur of a Mitzvah, but of renouncing the entire Mitzvah. For having the brain and ability to acquire the necessary knowledge about G-d, yet refusing to make use of them, is tantamount to wilful refusal to comply with the Mitzvah.

Likewise with regard to the commandments to love and fear Him. Surely it is impossible really to love or fear anything without at least some knowledge of that thing, as is also alluded to in the Rambam, beginning of Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah Chapter Two. Note there.

Finally, the same is true of the sixth commandment - not to go astray after the heart and eyes. For insofar as a mature ^(מבוגר) person is concerned, the commandment surely does not refer to only carnal temptation and crude idolatry, but that one should have a heart and eyes only for that which is true and good, to see in the world what is truly to be seen and to think what are truly good thoughts. However, to cultivate such vision as to see the inner content and reality of the world, and to train the heart to dwell only on the good and the true - this is a very difficult attainment which requires tremendous effort, as

explained in Kuntres Etz Chayim. Nevertheless, everyone is commanded to attain all that he is capable of attaining, each and everyone according to his mental capacity and grasp. And when it is said "each according to his capacity," it should be remembered that "a rich man ~~xxx~~ who brings a poor man's offering, has not fulfilled his obligation," and there is no "riches" and "poverty" except when it refers to the mind, i.e. potential intelligence.

I trust you will take no offence, if I ask you, Do you really think that you can fully carry out the Mitzvah of "Thou shalt love G-d thy G-d," a Mitzvah which is to be performed, ^{not by} uttering a verbal formula, but with heartfelt feeling, if by you will know about G-d only from what you have learned in the Gemoro, or Yore Deah, etc.?

Needless to say, all that has been written above at such length is not for the purpose of causing you pain, but in the hope that perhaps it may after all bring you to the realization that it is the Yetzer Hora that is inventing for you all sorts of strange and peculiar reasons to discourage you from learning Chasidus, thereby not merely preventing you from knowing what is taking place in the World of Atzilus, as you put it, but preventing you from fulfilling actual Mitzvoth, commanded in the Torah, Toras Chaim, to be fulfilled every day. But, of course, the Yetzer Hora does his work 'faithfully', and he will not come and tell you: Do not observe those six Mitzvoth which one is obliged to fulfill every day; he is too 'smart' for that; instead, he will tell you, What good will it do you to know what is happening in Atzilus!

Incidentally, let me add that the Wilner Gaon (not the Beil HaTanya, mind you) writes that those who do ^{not} learn Pnimius haTorah prolong the Golus and delay the Geulo, and that with knowledge of Pnimius haTorah it is impossible to know properly ^{only} ~~single~~ ^{the} Torah.

May G-d grant that you have good news to report concerning all that has been written above, and may it be soon.

With blessing,

M. Schmerson