

# RELIVING THE PAST

### 112

לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SIPURIM

The Torah teaches that one should remember the past and learn from it and to learn from the older generation on how to conduct oneself.

(האזינו לב, ז)

The Friediker Rebbe writes: The true service of *talmidei chachomim* to learn from their ways was accomplished at *chassidische farbrengens*, where the *eltre* chassidim would relate *sipurim* (stories) of *tzaddikim* and chassidim. They would explain and discuss the lesson to be learnt and arouse the listeners with the appropriate awakening, ensuring that it would bring to performance. Therefore, the telling of *sipurim* was cherished by our Rebbeim and other great *tzaddikim of chassidus*.

On one occasion the Friediker Rebbe said: "Remembering 'days of old' was very precious to *chassidim*. Homes were saturated with *midos tovos* and *ahavas Hashem*, *ahavas ha'torah* and *ahavas yisroel*, and no matter whether rich or poor, their doors were always open for *chachomim*. In the past, *eltre chassidim* would speak on their own without being asked. It was not 'storytelling'; rather, a way of life was shared.

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ו ע' עה, לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' 234)

Sent by the Tzemach Tzedek to the town of Ruzhin to take care of a public matter, the chossid and *gaon* Reb Aizik Homiler used this opportunity to observe the ways of the Ruzhiner chassidim and their Rebbe, the *tzaddik* Reb Yisroel. At that time, two chassidim came to Ruzhin to receive the Rebbe's *haskama* for *seforim* they had written. One was *chidushei torah* and the other was *sipurim of tzaddikim* and great chassidim. The Rebbe instructed that some of each *sefer* be read aloud, and the *tzaddik* then sat in *dveikus* for some time. He proceeded to praise the telling of *sipurei tzaddikim*, an activity in this world which raises echoes in the *heichalos of tzaddikim in Olam Haba*, and thereafter, said a *pilpul* in some of the *chidushei torah* written in the first *sefer*. The *tzaddik* instructed his *gabbai* to write *haskamos* for the *seforim*, first for the *sipurim* and then for the *chidushim*.

Reb Aizik was impressed with the *tzaddik's pilpul* on the second *sefer*, but was puzzled by the precedence given to the *sipurei tzaddikim*. A few days later, at a *Rosh Chodesh seuda*, the *tzaddik* suddenly said, "This *gaon* is surprised at my behavior in giving priority to the *sipurim*. Truthfully, this has already been addressed by Rashi where he asks why the Torah begins with the story of the *avos* before listing the *mitzvos*. This is because the *sipurim* tell us about the greatness which Hashem does in the world." Turning to Reb Aizik he concluded, "I followed the same order the Torah used."

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ו ע' עו)

In the year תרס"ג, the Rebbe Rashab told his son, the Friediker Rebbe, "For a while, I have been complaining at the Ohel of my father, the Rebbe Maharash, about my lacking in *chassidische farbrengens*, which is a result of spending my time catering to the needs of *chassidus*. I asked to receive this as a gift, and my father agreed. From then on, I began to hear *sipurim* while asleep."

Later on, the Friediker Rebbe said, "From that time on, I heard numerous stories from my father, the Rebbe Rashab, but I wouldn't ask where he had heard them."

(ספר השיחות תש"ה ע' 24)

In the year תש"ב, the Friediker Rebbe once said, "Today when the present in unpleasant, we must live with the past."

The *mashpia* Reb Shmuel Levitin asked, "Is this the same as learning from the past?" The Friediker Rebbe replied, "This is something else; to relive an incident which has once been experienced. The chossid Reb Dovid Tzvi Chein once cried out, 'Oy Rebbe!' and fainted. When roused, he related that he had recalled a *yechidus* with the Tzemach Tzedek." The Friediker Rebbe concluded, "If a negative experience impacts a person, surely so with a positive experience."

(סה"ש תש"ב ע' 92)

The Friediker Rebbe writes: When educating children, it is vital that they be given to read stories about the conduct of *tzaddikim*, which they can fully comprehend. An overseer must ensure that they read it with full attention, testing them to see whether it was understood, and training them to tell it over slowly and in order. After each *sipur*, it is necessary to explain to them the lesson in *yiras shamayim* that is derived from it.

The Rebbe explained that *sipurei tzaddikim* are an important supplement to learning Torah because they lead to *yiras shamayim*. Hearing or reading *sipurim* will encourage a person to add in Torah and *yiras shamayim*, and bring the person to serve Hashem *lishma* (with no ulterior motive).

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ג ע' שיא, תו"מ תשמ"ו ח"ב ע' 431)

### TELLING SIPURIM

The Rambam writes that speaking highly of *tzaddikim* and their qualities is beneficial, for it encourages the listeners to want to follow their ways. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that by praising *tzaddikim* one is praising Hashem, and it also brings out the good within the one telling it.

(פיהמ"ש אבות א, טז, שערי תשובה שער ג')

The Friediker Rebbe related: "It was a Shabbos afternoon in תרנ"ו. After my father finished davening, he went to the home of his mother Rebbetzin Rivkah to make *kiddush*. During the *kiddush*, my father asked his mother, "Do you recall how the picture of the Alter Rebbe was brought to the Tzemach Tzedek and what he said about it?" "Sure," she replied, "I remember it clearly." My father then asked her to tell it to me, so that I hear it from a first source. My grandmother readily agreed, and turning to me she said, "Come at a calmer time and I will tell it to you."

She then added, "At one Seder, I heard my father-in-law the Tzemach Tzedek say: '*Mitzva l'saper b'iytzias Mitzrayim*,' through *sipurim* we can go out of Mitzrayim. '*V'afilu kulanu chachomim n'vonim yod'im*,' even one who is a true *chabad'nik* (a chossid steeped in the insight of Chassidus), has the obligation to tell *chassidische sipurim*, for these will take him out of his

## Lma'an Yishme'u

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Mitzrayim (*ruchniyus'dike* limitations)." My grandmother concluded, "Since then, I am careful to tell *sipurim* only when completely focused."

(התמים ח"ב ע' 760)

The Frierdiker Rebbe related, "As a child, my greatest pleasure was to hear Reb Hendel tell of his childhood days spent amongst the previous *chassidim*. From every story or *minhag* that Reb Hendel would relate about them, he would learn a lesson and a good *middah*. For him, *ahavas yisrael* was one of the greatest qualities. He would speak from the heart, with a *chassidische 'brenn'* (excitement), using soft words that would penetrate the heart.

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' 212)

In the town of Shzerbina, there lived one of the great *chassidim* of the Rebbe Maharash, who was of great stature in *middos tovos*. He was a *lamdan*, thoroughly knowledgeable in Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, in Tur, Zohar and *Kisvei Ha-Arizal*, and was also a great *baal tzedakah*. He was known as Reb Zalman Shzerbiner.

The Frierdiker Rebbe heard many *sipurim* from him, describing the life of the *chassidim* and the ways of *chassidus* in the previous generations. When Reb Zalman would relate a story, he would begin by recounting the time, place and conditions of that era, giving the listener a full picture of the event. While listening to him, one was able to experience the atmosphere of the *chassidim* in the *sipur*, and truly see the Rebbe who was being described.

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' 234)

Before the Alter Rebbe would say a *torah* of the Baal Shem Tov, he would say, "The words of Torah from the 'Zeideh' (as he called the Baal Shem Tov), are a *segula* to increase understanding and *yiras shamayim*, and the stories of the 'Zeideh' are a *segula* for long life and *parnasa* in abundance."

When the Tzemach Tzeddek's daughter fell ill with high fever, he suggested that someone read to her stories of the Baal Shem Tov, for they are a superb *segulah* to heal fever.

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' 508, רשימו"ד החדש ע' 135)

Rebbetzin Rivkah related: "In תר"ט, when I was newly married, my father-in-law the Tzemach Tzeddek called in all his daughters-in-law who lived in Lubavitch and instructed them to gather each *Motzoei Shabbos* and relate a *sippur* of the holy Baal Shem Tov. We asked whether it was enough to just mention the Baal Shem Tov's name. My father-in-law replied, 'Definitely a story!' After that, each *Motzoei Shabbos*, one of the daughters-in-law would visit the Tzemach Tzeddek, where she would hear a story of the Baal Shem Tov. This story, she would then share it with the rest of us."

(סה"ש ת"ש ע' 173)

The Rebbe Maharash once said: "People say that relating a story of the Baal Shem Tov on *Motzoei Shabbos* is a *segula* for *parnassa*. The truth is that these three points are not necessarily so ("*lav davka*"). It does not necessarily have to be about the Baal Shem Tov – it can be about any *tzaddik*, and it is not only applicable on *Motzoei Shabbos* – it can be anytime, and the *segula* is not necessarily for *parnasa* – it is a *segula* for all matters of life."

(רשימו"ד החדש ע' 211, וראה שמו"ס ח"א ע' 4)

## THE FOCUS OF THE STORY

Once, after returning from the *kever* of the Baal Shem Tov, the *tzaddik* Reb Mendele of Rimanov prided himself that the Baal Shem Tov had appeared to him. When word about this reached the *tzaddik*, the *Degel Machane Efrayim*, he became angry. Thus, Reb Mendele set out to reconcile.

When Reb Mendele arrived, the *Degel Machane Efrayim*, without inviting him to sit, turned to him and asked, "Where am I now?" Referring to where the *tzaddik* is situated in his thought, Reb Mendele said, "In Yerushalayim." "And now?" the *Degel Machane Efrayim* continued to ask. "In the Beis Hamikdash." Impressed, the *Degel Machane Efrayim* then asked if he had truly seen the Baal Shem Tov. When Reb Mendele confirmed that he had, he inquired about what the Baal Shem Tov had said. "He is upset

that people only tell over his miracle stories and not the stories of *yiras shamayim* from which lessons can be learned." Hearing these words, the *Degel Machane Efrayim* then invited Reb Mendele to sit down at his side.

(לקוט חדש ע' קעה)

The Tzemach Tzeddek would often send the *yungeleit* to the great *chossid* Reb Hillel Paritcher to be directed in the ways of *chassidus*. Reb Hillel would place the newly arrived *yungerman* under the auspices of two senior *yungeleit*, who in addition to explaining the basics of *chassidus*, would most importantly tell *sipurim* about the Rebbeim and previous *chassidim*. They would retell each story numerous times, until it would penetrate the *yungerman*, and he would know its details very well. Then, they would ask what lessons in correcting one's *midos*, in *yiras shamayim* and *hashgacha protis*, could be learned from the story. They would urge the *yungerman* to toil, as one does in deep learning, to find the lesson, and they would help him in this. Finally, they would tell him what lessons they had been told by their *madrich* Reb Hillel.

On the first three *Shabbosim* of a newly arrived *yungerman*, Reb Hillel would relate a *sipur* in addition to the *chassidus* that he said every *Shabbos*. After the story, they would sing *niggunim*, and then discuss the lessons to be taken in *avoda* of the heart and the mind.

Reb Hillel explained the reason for this procedure: "The beginning of *avoda* is "*Adam ki yakriv mikem*," a person has to offer of himself to Hashem. However, in order for one to know he is an *Adam* and how an *Adam* should behave, it is preceded by the *sipurim* of of Breishis and Shmos.

(אגרות קודש מוהרי"צ ח"ד ע' נ"א)

When relating stories to children, we should tell stories from Tanach, Chazal and true stories of *tzaddikim*, and not relate "*bubeh maisehs*" as some do. Each story should have a lesson of goodness and *kedusha*. Telling a story without a purpose is not the *yiddische way*.

(שיחוק"ק תשמ"א ח"א ע' 246, תר"מ ח"ל ע' 52)

The Frierdiker Rebbe relates that in the past, *chassidim* would tell over stories of great *chassidim* and be inspired, and only later would they share stories of the Rebbe. Today, even stories of the Rebbe do not have the same effect.

In a *yechidus* with the *chossid* Reb Abba Pliskin, the Rebbe spoke of the need to tell over *sipurim* of *chassidische Yidden*. The Rebbe emphasized that he meant specifically those about *chassidim*, for when hearing *sipurei tzaddikim*, people can think that it is too far removed from them.

(סה"ש תרפ"ז ע' 118, היכל מנחם ח"ב ע' רכא)

The Frierdiker Rebbe related, "My melamed Reb Nissan would always conclude a day of *cheder* with a story. He explained the reason for this with a *marshal*:

"In the small towns, people were poor and were therefore careful with their use of matches. At night, they would leave one smoldering coal, making sure that it retained its heat, and in the morning, they would blow on it and relight the fireplace.

"The same is true with the story that children hear before leaving *cheder*. It keeps the fire burning, so there will be with what to ignite them on the following day."

(סה"ש תרצ"ו ע' 120)

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