



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Filling the Gaps

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## 1.

RABBI YOSI AND RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI

The *Zohar* on this week's *parshah*<sup>1</sup> relates that once when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's "group" was {sitting} discussing Torah secrets, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai perceived that Rabbi Yossi "was entertaining thoughts about worldly matters." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told Rabbi Yossi: "Yossi, get up and perfect your image,<sup>2</sup> for a letter of yours is missing." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai saw that because Rabbi Yossi was thinking about "worldly matters," his "image" was deficient — one of the letters (in his name)<sup>3</sup> "was "missing."

Subsequently, "Rabbi Yossi arose and rejoiced in words of the Torah... Rabbi Shimon looked at him and said, 'Rabbi Yossi, now you are complete... and your image is complete.'" (Following this episode, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai shared a teaching on the verse,<sup>4</sup> "He made the *tzitz*."<sup>5</sup>)

At first glance, this story is puzzling: How could Rabbi Yossi, one of the greatest Tannaic scholars,<sup>6</sup> while attending a gathering of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his "group," when Torah secrets were being shared, at that very moment, ponder "worldly matters"?!

And if a rationale can be found to justify why thinking about "worldly matters" was indeed permissible (even to the extent that Rabbi Yossi was permitted to think about worldly matters at that very moment),<sup>7</sup> the opposite problem arises: Why would this {permissible} interruption then result in him forfeiting a letter in his name?

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<sup>1</sup> *Zohar*, 217b.

<sup>2</sup> {In the original Hebrew, "*diyoken*"; lit., "image," a term used in *kabbalah* referring to a person's spiritual makeup.}

<sup>3</sup> As written in *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* on this passage in *Zohar* (p. 158). In *Or HaChamah*: the *yud* of 'Rebbi' departed from him.

<sup>4</sup> *Shemos* 39:30.

<sup>5</sup> {One of the eight garments of the *Kohen Gadol*, the *tzitz* was a golden band, which was worn on the *Kohen Gadol's* forehead, engraved with the words "Holy to Hashem".}

<sup>6</sup> See *Eruvin* 51a; Rashi on *Sukkah* 26a; et al; also, see *Seder HaDoros*, "Rabbi Yossi."

<sup>7</sup> As evidenced by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's rebuke, he only mentioned that "one of your letters is missing," and not that there was neglect of Torah study, G-d forbid.

## 2.

### COMMUNAL AFFAIRS

Seemingly, this question can be solved based on the explanation of my father {Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the Rebbe's father} in his notes on *Zohar* (as discussed in Section 3). To preface:

Although Rabbi Yossi belonged to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's "group,"<sup>8</sup> a group of scholars for whom (generally),<sup>9</sup> "the Torah is their {sole} occupation,"<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Yossi himself was **not** (at any rate, at all times) in **that** category of those only "occupied in Torah" — those who don't interrupt their learning to earn a living ("worldly matters"). Rather, as the Gemara describes, Rabbi Yossi "was a tanner"<sup>11</sup> ("a craftsman who processes animal skins").<sup>12</sup>

In addition, we find that Rabbi Yossi was involved in communal affairs (for instance, in the city of Tzipori, he introduced various rabbinic enactments ).<sup>13</sup>

On this basis, we can say that the "worldly matters" that Rabbi Yossi had been thinking about were communal affairs.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he diverted his attention from discussing Torah secrets to thinking about these material matters — for communal affairs **supersedes** Torah study.<sup>15</sup>

Through this, we can also explain why these thoughts caused him to lose one of the letters in his name — for communal affairs supersede Torah study only because of its benefit to the **public**. However, the individual engaged in

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<sup>8</sup> *Zohar* vol. 3 (*Idra Rabbah*), 127b.

<sup>9</sup> *Shabbos* 11a.

<sup>10</sup> {In the original, "*torasan umnasan*" (plural); lit., "their Torah learning is their craft," referring to Torah scholars who have no occupation other than Torah study.}

<sup>11</sup> *Shabbos* 49b.

<sup>12</sup> Rashi on *Shabbos* 49b.

<sup>13</sup> *Sanhedrin* 19a.

<sup>14</sup> But we cannot suggest that he was contemplating his personal livelihood (and therefore exempt from Torah study), as it does not make sense that he would interrupt listening to the secrets of Torah being discussed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai for such concerns. However, see fn. 31 below.

<sup>15</sup> For someone preoccupied with Torah study still pauses his Torah study to recite the "Shema" (*Shulchan Aruch* {and Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*} "*Orach Chaim*," end of ch. 106), but someone preoccupied with communal affairs does not pause to recite the "Shema" (*Shulchan Aruch* {and Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*} *Orach Chaim*, ch. 70, par. 4); and see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 380, fn. 47; *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 20, p. 248, fn. 40.

communal affairs **himself** (through his involvement) can suffer a **fall** (to the extent that our Sages say,<sup>16</sup> “Place the burden of communal affairs upon them and they will cease on their own”).

[Indeed, we find regarding Mordechai — as elucidated elsewhere<sup>17</sup> — he remained in his post of viceroy since by him “leaving {the exclusive pursuit of} Torah study and remaining in the government,”<sup>18</sup> he benefited the entire Jewish community (which supersedes Torah study). Nevertheless, for Mordechai personally, it was a setback (“his importance among the Sages declined” {and he was demoted in ranking})<sup>19</sup> for his virtue and greatness of Torah study had diminished.]

### 3.

#### TORAH VS CONVERSATION

This explanation is also derived from my father’s commentary (and from his notes on *Zohar*)<sup>20</sup> on this story — that Rabbi Yossi’s thoughts of “worldly matters” didn’t consist of “idle chatter, G-d forbid,” but rather refer to “the toil of conversation,” which is “a great thing” —

[As elucidated<sup>21</sup> in the explanation of our Sages’ teaching — “Man was born to toil... I do not know whether it is for the toil of Torah or the toil of conversation... you must say that he was created for the toil of Torah”<sup>22</sup> — because the Torah of truth entertains the possibility that man was created for “the toil of conversation,” this implies that this “toil” is a lofty *avodah*.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore: The conclusion that man “was created for the toil of Torah” never

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<sup>16</sup> *Sanhedrin* 17a; Rashi on *Bamidbar* 11:28; and see *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Shemos*” 5; *Shemos Rabbah* ch. 6, par. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, pp. 377 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Rashi on *Megillah* 16b; Rashi on the end of *Megillas Esther* — therefore, “some members of the *Sanhedrin* separated from him.”

<sup>19</sup> Rashi on *Megillah* 16b (therefore, “initially, Mordechai was listed after four {other Sages in Torah greatness}, but by the end of the story, he was listed after five others” — *Megillah* 16b).

<sup>20</sup> *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* on this passage in *Zohar* (p. 158 ff).

<sup>21</sup> *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, pp. 94 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Sanhedrin* 99b.

<sup>23</sup> {Divine service.}

**fully negates** the proposal that he was created for the “toil of conversation,” and merely qualifies that “toil of conversation” (alone) isn’t the ultimate purpose of man’s creation.

**On the contrary** — to achieve the ultimate goal and virtue of “the toil of Torah,” man must first engage in the *avodah* of “the toil of conversation.”]

This point is particularly compelling since through it {our “toil of conversation”}, we also engender Supernal “conversation”<sup>24</sup> — spurring Hashem, as it were, to “say” the Ten Utterances<sup>25</sup> through which He creates the world. As the Alter Rebbe explains in *Tanya*,<sup>26</sup> the Ten Utterances are **continuously** en clothed in the world to create, enliven, and sustain it. (And this is the meaning of “worldly matters” — the Ten Utterances that create the world and are en clothed in it. They are referred to as “simple words.”)<sup>27</sup>

In the parlance of *avodah*: “Entertaining thoughts about worldly matters” (“the toil of conversation”) is the *avodah* of “refining” — the *avodah* of refining and purifying worldly matters (particularly)<sup>28</sup> through the *avodah* of “all of **your actions** should be for the sake of Heaven,”<sup>29</sup> and, “in all of **your ways** you shall know Him”<sup>30</sup> (the act of refining and purifying the **permissible** matters of the person — “worldly matters”).<sup>31</sup> Through this *avodah*, the world is sustained (through Heaven’s {reciprocal} “conversation”).

Nevertheless, this can’t be compared to {the *avodah* of} “the toil of Torah (and especially — the secrets of the Torah), for although “the toil of conversation” helps to sustain the world (through the Ten Utterances) —

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<sup>24</sup> See *Or HaTorah*, “*Chayei Sarah*,” 129a ff.; *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 20, pp. 330 ff. (et al.) — the explanation of the Sages’ teaching (*Bereishis Rabah* 60:8; Rashi on *Bereishis* 24:42) “The **conversation** of the Patriarchs’s stewards [is more beloved before Hashem than] the Torah of their sons.”

<sup>25</sup> {In Hebrew, “*assarah maamaros*”; the ten Divine proclamations by which Hashem created the world. They are recorded in *parshas Bereishis*, beginning with the first verse of the Torah.}

<sup>26</sup> *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud Veba’Emunah*,” ch. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Zohar*, vol. 3, 149b; *Likkutei Torah*, *Acharei* 25d; et al.

<sup>28</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20, *ibid*, sec. 20 and 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 2, *mishnah* 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Mishlei* 3:6.

<sup>31</sup> Thus, we can posit that the phrase “worldly matters” can be interpreted literally (his livelihood) — because for Rabbi Yossi, it was a matter of Divine service (refining worldly matters).

[Furthermore, the purpose of the soul's descent below is (not to rectify itself, but rather) to rectify a person's body, his animalistic soul, and his portion **in the world**,<sup>32</sup> and through **this avodah** — the *avodah* of refining — the ultimate aim of Creation, that Hashem desired to have a dwelling place in the lowest worlds, is fulfilled]

— nevertheless, “the toil of Torah is superior to “the toil of conversation,” for it draws down the G-dly light that **transcends** the world.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Rabbi Yossi's name became deficient when he entertained thoughts of “worldly matters,” for this constituted a descent from the *avodah* of “the toil of Torah.”

#### 4.

##### PERSONAL PATH?

However, upon deeper analysis, this is not a sufficient explanation why “one of **your** letters is missing”:

The conduct of the *Tannaim*<sup>34</sup> and *Amoraim*<sup>35</sup> correlated with the source of their souls.<sup>36</sup> As this story illustrates, Rabbi Yossi, in particular, was involved in thoughts of “worldly matters” because — as my father explains — Rabbi Yossi personified the attribute of *malchus*,<sup>37</sup> which is the source that creates the worlds of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*<sup>38</sup> (that are created from the Ten Utterances of *malchus* {of *Atzilus*}). Therefore, his *avodah* was “the toil of conversation” (and sustaining the world).

And since Rabbi Yossi's mission in the world was the *avodah* of “the toil of conversation,” then (although it is indeed true that the toil of Torah has an

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<sup>32</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 37.

<sup>33</sup> In the realm of divine service, this is reflected by those whom Torah is their {sole} occupation and do not involve themselves with worldly matters.

<sup>34</sup> {Sages of the Mishnah.}

<sup>35</sup> {Sages of the Gemara.}

<sup>36</sup> See the preface to *Tanya*.

<sup>37</sup> {*Malchus*, lit., “kingship,” is the last of the ten *sefiros* of each spiritual world.}

<sup>38</sup> {These are the main stages, and resulting realms, in the creative process, resulting from the progressive self-screening of the Divine light known as *tzimtzum*.}

advantage over the toil of conversation — for Torah **transcends** the world — nevertheless), how can we say that “entertaining thoughts about worldly matters” would cause him to lose a letter of **his name** (being that a person’s name is aligned with the level of his soul)<sup>39</sup> when **this** was the fitting *avodah* for **his** soul (and by extension — of his name)?

[In a similar vein to the well-known saying of Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli that {when he goes up to Heaven} they won’t ask him why he wasn’t on the level of the great tzaddikim, but rather, why he wasn’t {on the level} of **Zusha**.]

Furthermore, the person will surely become disheartened without the advantage of the other *avodah*, coupled with the resulting deficiency in his name. Consequently, this awareness will prevent him from performing **his** designated *avodah* with joy and gladness.<sup>40</sup>

We must also clarify: Why didn’t Rabbi Yossi himself sense that his “image” and name were lacking until Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told him? Similarly, after his integrity was restored, “complete” (through having “rejoiced in words of the Torah”), why did **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai** have to disclose this to Rabbi Yossi?

## 5.

PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

The explanation — this question answers itself:

By Rabbi Yossi **himself** — meaning, according to the way **his** *avodah* was meant to be, based on his soul’s source — engaging in thoughts of “worldly matters,” wasn’t a deficiency. On the contrary (as discussed above), his *avodah* (and by extension — his “image” and name) were complete.

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<sup>39</sup> See the Mezritcher Maggid’s *Or Torah*, end of *parshas Bereishis*; *Likkutei Torah*, “Behar,” 41c; et al.

<sup>40</sup> Similar to *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 1; and take note of *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 27 (p. 34a).

Rabbi Yossi's shortcoming was related to his belonging to **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's group** (with **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's** quality of "the Torah is his {sole} occupation" [as will be discussed later]), which Rabbi Yossi should have (also) exemplified then. Consequently, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (the group leader) could perceive Rabbi Yossi's deficiency (and also tell when the deficiency was ultimately rectified).

## 6.

### LIVING UP TO POTENTIAL

This will be understood based on the teaching of the Alter Rebbe in *Hilchos Talmud Torah*. He writes that "to perfect itself, **every** soul must engage in the *Pardes*<sup>41</sup> according to its capacity to comprehend... The soul cannot reach consummate perfection... without this knowledge."<sup>42</sup> And a person who, "due to laziness, managed to comprehend and perceive only a little, must reincarnate {to continue his Torah studies} until he comprehends and perceives everything that his soul can comprehend and perceive in the knowledge of the Torah."

However, how do we view someone who studies only a "little," not due to **laziness**, but because, **according** to the Torah, he is excused from more intensive and prolonged Torah study? The Alter Rebbe writes (in *Torah Or*)<sup>43</sup> that two possibilities can lead to this scenario:

- a) The person's exemption from further Torah study itself indicates that **his** soul doesn't have the capacity for more (and therefore, it has no need for more) comprehension of Torah. Therefore, his soul reaches its **completion** (also) through less Torah study, possibly even the minimum of "one chapter in the

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<sup>41</sup> {*Pardes* (lit., "orchard") is an acronym for the Hebrew words: *pshat*, *remez*, *drush*, and *sod*, which refer to four strata in the understanding of the Torah. *Pshat* refers to the simple, straightforward meaning that meets the eye; *remez* refers to the allusions hidden beneath the surface; *derush* refers to the deeper concepts derived through non-literal exegesis (as in *Midrash* and *Aggadah*); and *sod* refers to the mystical secrets encoded in the Torah (as in the *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*).

<sup>42</sup> Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 1, end of par. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Torah Or*, "Megillas Esther," 98c.



morning, and one chapter at night.”<sup>44</sup>

b) Since he “engages (in Torah study) to the best of his ability,” “Hashem **compensates** for him” what he deserves but had not reached through his study and comprehension of the Torah.

We can suggest that, **in general**, these two possibilities depend on why the person is unable to engage in Torah study:

If {he can’t engage in Torah study} because of his (permissible and halachically sound) involvement in financial matters or other similar **personal matters**, this indicates that his soul isn’t among “the masters of Torah.” Instead, his soul belongs to “the masters of good deeds.”<sup>45</sup> As such, he does not have a copious capacity for Torah study. (Therefore, the Torah study of “one chapter in the morning, and one chapter at night” suffices for him.)

However, if {he can’t engage in Torah study} because of his (permissible and halachically sound) involvement with the needs of others (giving *tzedakah*, and so forth), and particularly, involvement in **communal** affairs, which supersede Torah study as they benefit and are for the sake of the public, then, Hashem compensates the person for what he did not attain<sup>46</sup> {on his own} through his study and understanding of Torah.

The person is also compensated by Hashem blessing him with tremendous success in Torah study, accomplishing the equivalent of a significant period of Torah study in a very short amount of time. As stated in the Jerusalem Talmud (regarding the “pious ones of old” who “would wait... and then pray”<sup>47</sup> — totaling nine hours per day),<sup>48</sup> “because they were pious, a **blessing** was given to their Torah studies” — (which brought about) “that they succeeded **immediately** in

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<sup>44</sup> *Menachos* 99b; note that this idea “is derived from the words of Rabbi **Yossi**.”

<sup>45</sup> See *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaKodesh*,” epistle 5 (p. 109a) in the name of the *Arizal*; the Mittlerer Rebbe’s *Beiurei HaZohar*, “*Vayeshev*” (pp. 25a-b) and the Tzemach Tzedek’s *Beiurei HaZohar* (p. 134).

<sup>46</sup> He is particularly deficient in this respect because involvement in communal matters leads to one forgetting what one has learned (*Midrash Tanchuma*, ‘*Shemos*’ 5; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 6, par. 2).

<sup>47</sup> *Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Berachos*,” ch. 5, halachah 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Berachos* 32b. {The calculation of nine hours — for each of the three daily prayers, they would: wait for one hour before praying, spend one hour praying, and then wait for one hour afterward.}

their studies and mastery of the material without delay.”<sup>49</sup>

In this vein, regarding *tzedakah* it says that through the act of charity, the benefactor’s “mind and heart is purified a thousandfold.”<sup>50</sup>

## 7.

### SEIZE THE MOMENT

Through the above, we can also explain the story mentioned above of the *Zohar*:

The fact that **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai** sensed a letter was missing from Rabbi Yossi’s name

— particularly according to my father’s explanation, that the letter missing was the letter “*yud*”<sup>51</sup> of “Yossi,” which corresponds to the letter “*yud*” of Hashem’s name *Havayah*,<sup>52</sup> which emanates in the world of *Atzilus*. In the realm of *avodah*, this represents the level of “the toil of Torah study” (particularly — the study of Torah secrets), which transcends “the toil of conversation” (the Ten Utterances, the source for the lower worlds of *Beriyah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*) — the defining characteristic of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, “the Torah is his {sole} occupation” (and — masters of the secrets of the Torah) —

this indicated and proved that **at that moment**, Rabbi Yossi needed to leave his *avodah* of “worldly matters” and involve himself **at that moment** with “the toil of Torah study,” in the manner of **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s** group, “the Torah is their {sole} occupation.”

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<sup>49</sup> *Pnei Moshe*, on *Jerusalem Talmud*, loc. cit.; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 375.

<sup>50</sup> *Torah Or*, 1a; *Or HaTorah*, “*Bereishis*,” vol. 6, pp. 1026b ff.

<sup>51</sup> See also *Or HaChamah* on *Zohar*, loc. cit.

<sup>52</sup> {*Havayah*, also known as the Tetragrammaton, is the four-letter name of Hashem, spelled *yud-hei-vav-hei*.}

Perhaps we can say even further: That moment was opportune for Torah study; {the importance of} Torah study at that time would be {magnified} “many times over.” He could accomplish everything that he needed to through his study and understanding of the Torah (during the time that he was {instead} “entertaining thoughts about worldly matters”).

And as the story indeed continues, by studying — “Rabbi Yossi arose and rejoiced in words of the Torah” — he could achieve perfection (as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told him) “you are complete... and your image is complete” — where “complete” can be interpreted to mean the *ultimate* completeness, that he was able to restore his {shortcomings of the} past.

— From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayakhel Pekudei* 5732 (1972) and Shabbos *parshas Vayakhel Pekudei* 5735 (1975)