

A Tzaddik and His Students

Many Jews are attracted to spirituality but never think to look in their own religion to find it. Still more are unaware that chassidic philosophy and its practice are the “soul” and spiritual core of Judaism.

The starting point of the chassidic way of life is a chassid’s connection to his or her Rebbe. But like many of the more spiritual concepts in Judaism, the role and function of a Rebbe -- and the chassidic movement in general -- has been largely cloaked in mystery, misinterpreted, or simply unknown.

In this book, **A Tzaddik and His Students: *The Rebbe-Chassid Relationship***, Rabbi Shloma Majeski takes the reader on a step-by-step journey into the spiritual world of the Rebbe-chassid relationship, explaining the nature and purpose of a tzaddik/Rebbe, his connection with his chassidim, and the relevance of this phenomenon in the lives of every human being today.

Rabbi Shloma Majeski is the dean of Machon Chana Women’s Institute of Jewish Studies in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, home of the World Headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. A renowned lecturer on chassidic philosophy for over thirty years, Rabbi Majeski is the author of the acclaimed book *The Chassidic Approach to Joy* and a tape series entitled “The Basic Principles of Chabad Chassidic Philosophy.”



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בס"ד

A Tzaddik and His Students: THE REBBE-CHASSID RELATIONSHIP

By: Rabbi Shloma Majeski

(Chapter 6)



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For further reading about this and other topics in chassidic philosophy, information on how to obtain Rabbi Majeski's book *The Chassidic Approach to Joy*, and his tape series on chassidic philosophy, contact your local Jewish bookstore, sie100@aol.com, or call 718-778-5436.



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לעילוי נשמת

החייל ב"צבאות השם" שכנא ע"ה

בן ר' שלמה אלי' שיחי

נפטר בדמי ימיו, כ"א מני"א ה'תשנ"ט

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

ולזכות אחיו ואחותיו שיחיו

ולזכות הוריו

הרה"ת ר' שלמה אלי' וזוגתו מרת שרה שיחיו

מארקאוויטש

לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת גואל צדק

ומתוך בריאות הנכונה, ולשנת ברכה והצלחה בגו"ר

*

נדפס ע"י ידידיהם

הרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק הלוי וזוגתו מרת גיטל רחל שיחיו

שגלוב

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לעילוי נשמת

הרבנית מרת לאה בת ר' אברהם אבלי ע"ה רייטשיק

אשת שדי"ר כ"ק רבותינו נשיאינו

הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' מנחם שמואל דוד הלוי ע"ה

ב"ר שמעון הלוי הי"ד רייטשיק

נלב"ע ביום כ"ד מנחם-אב ה'תשס"ז

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

נדפס ע"י

אנ"ש דלאס-אנדזשעלעס, קאליפארניע

שיחיו

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	
Chapter One	
The Rebbe-Chassid Relationship: A Fundamental Principle of the Torah.....	
Chapter Two	
But Is It Jewish...?	
Chapter Three	
Like the Beis HaMikdash	
Chapter Four	
The Significance of Miracles	
Chapter Five	
Ruach HaKodesh and Prophecy	
Chapter Six	
A Rebbe's Advice and Instruction	87
Chapter Seven	
The Blessings and Prayers of a Rebbe	
Chapter Eight	
The Ultimate Purpose of It All	

לזכות

החייל ב"צבאות השם" שניאור זלמן שי
ליום הולדתו השביעי לאויוש"ט,
ביום, וא"ו אלול, ה"י תהא שנת עשירות

ולזכות אחיו ואחיותיו שיחיו

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק וזוגתו מרת שרה שיחיו גורביץ

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לזכות

החייל ב"צבאות השם" ישראל צבי שי
ליום הולדתו הראשון לאויוש"ט,
ביום טו"ב סיון ה"י תהא שנת עשירות

אחיו החייל ב"צבאות השם" פסח חיים מנחם שי
ליום הולדתו השישי לאויוש"ט,

ביום י"ב מנחם-אב ה"י תהא שנת עשירות

אחותו החיילת ב"צבאות השם" טשארנא גיטל תחי
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ביום כ"ו מנחם-אב ה"י תהא שנת עשירות

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ביום ל' מנחם-אב - אדר"ח אלול ה"י תהא שנת עשירות

ולזכות הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' אלי' וזוגתו מרת שושנה ברכה שיחיו ניומאן

נדפס ע"י זקניהם

הרה"ת ר' יהודה ליב וזוגתו מרת זיסל שיחיו ניומאן

הו"ח ר' שמואל וזוגתו מרת מלכה שיינדל שיחיו סטראל

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לזכות

מרת חוה בת פייגא תחי'

לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת

גואל צדק ומתוך בריאות הנכונה

נדפס ע"י משפחתה שיחיו

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"י
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** ע"ה
Ekman

Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** ע"ה
Marenburg

Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** ע"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)

Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF
Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתי
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

IN HONOR OF
Yosef Yitzchok שיחי **Gertel**

On the occasion of his bris, 11 Menachem-Av, 5770

AND IN HONOR OF HIS PARENTS

Mr. & Mrs. **Avraham Chaim** and **Maggie Rachel** שיחי **Gertel**

DEDICATED BY HIS GRANDPARENTS

Mr. & Mrs. **Yonah Hertzfel** and **Shaindel Tzipora** שיחי **Gertel**

Mr. & Mrs. **Mordechai** and **Chaya** שיחי **Douek**

* * *

IN HONOR OF
Dr. Dovid Eliyahu שיחי **Brown**

On the occasion of his birthday, 29 Menachen-Av, 5770

May he go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah and *mitzvot*.

DEDICATED BY HIS WIFE

Mrs. Sara Malka שתיחי **Brown**
and family שיחי

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR BROTHER
R'foel Mordechai ben Reb **Yitzchok** ע"ה **Plotkin**

On the occasion of his 8th yahrtzeit, 1 Elul, 5770

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

DEDICATED BY

Mr. & Mrs. **Avrohom Aharon** and **Shoshana Baila** שיחי **Plotkin**

Mr. & Mrs. **Michael Yosef (Michael)**
and **Rodah Chayah (Karen)** שיחי **Block**

What *would* cause a loss of free will and feelings of resignation would be consulting with a Rebbe to find out one's future.¹⁷ For the most part, a Rebbe who tells you which path to follow is not predicting the future but advising which direction would be the most productive for you to pursue.

So why were the advice and directives of the Rebbe received with such great joy? Because the true purpose of going to a *tzaddik* is to find out the will of G-d: what G-d wants a person to do and what direction G-d wants a person to take. In this way, the *tzaddik* conveys to a person his Divine purpose and direction.

Following a Rebbe's Directives With Joy

What greater joy can there be than knowing what G-d wants from you and in which direction G-d wants you to go? A chassid feels fortunate and privileged to be told by G-d, through the *tzaddik*, what needs to be done and how to do it. And if one is worried about how things will turn out, he need only know the basic axiom of Jewish faith that by following G-d's will, everything will naturally turn out for the best.

When a chassid realizes that G-d wants him to go someplace and do something for his or the world's greater good, he is ready to do this with the greatest joy, regardless of the circumstances. How fortunate are we that through a *tzaddik* we can actually be privy to what G-d wants and expects from us!



17. As the verse in the Torah states (*Deuteronomy* 18:13): "You should be wholehearted with G-d...", to which *Rashi* comments, "Walk with G-d wholeheartedly and depend on Him, and do not seek the future, but accept whatever befalls you with wholeheartedness...."

CHAPTER SIX

A REBBE'S ADVICE AND INSTRUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the heightened spiritual perception of a *tzaddik* revealed to us through varying levels of prophecy or *ruach hakodesh*.

As stated there, the main purpose of these G-dly revelations — as it relates to the Rebbe-chassid relationship — is to strengthen the chassid's belief in and love for G-d and to enhance his performance of *mitzvos* and the service of prayer.

The chapter concluded with the statement that when a person receives the advice and spiritual insight of a *tzaddik* through his *ruach hakodesh* or prophecy, G-d is personally communicating His will and directives to him through the *tzaddik*.

But what is the basis for G-d communicating to a person through the agency of someone or something other than Himself? And to what degree does a chassid need to follow the direction and guidance of his Rebbe? This chapter will attempt to answer those questions.

Overview

A significant aspect of a Rebbe's role in the lives of his chassidim is the advice, guidance and instruction that he gives them. This can manifest in the Rebbe initiating requests of certain individuals or groups, or individuals or groups asking the Rebbe for his advice and guidance.

There are times when the Rebbe's advice or guidance comes as a general instruction to a community as a whole, such as requesting that every member of a community perform a particular action in order to alter a Heavenly decree or world event. Or the Rebbe can single out an individual and charge him with a specific mission, as was the case with many underground operations carried out to keep Judaism alive in Communist Russia.

The interplay between a Rebbe and a community can occur when representatives of a community approach the Rebbe about some untoward situation in their community and the Rebbe recommends, for example, writing a Torah scroll or opening a Jewish school to counteract the negative forces affecting them. They can also ask for general spiritual guidance in order to elevate their level of Torah observance and community involvement.

Regarding communal instruction initiated by the Rebbe himself, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, instituted ten major global campaigns in the last few decades in order to effect a shift or elevation in the spiritual climate of the world. These included encouraging all Jewish women and girls above the age of three to light Shabbos candles, affixing *mezuzahs* on the doorposts of one's home, keeping the Jewish dietary laws (*kashrus*), and increasing in charity and good deeds.

On an individual level, some of the venues in which a chassid requests advice and instruction of a Rebbe are a private, one-on-one meeting; a one-on-one encounter with a Rebbe in a more public setting;¹ or by mail.² Common requests can

1. See the section entitled "Through an Object" in the next chapter.

2. Since the times of the Baal Shem Tov, it is also a common practice among chassidim to write a letter to a *tzaddik* who has passed away — asking him to petition G-d for Divine assistance on their behalf — and place it at his gravesite.

Similarly, the consequences of the identical transgression outside the *Beis HaMikdash*, inside the *Beis HaMikdash*, and inside the Holy of Holies¹⁶ would vary depending on the level of G-dly revelation in each of those places. Outside the *Beis HaMikdash*, where G-dliness was almost entirely hidden, the consequences of this particular act would be milder than inside the *Beis HaMikdash* where G-dliness was more revealed. And there, inside the *Beis HaMikdash*, this transgression could be punishable by death. But because the G-dliness in the Holy of Holies was more revealed than anywhere else on earth, even a person's minor infraction there could cause him to die right on the spot.

This gives some insight into the importance of following the advice and instruction of a *tzaddik*. Since he is a G-dly person in whom G-d's presence is revealed infinitely more than in any other person, a violation of G-d's wishes conveyed through the *tzaddik* is a very serious violation against G-d.

So when a chassid was told by his Rebbe to do something, it was irrelevant how difficult it was or how much he would have to lose or give up to fulfill that directive. Since he was being conveyed G-d's clear wish and instruction to him through his Rebbe, he would go to whatever lengths necessary to fulfill it.

With the imperative to fulfill the Rebbe's instruction, one might imagine this aspect of the Rebbe-chassid relationship to be one of resigned servitude with a loss of free choice and self-expression. Actually, the opposite is true. Far from being a burden, the Rebbe's guidance and directives were embraced with the greatest joy.

16. The innermost chamber of the *Beis HaMikdash* which housed the Ark of the Covenant in which rested the First Tablets (the Ten Commandments) which had been broken by Moses, and the Second Tablets.

came to violating the command of a prophet, the punishment was always death, regardless of whether the directive seemed serious or insignificant.

So fulfilling the commands and instructions of a prophet is an extremely serious affair, just as violating those instructions is an extremely serious offense. Why would a prophet's directive to the people seem to hold more weight than a commandment explicitly written in the Torah? Because a prophet is a G-dly person, and through him G-dliness is expressed in a very revealed and exposed way. Since his wishes are G-d's wishes, and his instructions are G-d's instructions, a prophet cannot prophesize anything unless it has been told to him directly by G-d. Therefore, violating G-d's wish when it has been presented in such an obviously revealed and exposed way is a much more serious infraction in our relationship to G-d.

Similarly, through his advice to a person, a *tzaddik* is also revealing G-d's wishes for him in a more revealed way, and ignoring or dismissing those instructions is also a serious violation of G-d's will. Even those *tzaddikim* who do not have the legal status of prophet can still reveal G-d's wishes for people through their *ruach hakodesh*.

To give an analogy, we know that the soul is found in all the organs of the body but it is most revealed in the brain. If a person would take a needle and lightly scratch his finger, the mark on his finger would last a few seconds and then be gone. But if the same needle were to make the same movement on the brain, G-d forbid, it could be fatal. Therefore, because the soul is more revealed there, the brain is more sensitive than other organs where the soul is less revealed, and the effects of a seemingly minor action are more severe there than anywhere else in the body.

range anywhere from how a person can get closer to G-d or achieve his or her life's purpose, to the more mundane concerns of human life such as where to live or whether or not to embark on a journey.

Regardless of whether the Rebbe initiates the bestowal of advice or whether it is initiated by the chassid, the chassid can be assured that the guidance and instruction he receives are personally tailored to him and his soul's mission in life.

From Where Does a Rebbe Receive His Information?

Interestingly, a Rebbe's guidance is not limited to the more spiritual areas of life such as which Torah topic to study, how to observe *mitzvos*, or how to overcome certain spiritual challenges. A Rebbe is frequently consulted for his advice and guidance in the more material areas of life, such as health, finances, and family.

What qualifies a Rebbe to give advice in mundane, material matters? Since a Rebbe is a wholly righteous person whose entire life revolves around the spiritual teachings and ethical conduct of the Torah, how does such a great *tzaddik* and Torah scholar come to be consulted for advice about which business to get involved in, whom to marry, and which house to buy? Is this a practice that began with the chassidic movement?

The answer can be summed up through a statement in the most well-known section of the Oral Torah known as *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of Our Fathers*). In reference to the qualities of a great Torah scholar, *mishnah* 1:6 reads: "People derive the benefit of his wise counsel and guidance... as it is said, 'Counsel and guidance are mine.'" In a commentary on this *mishnah*, a true Torah scholar is defined as someone who is not

only capable of teaching people Torah but someone who can give advice in other areas of life as well.³

But if a Torah scholar is neither doctor, financial expert nor psychologist, how can he give advice and instruction on matters in these areas? What gives him the confidence and knowledge to address areas to which he has no apparent connection?

To understand that requires an understanding of the external and internal dimensions of a *tzaddik*.

On an external level, a *tzaddik* is a person who lives a perfectly G-dly life. His thought, speech, and conduct are all exemplary, exhibiting perfection and refinement in his every character trait and behavior. He never violates the laws of Torah in any way, performing them with great ardor and focus. Indeed, every moment of his life is permeated with purpose and meaning.

A *tzaddik* can maintain this unwavering level of spirituality because everything he experiences is in accordance with G-d's will. He has not even the slightest desire to act contrary to the ways of the Torah because his will and G-d's will are truly one.

The inner, more spiritual, dimension of a *tzaddik* relates to the G-dly presence that dwells within him. Because G-d is unlimited, the G-dly presence that dwells within the *tzaddik* is also unlimited, allowing him to see and understand those areas that go beyond the limits of his own personal experience. This is precisely why we turn to a *tzaddik* for guidance even in matters that seem completely outside his sphere of understanding, because his realm of perception permeates all levels of human awareness and understanding.

3. *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 405.

Fulfilling a Tzaddik's Directives

Are there spiritual ramifications when a chassid doesn't follow the advice and instructions of his Rebbe? Does it matter all that much if a chassid chooses not to act on the Rebbe's guidance?

Since receiving and following the guidance of one's Rebbe is one of the most serious components of the Rebbe-chassid relationship, ignoring the Rebbe's directives or advice is considered a significant violation of that bond.

To preface, there is an explicit precedent in the Torah that helps us understand the above. One of the Torah's 613 commandments¹⁴ is to follow the instructions of a prophet: in short, when a prophet gives specific instructions, his words must be followed.

So serious is this commandment, that in the era of prophecy, violating the instructions and wishes of a prophet was punishable by death. It made no difference how big or small the directive would be, the punishment would always be same if the prophet commanded the Jewish people or an individual to do something and that command was not followed.

It is shocking in a sense that when it came to violating or ignoring the things that are explicitly commanded in the Torah, the punishments ranged from the death penalty to no penalty at all, depending on the commandment.¹⁵ But when it

14. *Deuteronomy* 18:15. See also Positive Commandment #172 in the *Rambam's* enumeration of the commandments (*Sefer HaMitzvos*). Although a *mitzvah* exists for all times, the punishment discussed here for transgressing this *mitzvah* was only carried out during the era of prophecy which existed during the times of the First *Beis HaMikdash*.

15. Although the laws of the Torah (and the consequences for transgressing them) are eternal, these punishments can only be carried out by a *Sanhedrin*, a Jewish court of law based on the laws and principles of Torah. Convening in the *Beis HaMikdash*, the *Sanhedrin* abolished capital punishment approximately two thousand years ago, approximately forty years before the destruction of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*.

began to run away but he called them back. Aware that government ministers could make trouble for people for far less than breaking into a palace park and disturbing a dignitary's solitude, they fully expected some sort of punishment but, to their shock, he said, "I am the Minister of Education. There is a question that the Czar asked me a few days ago and I've been troubled by it for days. You look like Torah scholars; maybe you can give me the answer. The Czar wants to know, 'What does the Jewish *Talmud* mean when it says that the earthly kingdom conducts itself like the Heavenly Kingdom?'"

When they heard this question, they immediately understood the reason for the Alter Rebbe's seemingly incongruous conversation. After giving the Minister the Alter Rebbe's explanation, they listened dumbstruck as the Minister told them it was the best answer he had heard to date and would convey it immediately to the Czar. When the Czar heard the answer he was so pleased, that the Minister of Education asked his colleague, the Minister of Justice, to arrange to have their records wiped clean. Against all odds, they were able to return home free men.

When Reb Meir Raphaels heard this second story, he finally decided that the Alter Rebbe was really a *tzaddik* and he subsequently became his student.

In this unbelievable story, the Alter Rebbe helped save the lives of two men without giving them one word of direct advice or guidance. Even that which he did tell them made no sense to them until they eventually saw the wisdom in his words. So even though a Rebbe can't always reveal exactly how or what to do in a given situation, it is incumbent on the chassid to trust the Rebbe and know that there is a message for him in the Rebbe's words and a hidden directive in how to conduct his life.

It may be difficult for a human being of flesh and blood to accept the concept of a Rebbe's unlimited range of knowledge, and even more difficult to summon up the faith to follow his advice. Although this advice comes from the G-dly source within the *tzaddik*, trusting its veracity can be a challenge for some, as illustrated in the following story:

A chassid of the Rebbe Maharash came to him for advice about investing in a particular business. Big investors had been showering him with "proofs" of the tremendous profits he would garner in such a business, but the Rebbe Maharash advised against it in a clear and unequivocal way.

Satisfied with that counsel, the chassid returned home; his response eagerly anticipated by his investors. When he related the Rebbe's advice, the investors scoffed at the Rebbe's judgment and hounded the chassid relentlessly, threatening a tremendous loss of income were he to follow the Rebbe's advice.

The chassid returned to the Rebbe Maharash to get clarification on his answer. Maybe the Rebbe didn't quite understand the nature of the investment? But the Rebbe remained firm: do not invest in this business.

Determined to hear a different response, he visited the Rebbe yet a third time, but the Rebbe's answer did not change.

So harassed was he by his business associates, they eventually wore him down and he was unable to withstand the pressure. He invested in the business and a short while later lost all his money when the deal turned sour.

The chassid came running back to the Rebbe Maharash begging his forgiveness for not listening to his clear, prophetic words.

The Rebbe Maharash would often convey information in a humorous way, and this was one of those occasions. He said to the chassid, “There are three types of chassidim who take my advice: One says, ‘The Rebbe receives so many letters from people seeking guidance that the information he has amassed from them has given him broad knowledge about all areas of life. That’s how the Rebbe knows what advice to give.’ The second type says, ‘No, he’s actually brilliant and has such a good head that he knows the right thing to say from all his research about all the different subjects that he has studied over the years.’ Then there’s the third group — the foolish people⁴ — who say the Rebbe has *ruach hakodesh*.

“You asked me the same question three times. Surely you fit into one of the above categories, and *whichever* chassid you are, you should have listened to my advice!”

Humor aside, when a person asks a *tzaddik* for guidance on how to conduct himself in any area of his life, he can trust with perfect faith that the *tzaddik*’s range of vision extends to whichever area of life he is inquiring about because it’s coming from the G-dly source within the *tzaddik*.

G-d Communicates Through Various Mediums

It states in the *Book of Exodus*⁵ that “After the Jewish people saw the great miracles that took place in Egypt and at the Red Sea, they believed in G-d and in His servant Moses.”

There is a *Midrash*⁶ on this verse, stating that by believing in Moses, they believed in G-d — meaning — that their belief

4. The Rebbe Maharash was obviously not saying that people who believe in *ruach hakodesh* are foolish; he was merely reflecting the oft-repeated complaint against this aspect of spirituality by those reluctant to believe in a higher level of G-dly revelation.

5. 14:31.

Stupefied, they looked at each other as if to ask, “Is this why we traveled all this way? What does this question have to do with anything?!” The Alter Rebbe gave them little time to respond and continued, “I see you have no answer. I will give you one.” He then gave them a clear explanation that satisfied the question he had posed.

As they exited the room, the two men were livid! Not only did the Alter Rebbe ignore their situation, he didn’t give them any advice. Furthermore, while explaining the passage from the Torah, his main interest seemed only in impressing them with his Torah knowledge. All they got from the visit was a loss of time, money, and hope.

All options exhausted, they traveled to Petersburg where the court case was to take place. Speaking to various lawyers, they received the same prognosis from them all: the situation was impossible and a plea for mercy would be their only hope.

With nothing to lose, they decided to fabricate a chance meeting with the Minister of Justice who was known to take a walk in a certain park everyday. They would bribe the park’s guard to allow them to enter the park and hide in the bushes, and when the minister would take his walk they would jump out, fall on their knees, and beg him for mercy. This was their only hope. Having bribed the guard, they arranged with him that when the minister passed by, he would give them a signal.

Indeed, shortly after hiding in the bushes, they spotted a very dignified man walking toward them. The guard signaled but it was the wrong signal, for the man approaching was the Minister of Education and not the Minister of Justice.

Unaware of the guard’s mistake, they ran out from the bushes and fell to their knees, crying and pleading. Finally the man said, “Your predicament is clearly terrible, but I’m sorry... I am not the person you are looking for.” Embarrassed, they

Shortly after the incident with the *agunah*, a traveler came to Vilna and was hosted for Shabbos at the home of a wealthy Jew. Observing that his host sighed every few moments, the guest realized that he must be very concerned about something and asked him what was weighing so heavily on his mind.

It wasn't easy for the host to open up, but he finally divulged that he had been wrongly accused of a serious crime, and with a court case pending, could possibly be sentenced to Siberian exile. No matter which lawyer or which angle he employed, the situation looked hopeless.

The guest asked to speak with him privately and suggested that he travel to his great teacher, the Alter Rebbe, to get his advice and blessing. Distrustful of the chassidic movement but desperate to find a solution to his dilemma, the host called his business partner after Shabbos and the two of them went to their friend Reb Meir Raphaels to ask his opinion.

Although Reb Meir Raphaels was reserving judgment about the Alter Rebbe, the incident with the *agunah* made him wonder if perhaps the Alter Rebbe was indeed a G-dly man. The two men were greatly surprised when Reb Meir Raphaels suggested that they go to the Alter Rebbe to receive his blessing and advice.

Although they would never consult a chassidic Rebbe under normal circumstances, they took Reb Meir Raphaels' advice, hoping for the best. But when they arrived for a private audience with the Alter Rebbe, they were stunned when he appeared to ignore all mention of their dire situation and instead ask them a question in Torah: "Are you familiar with the statement of the Rabbis which states: 'The way a kingdom conducts itself on earth is actually a reflection of how the Supernal Kingdom conducts itself in heaven?'"

and trust in Moses was an expression of their belief and trust in G-d.

Now a person could easily say, "I believe in G-d with all my heart. I just don't believe in Moses." This *Midrash* comes to say that if someone lacks belief in Moses, he actually lacks belief in G-d. Does that seem a little extreme? But if G-d created a system in which He manifests Himself through the *tzaddik* — which the *tzaddik* then manifests to us — then believing in the *tzaddik* means believing in G-d Who created this system of communication. And if a person doesn't believe in the *tzaddik*, we can infer the opposite.

Recognizing that G-d and the *tzaddik* share a oneness of spirit means that one's faith in a *tzaddik* is an expression of one's faith in G-d; love for a *tzaddik* is an expression of one's love for G-d; and fear or awe of the *tzaddik* is an expression of one's fear or awe for G-d. This is what makes one's spiritual connection to a *tzaddik* such an undeniable imperative: the connection brings out a person's faith, love and awe for G-d in much greater measure than could otherwise exist.

Because the millions of Jews who had just witnessed tremendous miracles "believed in G-d and in His servant Moses," they recognized that G-d's presence can rest within, and work through, an individual. All of his ability to perform miracles came from the G-dly presence within him. So their belief and trust in Moses actually exhibited their belief and trust in G-d.

A similar phenomenon took place in the Holy Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) in the desert, the *Mishkan* that existed in Israel after the Jews entered the land, and in the First Temple up until its destruction:

6. The *Mechilta* on *ibid.*, which states: "He who believes in the faithful shepherd [of every generation] believes in the One Who spoke and created the world."

As part of his priestly garb, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) would wear a breastplate in which a holy parchment called the *Urim v'Tumim* was inserted.⁷ The letters of the Hebrew *alef-beis* were inscribed on precious stones set on the breastplate and when the *Kohen Gadol* was approached with a question, the *Urim v'Tumim* would cause certain letters to stand out, spelling the answer to his question. Now, no one would ever believe that the parchment or the breastplate had independent power: clearly G-d was working through the *Urim v'Tumim* to answer people's questions.⁸ The fact that the people believed and trusted an answer from letters on a breastplate was an expression of their belief and trust in G-d, because if G-d had instructed people to receive His communications in this way, their belief in the method demonstrated their belief in Him.

The above are perfect examples to illustrate the similar relationship between G-d and a *tzaddik* to inspire and enhance a person's Divine service. For just as the Jewish people received advice from Moses and the *Urim v'Tumim*, so, too, the *tzaddik* of every generation communicates G-d's words through whatever means he is given to do so. Believing in a *tzaddik* exhibits a belief in G-d because of one's recognition that G-d works through the *tzaddik*.

While this concept may be initially difficult to internalize, stories of chassidim who sought and received remarkable advice from their Rebbe strengthen our belief in this phenomenon.

7. *Exodus* 28:30.

8. An unresolved debate exists among the great Torah commentators including the *Rambam* and the *Raavad* as to whether the letters lit up on the parchment itself or from the letters engraved on the precious gems on the breastplate, but all agree that from the times of the *Mishkan* up to and including the times of the First Temple, G-d communicated to the people through the *Urim v'Tumim*. For a more in-depth explanation, see *Kesef Mishnah* to the *Laws of the Beis HaBechirah* 4:1.

conversation in such a way that he could wriggle out of parting with his money. He set out immediately for home.

On the way, he approached a stretch of road that was only wide enough for one carriage. Just then, however, he saw another carriage coming straight toward him from the opposite direction; one of them would have to move to the side and let the other pass. The chassid took the initiative to be the one to continue on, and, in so doing, inadvertently forced the other carriage off the road.

To his ill fortune, the occupant of the second carriage happened to be a very high official and, outraged by the turn of events, fined the chassid 10,000 rubles. The contrite chassid later admitted his foolishness, acknowledging that had he given the Rebbe the 10,000 rubles that he needed, the incident would surely have never happened.

Who knows what the Rebbe saw? Perhaps he foresaw that the chassid was destined to lose 10,000 rubles and hinted that if he gave 10,000 rubles to *tzedakah* (charity), it wouldn't be foolishly lost or wasted. Or perhaps he wanted the chassid to have the spiritual merit of giving the *tzedakah* of his own volition. Whatever the case, the chassid learned an invaluable lesson: that a person should pay heed even to the Rebbe's intimations, regardless of the reason.

In the next story, there is neither clear direction nor intimation. There is only the sharing of information that makes no logical sense at all. In such a case, a chassid simply has to trust his Rebbe and watch the events unfold.

In the earlier story about the *agunah*, Reb Meir Raphaels became more intrigued by the Alter Rebbe and the chassidic movement but still wasn't ready to commit to it himself. A second incident took place which finally convinced him to become a chassid of the Alter Rebbe.

growth, people need to have free choice and the particular life experiences that G-d plans for them. Telling them things they are not meant to know would interfere with this process. As such, Moses had to restrain himself from revealing that which G-d meant to be hidden.¹²

This is what made him — and what makes all *tzaddikim* — G-d's trusted servants.

People might not be inclined to follow a Rebbe's advice if they don't understand all the details and ramifications of what they are being told to do, but a chassid who truly trusts his Rebbe understands that he has been told exactly and only what G-d wants him to know. More than that is not in the Rebbe's hands. Regardless, it is to the person's benefit to act on the Rebbe's advice.

Sometimes the Rebbe's guidance is purposely unclear: he will merely hint at something since it is not G-d's will that the instruction itself be clearly revealed. The true chassid understands that the Rebbe conveyed the information in a roundabout way for good reason and it is up to him to figure out for himself what has to be done.

A story is told of a certain wealthy chassid who came to the Rebbe Rashab¹³ to get his blessing before returning home after a lengthy visit in the Rebbe's court. The Rebbe struck up a conversation with him about a certain problem in the *yeshivah* and insinuated that 10,000 rubles would be needed to ameliorate the situation.

Since the chassid was very wealthy, he understood that the Rebbe wanted him to offer the amount but didn't want to ask for it outright. Nevertheless, he managed to maneuver the

12. *Maamarim* (Chassidic Discourses) of the Alter Rebbe, *Es'halech Liozna* (Kehot), p. 1.

13. Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn (1860-1920), the fifth Rebbe of Lubavitch and son of the Rebbe Maharash.

In many cases, as seen in the following story, the Rebbe would convey advice that logically had no connection to the objective at hand or would give a directive which did not seem to have any apparent meaning or purpose. Nevertheless, the chassid would know with complete faith that the Rebbe's words were true because of their true and holy source in G-dliness. Ultimately, if the chassid followed the Rebbe's advice, he would see the wisdom in the Rebbe's words, whether it took days, weeks or even years to be revealed.

A Story

There was once a chassid of the Alter Rebbe named Reb Meir Raphaels.⁹ This chassid was one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Vilna, a city known for its staunch opposition to the chassidic movement. Reb Meir Raphaels was quite skeptical about Chassidism himself until the following story took place.

Before he became a chassid, a woman came to him from a faraway town demanding that he find her wayward husband. If he was not found, she would not be able to obtain a legal divorce (a *get*) and with her ensuing status as an *agunah*,¹⁰ she would never be able to remarry.

When Reb Meir Raphaels asked why she would come to *him* — someone who had never heard of her or her husband — she said she had come on the instructions of the *tzaddik*,

9. For more on Reb Meir Raphaels, see *Early Chassidic Personalities: Reb Meir Raphaels*, compiled and published by Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon, Brooklyn, NY, 2004.

10. A legal term for a woman whose husband is alive but refuses to give her a *get*, or a husband whose whereabouts are unknown. In both cases, the woman is trapped in the status of *agunah*: unable to obtain a legal divorce, she is prohibited from remarrying until the situation is rectified.

the Alter Rebbe, who told her to go to the city of Vilna to find whom she was looking for.

After she described her husband's appearance, Reb Meir Raphaels assured her that there was no such person in his city. Somewhat irritated by the concept of a Rebbe and the chassidic movement in general, Reb Meir Raphaels tried to dismiss her, but she was persistent. "If the Alter Rebbe sent me here, then my husband is here," she said firmly, determined to see the fulfillment of the Rebbe's words.

Every day she would show up on Reb Meir Raphaels' doorstep asking, "Do you have any news? Have you heard anything?" Annoyed as he was by her persistence, he had no choice but to address her, although his patience was wearing quite thin. This scene repeated itself day after day until, one day, the chief of police paid him a visit with news that several out-of-town prisoners were being routed through his jail. He asked Reb Meir Raphaels to come to the jail to try to arrange for the release of any of the Jewish prisoners by paying their fines or penalties.

Reb Meir Raphaels was shocked to find that one of the prisoners fit the exact description of that given to him by the *agunah*. Sure enough, the man turned out to be her husband, and after some forceful prodding, agreed to give his wife the *get*. It was hard for Reb Meir Raphaels to admit that the Alter Rebbe had *ruach hakodesh*, as believing in such things would challenge his whole way of life. Nevertheless, this incident made him think very seriously about the Alter Rebbe who apparently possessed the ability to see that which the ordinary mind and ordinary eye could not see.

The Trustworthiness of the Tzaddik

Sometimes a chassid comes to his Rebbe and the Rebbe gives him a particular instruction without any explanation. If

he is a true chassid, he needs no proofs or logic. Assured of the Rebbe's lofty spiritual status, the chassid is secure in knowing that whatever the Rebbe tells him is what G-d wants him to know or do. Of course, what the Rebbe does *not* say is also part of G-d's directive.

The reason for this "secrecy" has its source in the Torah. The words "in all My house he is trusted,"¹¹ allude to Moses' role as a "trusted servant." But what does it mean to "trust Moses with all of G-d's house"? A human king trusts a servant "with his whole house" because the servant won't steal or take anything from the palace. But what could Moses possibly take — or not take — from G-d's "palace" that would determine whether or not he was trustworthy?

The answer lies in what it is that requires safekeeping. Sometimes there are non-material things in the palace that need to be guarded. Palace secrets, for example, crucial to the safety of the kingdom, need to remain within the confines of the palace.

So a trusted servant is privy to sensitive information of which people outside the walls of the palace are simply unaware. Even though the servant's position in the king's inner chambers allows him to see, hear, and know certain things, he never divulges that which he has been commanded to protect.

This is what it means that Moses was trusted with all [the things] in G-d's house. Moses' spiritual sight encompassed the world, the future, and the inner dimensions of people's lives, but he only disclosed those things that G-d gave him permission to reveal.

To make life more understandable or bearable for people, revealing G-dly secrets about their lives would have been greatly helpful to them. Nevertheless, for their own personal

11. *Numbers* 12:7.