

# Insights from Shiurim of Contemporary Torah Giants

Summaries and Reflections



## Featuring

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Rav Betzalel Rudinsky        | Reb Ralph Rieder              |
| Rav Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg | Rav Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger |
| Rav Daniel Kalish            | Rav Moshe Leib Rabinovich     |
| Rav Ephraim Wachsman         | Rav Yisroel Reisman           |
| Rav Mordechai Finkelman      | Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein     |
| Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum     | Rav Avrohom Schorr            |
| Rav Ron Yitzchok Eisenman    |                               |

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# Contents

<b>1 Rav Betzalel Rudinsky</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 The Categorization of Ribbis in Yoreh Deah . . . . .	13
1.2 Concepts of Ownership and Obligation . . . . .	13
1.2.1 Milveh L'hotzaah Nitnah . . . . .	13
1.2.2 Prias Baal Chov Mitzvah . . . . .	14
1.2.3 Lifnim Mishurat Hadin . . . . .	14
1.3 The Torah Perspective on Property and Ownership . . . . .	14
1.4 The Transformative Power of Learning Torah . . . . .	15
1.4.1 The Character of Torah . . . . .	15
1.4.2 The Value of Sacrifice for Torah . . . . .	15
1.4.3 Inspirational Models . . . . .	15
1.5 Conclusion . . . . .	15
<b>2 Rav Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 The Origin of "Divrei Chachamim" . . . . .	17
2.1.1 The Beginning of a Lifelong Connection . . . . .	17
2.2 Remarkable Stories of Gedolim . . . . .	18
2.2.1 Respect Among Torah Giants . . . . .	18
2.2.2 Rav Elyashiv's Knowledge of Rav Moshe Feinstein . . . . .	18
2.3 Responding to Personal Tragedy . . . . .	19
2.3.1 The COVID Experience and Divine Providence . . . . .	19
2.3.2 Transforming Tragedy into Legacy . . . . .	19
2.4 Understanding Unanswered Prayers . . . . .	20
2.5 Conclusion . . . . .	20
<b>3 Rav Daniel Kalish</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 The Value of Authentic Friendship . . . . .	23
3.2 Friendship in Jewish Tradition . . . . .	23
3.2.1 The Gra on Eruv Techumin . . . . .	23
3.2.2 Hazal on Group Study . . . . .	24
3.3 Breaking Down Artificial Divisions . . . . .	24
3.4 Insights from the Berditchever Rebbe . . . . .	24
3.4.1 The Double Expression in Emor . . . . .	25
3.4.2 A Deeper Understanding . . . . .	25
3.5 The Greatness in Every Jew . . . . .	25
3.6 Songs Shared During the Shiur . . . . .	26

3.7	The Story of Mrs. Noah Miller . . . . .	26
3.8	Conclusion . . . . .	26
<b>4</b>	<b>Rav Ephraim Wachsman</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1	The Torah Belongs to Us, Not the Angels . . . . .	29
4.1.1	The Angels' True Argument . . . . .	29
4.2	Our Inheritance Through Marriage to Torah . . . . .	30
4.2.1	The Mashal of the Billionaire's Daughter . . . . .	30
4.2.2	Marriage Through Amal . . . . .	30
4.3	The Test of the Heart . . . . .	30
4.3.1	What Shamayim Measures . . . . .	30
4.3.2	Artificial Intelligence and Real Intelligence . . . . .	31
4.4	Every Individual's Unique Mission . . . . .	31
4.4.1	The Return of Our Neshama . . . . .	31
4.4.2	Unique Contributions to Torah . . . . .	31
4.5	The Importance of Sefirat HaOmer . . . . .	32
4.5.1	Living in the Moment . . . . .	32
4.5.2	The Skulener Rebbe's Lesson . . . . .	32
4.6	Learning with Yegiah . . . . .	32
4.6.1	The Baby's Forgotten Torah . . . . .	32
4.7	Practical Guidance for Baalei Batim . . . . .	32
4.7.1	Creating an Ohel Torah . . . . .	32
4.7.2	Gemara as Bread . . . . .	33
4.8	The Preciousness of Our Struggle . . . . .	33
4.8.1	The Sfas Emes on Chassidim at War . . . . .	33
4.8.2	Moshe's Humility Before Our Generation . . . . .	33
4.9	Questions and Responses . . . . .	33
4.9.1	On Limited Time for Learning . . . . .	34
4.9.2	On Tefillah in a Fast-Paced World . . . . .	34
4.9.3	On the Value of Showing Up . . . . .	34
4.10	Conclusion . . . . .	34
<b>5</b>	<b>Rav Mordechai Finkelman</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1	A Tribute to His Rebbe . . . . .	35
5.2	The Opening of Heavenly Doors . . . . .	35
5.2.1	From Pesach to Pesach Sheni . . . . .	35
5.2.2	The Story of Pesach Sheni . . . . .	36
5.3	Where There's a Will, There's a Way - A Jewish Perspective . . . . .	36
5.3.1	The American vs. Jewish Understanding . . . . .	36
5.3.2	The Lesson of the Akeidah . . . . .	36
5.4	The Middos of Sefirat HaOmer . . . . .	37
5.4.1	The Seven Foundational Middos . . . . .	37
5.4.2	Practical Application: The Wedding Story . . . . .	37
5.4.3	Netzach and Hod . . . . .	37
5.5	The Highest Middos: Yesod and Malchus . . . . .	38
5.5.1	Yesod - Kedusha and Moral Elevation . . . . .	38
5.5.2	Malchus - Divine Sovereignty . . . . .	38
5.6	Chochma, Bina, and Daas - The Three Levels of Torah . . . . .	38

5.6.1	The Approach to Shavuos . . . . .	38
5.6.2	The Language of Intimacy . . . . .	38
5.7	The Built-in System of Tochecha . . . . .	39
5.7.1	Divine Love Through Correction . . . . .	39
5.7.2	The Smoking Analogy . . . . .	39
5.8	The Zohar's Mashal of Unconditional Love . . . . .	39
5.8.1	Rav Shimon bar Yochai's Teaching . . . . .	39
5.8.2	The Missing Vav . . . . .	40
5.9	The Three Regalim as Stages of Marriage . . . . .	40
5.9.1	The Marriage Metaphor . . . . .	40
5.9.2	The Importance of Preparation . . . . .	40
5.10	The Sanctity of Language . . . . .	41
5.10.1	Lashon Hakodesh . . . . .	41
5.10.2	Yiddish as Purified German . . . . .	41
5.11	Shabbos as a Mirror . . . . .	41
5.11.1	The Blessing of Mon . . . . .	41
5.11.2	The Mirror Effect . . . . .	41
5.12	The Current Spiritual State and Future Redemption . . . . .	42
5.12.1	The 80/20 Parallel . . . . .	42
5.12.2	The Promise of Universal Return . . . . .	42
5.13	The Unity of Nissan and Shavuos . . . . .	42
5.13.1	Resolving Conflicting Teachings . . . . .	42
5.14	Conclusion: Going with Pride . . . . .	43
<b>6</b>	<b>Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum</b>	<b>45</b>
6.1	The Opening Story: A Lesson in Honesty . . . . .	45
6.2	The Central Teaching: "Don't Be So Sure" . . . . .	45
6.2.1	The Problem with Certainty . . . . .	45
6.2.2	Why Uncertainty is Valuable . . . . .	46
6.2.3	The Balance of Commitment and Openness . . . . .	46
6.3	Olam HaMidos: Writing from Experience . . . . .	46
6.3.1	The Authenticity of Personal Struggle . . . . .	46
6.3.2	The Bookstore Encounters . . . . .	47
6.4	Parenting Teenagers: Fundamental Principles . . . . .	47
6.4.1	The Core Insight: It's Not Your Child . . . . .	47
6.4.2	Understanding Our Reactions . . . . .	47
6.4.3	The Examples of Our Forefathers . . . . .	48
6.4.4	The Virtue of Patience . . . . .	48
6.5	Educational Philosophy: The Issue of Tracking . . . . .	48
6.5.1	The Complexity of Academic Levels . . . . .	48
6.5.2	The Real Issue: Attitude, Not Structure . . . . .	48
6.5.3	A Personal Example . . . . .	49
6.6	The Root of Bullying . . . . .	49
6.6.1	A Shocking Insight . . . . .	49
6.6.2	Creating the Right Environment . . . . .	49
6.7	The Challenge of Chinuch Today . . . . .	50
6.7.1	The Teacher Quality Problem . . . . .	50
6.7.2	The Need for Different Types of Educators . . . . .	50

6.7.3	The Solution: Education and Understanding . . . . .	50
6.8	The Path to Self-Discovery . . . . .	50
6.8.1	The Most Important Message . . . . .	50
6.8.2	Practical Self-Examination . . . . .	51
6.8.3	Going Deeper Than Surface Reactions . . . . .	51
6.8.4	The Ongoing Journey . . . . .	51
6.9	Conclusion . . . . .	51
<b>7</b>	<b>Rav Ron Yitzchok Eisenman</b>	<b>53</b>
7.1	Personal Connection to Israel . . . . .	53
7.2	The Foundation of Sincerity . . . . .	53
7.2.1	Beyond Appearances . . . . .	53
7.2.2	The Example of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein . . . . .	53
7.3	Navigating Disagreements with Respect . . . . .	54
7.3.1	The Importance of Civil Discourse . . . . .	54
7.3.2	A Lesson from Political History . . . . .	54
7.4	The Complexity of Religious Issues . . . . .	55
7.4.1	Israel: A Nuanced Reality . . . . .	55
7.4.2	Rejecting Monolithic Thinking . . . . .	55
7.5	The Challenge of Modern Communication . . . . .	55
7.5.1	Rewards for Divisiveness . . . . .	55
7.5.2	The Problem with Religious Media . . . . .	55
7.6	The Reality of Spiritual Struggles . . . . .	56
7.6.1	Private Battles . . . . .	56
7.6.2	The Deception of Appearances . . . . .	56
7.7	Addressing Modern Challenges with Compassion . . . . .	56
7.7.1	The Plague of Addiction . . . . .	56
7.7.2	A Pastoral Approach . . . . .	57
7.7.3	The Importance of Compassion . . . . .	57
7.8	The Power of Honest Discourse . . . . .	57
7.8.1	Living in an "ArtScrollian Universe" . . . . .	57
7.8.2	The Value of Admitting Uncertainty . . . . .	57
7.8.3	Judging Religion by Practice . . . . .	58
7.9	Finding Inspiration Amid Challenges . . . . .	58
7.9.1	Drawing Strength from Others . . . . .	58
7.9.2	Recognizing the Good . . . . .	58
7.10	Practical Guidance for Spiritual Growth . . . . .	59
7.10.1	Setting Boundaries . . . . .	59
7.10.2	Including Rather Than Excluding . . . . .	59
7.11	Building an Inclusive Community . . . . .	59
7.11.1	The Transformation of Ahavas Israel . . . . .	59
7.11.2	Encouraging Participation . . . . .	59
7.12	The Balance of Torah Learning and Life . . . . .	60
7.12.1	Shared Learning Experiences . . . . .	60
7.12.2	Honest Feedback . . . . .	60
7.13	Finding Humor in Service . . . . .	60
7.13.1	The Refreshing Nap . . . . .	60
7.14	Conclusion . . . . .	61

<b>8 Reb Ralph Rieder</b>	<b>63</b>
8.1 The Foundation: Shivisi Hashem L'negdi Tamid . . . . .	63
8.1.1 The Central Principle . . . . .	63
8.1.2 Elevating Every Action . . . . .	63
8.2 The Dual Approach: Heart and Mind . . . . .	64
8.2.1 Balancing Passion and Intellect . . . . .	64
8.2.2 The Practical Implementation . . . . .	64
8.3 The Power of Daily Learning . . . . .	64
8.3.1 Dual Chavrusos . . . . .	64
8.3.2 The Sandwich Approach . . . . .	64
8.4 Time as Sacred Resource . . . . .	65
8.4.1 Rav Moshe's Teaching . . . . .	65
8.4.2 Personal Implementation . . . . .	65
8.5 The Birth of the Modern Siyum HaShas . . . . .	65
8.5.1 Divine Inspiration . . . . .	65
8.5.2 The Madison Square Garden Proposal . . . . .	66
8.5.3 Faith and Partnership . . . . .	66
8.5.4 Divine Assistance . . . . .	66
8.6 Business Ethics and Kiddush Hashem . . . . .	66
8.6.1 The Guiding Principle . . . . .	66
8.6.2 Practical Application . . . . .	67
8.6.3 The Results of Honesty . . . . .	67
8.7 The Hungarian Torah Tradition . . . . .	67
8.7.1 Family Background . . . . .	67
8.7.2 The Chasam Sofer Influence . . . . .	67
8.8 Practical Guidance for Balance . . . . .	68
8.8.1 Managing Stress and Priorities . . . . .	68
8.8.2 Prioritizing Relationships . . . . .	68
8.9 Divine Guidance in Life Decisions . . . . .	68
8.9.1 Trusting in God's Direction . . . . .	68
8.9.2 Prayer as Foundation . . . . .	68
8.10 Kesher Yehudi: Building Bridges . . . . .	69
8.10.1 The Organization's Mission . . . . .	69
8.10.2 The Nova Shabbatons . . . . .	69
8.10.3 Transformative Results . . . . .	69
8.11 The Mechina Program . . . . .	69
8.11.1 Pre-Military Leadership Development . . . . .	69
8.11.2 Complete Success Rate . . . . .	70
8.12 Navigating Organizational Politics . . . . .	70
8.12.1 A Historical Lesson . . . . .	70
8.12.2 Rabbi Sherer's Wisdom . . . . .	70
8.13 Future Vision: Expanding Achdus . . . . .	71
8.13.1 The Next Siyum HaShas . . . . .	71
8.13.2 A Vision for Unity . . . . .	71
8.14 Learning to Say No . . . . .	71
8.14.1 The Challenge of Multiple Commitments . . . . .	71
8.14.2 The Decision-Making Process . . . . .	71
8.15 Conclusion . . . . .	72

<b>9 Rav Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger</b>	<b>73</b>
9.1 The Central Message: Ki Hem Chayeinu V'Orech Yameinu . . . . .	73
9.1.1 Living the Words We Say . . . . .	73
9.1.2 The Business Appointment Mashal . . . . .	73
9.1.3 The Medical Analogy . . . . .	73
9.2 Torah as Non-Negotiable Priority . . . . .	74
9.2.1 The Uncompromising Commitment . . . . .	74
9.2.2 Preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah . . . . .	74
9.3 The Wisdom of Rav Koppelman . . . . .	74
9.3.1 A Direct Link to Pre-War Greatness . . . . .	74
9.3.2 The Legacy of Rav Shimon Shkop . . . . .	75
9.4 The Bracha of Ahava Rabba . . . . .	75
9.4.1 The Overwhelming Prayer . . . . .	75
9.4.2 The Audacious Request . . . . .	75
9.5 The Life-and-Death Nature of Torah . . . . .	75
9.5.1 Rav Koppelman's Answer . . . . .	75
9.5.2 Torah as Our Breathing Machine . . . . .	76
9.6 The Rav Saadia Gaon's Teaching . . . . .	76
9.6.1 What Makes Us a Nation . . . . .	76
9.6.2 The Connection to Hashem . . . . .	76
9.7 Establishing Proper Priorities . . . . .	77
9.7.1 Ikar and Tafel . . . . .	77
9.7.2 Everything Else Follows . . . . .	77
9.8 The Hope for Geulah . . . . .	77
9.8.1 Connecting Kabbalas HaTorah to Final Redemption . . . . .	77
9.9 The Mission in America . . . . .	77
9.9.1 A Mystical Understanding of Geography . . . . .	77
9.9.2 Where the Great Ones Have Been . . . . .	78
9.9.3 Our Contemporary Mission . . . . .	78
9.10 The Bracha and Vision . . . . .	78
9.10.1 A Collective Blessing . . . . .	78
9.11 Conclusion . . . . .	78
<b>10 Rav Moshe Leib Rabinovich (Munkatcher Rebbe)</b>	<b>81</b>
10.1 The Sacred Nature of Preparation . . . . .	81
10.2 The Gemara's Teaching on Tumah and Taharah . . . . .	81
10.2.1 The Original Chet and Its Consequences . . . . .	81
10.2.2 The Moment of Purification . . . . .	82
10.3 The Alshich's Insight on "Dayeinu" . . . . .	82
10.3.1 The Question from the Haggadah . . . . .	82
10.3.2 The Alshich's Resolution . . . . .	82
10.4 The Profound Nature of Sefiras HaOmer . . . . .	83
10.4.1 The Machlokes Among Rishonim . . . . .	83
10.4.2 The Sefer HaChinuch's Explanation . . . . .	83
10.4.3 The Kabbalistic Dimension . . . . .	83
10.5 The Nature of Brachos and Personal Effort . . . . .	84
10.5.1 His Grandfather's Teaching . . . . .	84
10.5.2 The Balance of Divine Help and Human Effort . . . . .	84

10.6 The Munkatcher Approach to Kabbalas HaTorah . . . . .	84
10.6.1 A Unique Synthesis of Emotion . . . . .	84
10.6.2 The Desperate Need for Torah . . . . .	84
10.7 Unity Beyond Labels . . . . .	85
10.7.1 The Question About Modern Orthodoxy . . . . .	85
10.7.2 The Chassidic Perspective on Unity . . . . .	85
10.8 The Story of the Munkatcher Passport . . . . .	85
10.8.1 The Historical Account . . . . .	85
10.8.2 The Three Responses . . . . .	86
10.9 Conclusion . . . . .	86
<b>11 Rav Yisroel Reisman</b>	<b>89</b>
11.1 The Eternal Battle for Kavanah . . . . .	89
11.2 The Gra's Revolutionary Approach to Shmoneh Esrei . . . . .	89
11.2.1 The First Bracha's Crucial Importance . . . . .	89
11.2.2 The Structure of Praise . . . . .	89
11.3 Unpacking Each Element of Praise . . . . .	90
11.3.1 Understanding "HaKel" - Kel Elyon . . . . .	90
11.3.2 The True Meaning of "Gadol" - Gomel Chasadim Tovim . . . . .	90
11.3.3 Redefining "Gibor" - Koneh HaKol . . . . .	90
11.3.4 The Wonder of "Norah" - Zocher Chasdei Avos . . . . .	91
11.4 A Practical Tool for Enhanced Kavanah . . . . .	91
11.4.1 The Method . . . . .	91
11.4.2 The Power of Practical Application . . . . .	92
11.5 The Key to Lasting Impact . . . . .	92
11.5.1 Repetition Creates Memory . . . . .	92
11.5.2 Use Creates Retention . . . . .	92
11.6 The Philosophy of Spiritual "Tricks"	92
11.7 Addressing Practical Questions . . . . .	93
11.7.1 The Challenge of the Yetzer Hara . . . . .	93
11.7.2 Language in Prayer . . . . .	93
11.8 The Challenge of Yeshiva Education . . . . .	93
11.8.1 Academic Focus vs. Spiritual Development . . . . .	93
11.8.2 The Need for Personal Initiative . . . . .	94
11.9 Shabbos as Spiritual Anchor . . . . .	94
11.9.1 The Power of Shabbos Transformation . . . . .	94
11.9.2 Strategic Spiritual Warfare . . . . .	94
11.9.3 The Ultimate Goal . . . . .	94
11.10 Conclusion . . . . .	94
<b>12 Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein</b>	<b>97</b>
12.1 The Legacy of Focused Living . . . . .	97
12.1.1 His Father's Defining Characteristic . . . . .	97
12.1.2 The Totality of Purpose . . . . .	97
12.2 Navigating Truth Within Tradition . . . . .	97
12.2.1 The Challenge of Personal Growth and Mesorah . . . . .	97
12.2.2 Truth Guides Its Own Path . . . . .	98
12.3 Maintaining Relationships Across Hashkafic Differences . . . . .	98

12.3.1 The Foundation of L'Shem Shamayim . . . . .	98
12.3.2 Mutual Recognition of Divine Service . . . . .	98
12.4 Balancing Family Life and Torah Focus . . . . .	99
12.4.1 The Prerequisites for Success . . . . .	99
12.4.2 The Sanctification of Mundane Activities . . . . .	99
12.5 The Nature of Truth in Our Generation . . . . .	99
12.5.1 The Challenge of Ikveta d'Meshicha . . . . .	99
12.5.2 The Role of Mesorah and Guidance . . . . .	100
12.5.3 The Example of the Vilna Gaon . . . . .	100
12.6 Priorities and Value Systems . . . . .	100
12.6.1 The Question of Time Allocation . . . . .	100
12.6.2 The Hierarchy of Importance . . . . .	100
12.7 The Story of Rav Shlomo Schwadron . . . . .	101
12.7.1 A Lesson in Perspective . . . . .	101
12.7.2 The Insight About Free Time . . . . .	101
12.8 The Path Forward . . . . .	101
12.8.1 Individual Adaptation . . . . .	101
12.8.2 The Ultimate Goal . . . . .	101
12.8.3 Constructive Family Activities . . . . .	102
12.9 Conclusion . . . . .	102
<b>13 Rav Avrohom Schorr</b>	<b>105</b>
13.1 The Mystical Framework of Sefiras HaOmer . . . . .	105
13.1.1 Today's Spiritual Configuration . . . . .	105
13.2 The Invisible Sanctuary of Yiras Shamayim . . . . .	105
13.2.1 Yitzchak's Field Prayer . . . . .	105
13.2.2 The Answer from Rimzei HaChochmah . . . . .	105
13.2.3 Yitzchak's Invisible Sanctuary . . . . .	106
13.3 Biblical Examples of Yiras Shamayim as Protection . . . . .	106
13.3.1 Yosef HaTzaddik's Declaration . . . . .	106
13.3.2 The Midwives' Courage . . . . .	106
13.4 The True Nature of Yiras Shamayim . . . . .	106
13.4.1 Beyond Temptation . . . . .	106
13.4.2 The Fire Analogy . . . . .	107
13.4.3 The Complete Barrier . . . . .	107
13.5 The Source of Moral Strength . . . . .	107
13.5.1 The Only Thing in Our Control . . . . .	107
13.5.2 The Principle of Hakol BiYedei Shamayim . . . . .	107
13.6 Practical Methods for Developing Yiras Shamayim . . . . .	108
13.6.1 The Rambam's Method . . . . .	108
13.6.2 The Chidushei HaRim's Explanation . . . . .	108
13.7 Recognizing the Miraculous in the Natural . . . . .	108
13.7.1 The Sfas Emes on Teva vs. Nes . . . . .	108
13.7.2 Practical Exercises in Recognition . . . . .	108
13.8 The Connection Between Yitzchak and Yosef . . . . .	109
13.8.1 The Mystical Link . . . . .	109
13.8.2 The Foundation of Kedusha . . . . .	109
13.9 The Chidushei HaRim's Teaching on Separation . . . . .	109

13.9.1 Backs to the World . . . . .	109
13.10 Contemporary Applications and Challenges . . . . .	110
13.10.1 The Question of Daily Renewal . . . . .	110
13.10.2 The Daily Choice . . . . .	110
13.11 Addressing Modern Technology: The AI Question . . . . .	110
13.11.1 The Danger of Artificial Reality . . . . .	110
13.11.2 Technology and Human Happiness . . . . .	110
13.12 The Question of God's "Need" for Us . . . . .	111
13.12.1 Clarifying a Dangerous Misconception . . . . .	111
13.12.2 The Theological Problem . . . . .	111
13.13 Guidance on Sleep and Time Management . . . . .	111
13.13.1 The Importance of Proper Sleep . . . . .	111
13.13.2 The Satmar Model . . . . .	111
13.14 Developing Hunger for Torah . . . . .	112
13.14.1 The Ultimate Question . . . . .	112
13.14.2 The Foundation of Torah Hunger . . . . .	112
13.14.3 Recommended Study Materials . . . . .	112
13.15 Conclusion . . . . .	112



# 1 Rav Betzalel Rudinsky

## Erev Kabbalas HaTorah

### 1.1 The Categorization of Ribbis in Yoreh Deah

The placement of the laws of ribbis (interest) in Yoreh Deah rather than Choshen Mishpat raises an important distinction in halacha. While monetary laws typically fall under Choshen Mishpat, ribbis is categorized with ritual prohibitions in Yoreh Deah, suggesting its primary nature is an issur (prohibition) rather than a straightforward monetary concern.

**Bava Metzia 60b:** "*Eizehu Neshech v'eizehu Tarbit?*" - The Gemara begins the section on interest by distinguishing between two forms of prohibited interest. The shiur explored why this entire topic appears in Yoreh Deah rather than Choshen Mishpat, suggesting deeper underlying principles.

This categorization reveals fundamental distinctions between:

- **Safeik Mamon vs. Safeik Issur:** When uncertainty exists, monetary doubts follow the principle of "hamotzi mechavero alav harayah" (the burden of proof is on the claimant), while doubts about prohibitions typically follow more stringent guidelines.
- **Gezel vs. Ribbis:** Though both involve money, theft is primarily a transgression against one's fellow, while ribbis constitutes a ritual prohibition.

A revealing anecdote demonstrates this distinction: a real estate developer once expressed concern about rabbinical interest prohibitions while remaining unconcerned about straightforward theft, prompting the observation "now I understood how chachamim mechazeik l'divreihem" - now I understand why the Sages had to strengthen their enactments beyond Torah law.

### 1.2 Concepts of Ownership and Obligation

#### 1.2.1 Milveh L'hotzaah Nitnah

A loan of money differs fundamentally from borrowing objects. When one borrows money, it legally becomes the property of the borrower, with only an obligation to repay, as expressed in the principle "milveh l'hotzaah nitnah" (a loan is given to be spent). This creates a unique dynamic where:

- The lender no longer owns the specific money lent

- The borrower has a debt obligation rather than holding someone else's property
- Repayment occurs with different funds than those originally borrowed

### 1.2.2 Prias Baal Chov Mitzvah

Debt repayment constitutes a mitzvah, but has defined limits. Citing Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the shiur examined the case of someone who borrowed a million dollars but whose investments performed poorly. The obligation of "prias baal chov mitzvah" (repaying a debt is a mitzvah) requires giving up to a fifth of one's assets—but not beyond that threshold. This creates the paradoxical situation where someone with three million might legitimately claim inability to repay one million until their assets grow further.

### 1.2.3 Lifnim Mishurat Hadin

The concept of going beyond the letter of the law applies specifically when something legally belongs to you but moral considerations suggest relinquishing it. The application of this principle depends on whether we view something as fundamentally yours (in which case lifnim mishurat hadin applies) or whether it remains the property of another (in which case the question becomes one of prohibition).

**Bava Metzia 30a:** *The Gemara discusses cases where one might be exempt from returning a lost object because it is "beneath one's dignity," yet should still do so as lifnim mishurat hadin (beyond the letter of the law).*

## 1.3 The Torah Perspective on Property and Ownership

In certain cases, the Torah recognizes a legal status of ownership that differs from the metaphysical reality. This concept emerges in various contexts:

- The sugya in Sukkah (30a) where Rav Huna advised Jewish merchants to have their non-Jewish suppliers cut palm branches for the lulav rather than cutting them themselves, to avoid potential theft issues
- The principle of "klapei shmaya galya" (it is revealed before Heaven) where the true ownership might differ from the legal status
- The case of bringing bikurim (first fruits) when purchasing two trees in another's field, where one brings the offering despite questions about land ownership

**Sukkah 30a:** *The Gemara states, "Amar lei Rav Huna l'hanei Avancherei ki zavnitu asa mi'akum, la tigzu atum, ela ligzuhu inhu..." Rav Huna instructed merchants buying myrtle branches from non-Jews to have the non-Jews cut them rather than cutting the branches themselves, due to concerns about the status of land ownership and avoiding a mitzvah performed through transgression.*

This distinction reveals how ritual law (Yoreh Deah) sometimes operates according to a different standard than monetary law (Choshen Mishpat), reflecting deeper truths than legal technicalities.

## 1.4 The Transformative Power of Learning Torah

### 1.4.1 The Character of Torah

The attraction to Torah often comes through witnessing its impact on those who embody it. The Lubliner Rav, Rav Meir Shapiro, once explained to a professor from Berlin why yeshiva students eagerly attended ethical lectures while university students showed no interest in ethics: "By us, the students come here because they want to be like the rebbe... they look at that man and they go, 'I want to be like him.'"

This concept appears in Pirkei Avos with the recurring phrase "hu haya omer" (he used to say), suggesting that a Tanna's words emerged from his very essence—his life spoke the teaching, not merely his words.

**Pirkei Avot 1:1:** "*Hem amru shlosha devarim...*" (*They said three things...*) - The Mishna introduces teachings with references to the sayer, not just the saying, emphasizing that the teacher embodied the teaching.

### 1.4.2 The Value of Sacrifice for Torah

A powerful story from Rav Elyashiv illustrates how sacrifice enhances the value of mitzvos: A kollel student spent his limited funds on a taxi to say Kaddish for his mother when a minyan failed to materialize nearby. Though not strictly required, this sacrifice elevated not just that Kaddish but every Kaddish he would ever recite.

Rav Elyashiv explained that Hashem rewards each mitzvah based on the greatest sacrifice one has ever made for that particular mitzvah. Thus, by demonstrating willingness to expend significant resources and effort for Torah study through their travel, the dedication shown becomes the new standard by which all their regular Torah learning is valued.

### 1.4.3 Inspirational Models

Two primary influences shaped this approach to Torah:

- **Parental Dedication:** A father who, despite limited early education, took two years off at age 40 without pay to learn in Israel, considered even the most menial work to continue his Torah studies, and consistently connected his children with Torah giants.
- **Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky's Example:** Witnessing Rav Yaakov's exceptional character—his respect for every human being, his natural humility, and his profound embodiment of Torah values—created a desire to achieve similar refinement through Torah study.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The placement of ribbis in Yoreh Deah rather than Choshen Mishpat reflects a profound understanding that Torah encompasses far more than legal technicalities. It shapes character, transforms

individuals, and creates an integrated life where monetary matters cannot be separated from spiritual considerations.

**Bava Kamma 94a:** *The Gemara discusses cases where someone stole and the object underwent a transformation (shinui), raising questions about whether the thief acquires ownership through the transformation. This relates to concepts discussed in the shiur regarding how halacha views the metaphysical reality versus legal status of ownership.*

The supreme value of Torah learning emerges not just from intellectual achievement but from the sacrifice, dedication, and character transformation it produces. When learning becomes a reflection of one's deepest commitments, every moment of study takes on heightened significance.



## About Rav Betzalel Rudinsky



Rav Betzalel Y. Rudinsky serves as the Rav and Moreh D'Asrah of Kahal Ahavas Yitzchok, an Agudas Yisroel affiliated synagogue that prides itself on being an inclusive community where all are welcome. Beyond his pulpit responsibilities, Rabbi Rudinsky is the Rosh HaYeshiva and founder of Yeshivas Ohr Reuven, a comprehensive educational institution encompassing an elementary school, mesivta, bais medrash, and kollel.

Rav Rudinsky has established himself as an internationally recognized posek, consulted by many on halachic and hashkafic questions across a broad spectrum of Jewish law and philosophy. His scholarly contributions include the popular "Mishkan Bezalel" series on Chumash and Haggadah, among other works. Under his leadership, both his synagogue and yeshiva have flourished as centers of Torah learning and spiritual growth, reflecting his commitment to inspiring love for Torah values while fostering an environment where individuals at all levels of observance can find opportunities for meaningful Jewish engagement and learning.

## 2 Rav Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg

### Understanding Gedolim and Personal Experiences

#### 2.1 The Origin of "Divrei Chachamim"

##### 2.1.1 The Beginning of a Lifelong Connection

Rav Ginzberg's journey of connecting with gedolim began in 1974 when, as a 19-year-old yeshiva student visiting Israel for the first time, he received an airmail letter from his rebbi in yeshiva, Rav Neiman. The letter contained a request to help a woman who had suffered three miscarriages and was now pregnant for a fourth time. She had heard about a segulah involving water blessed by a tzaddik in Israel that could prevent miscarriage.

*Rav Ginzberg recalled, "So I said, where's Baba Sali? In Netivot. Today Netivot is if you take a direct road, car you can make it in two hours and 20 minutes. But those days it was a six-hour bus ride."*

When Rav Ginzberg consulted his mashgiach in yeshiva about making this lengthy journey, the mashgiach directed him to consult with Rav Elyashiv. Despite not knowing who Rav Elyashiv was at the time, the young Rav Ginzberg sought him out in Meah Shearim. Rav Elyashiv redirected him to the Steipler Gaon in Bnei Brak, writing an introductory letter for him.

The Steipler, unable to give the blessing himself, directed Rav Ginzberg to his son, Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Through a series of providential events, Rav Ginzberg managed to have the water sent to the woman, whose son was born healthy. Twenty-five years later, Rav Ginzberg received an unexpected wedding invitation and discovered it was for this very child.

*"So she wanted I should be at the chasunah, he was getting married. She wanted me to come to the chasunah, I had to be there. Well, incredible, incredible end to that story."*

This experience ignited Rav Ginzberg's passion to connect with gedolim, learning not just halachic rulings but witnessing greatness firsthand.

## 2.2 Remarkable Stories of Gedolim

### 2.2.1 Respect Among Torah Giants

Rav Ginzberg shared a powerful story illustrating the mutual respect between gedolim. A baal teshuva chassan from Yeshivas Ohr Somayach was engaged to a baalas teshuva from Neve Yerushalayim. Shortly before their wedding, it was discovered that the chassan was a Kohen and his kallah was a giyores (convert), creating a halachic issue preventing their marriage.

The Rosh Yeshiva took the chassan to Rav Betzalel Zolty, the Chief Rav of Jerusalem, who requested two days to consider the case. Tragically, Rav Zolty passed away that night, leaving behind an 11-page teshuva on his desk permitting the marriage. When presented with this teshuva, Rav Elyashiv, though close with Rav Zolty, disagreed with the ruling. However, he stated that if Rav Moshe Feinstein would permit it, he would not only accept the ruling but would officiate at the wedding himself.

*"Rav Moshe pushes it away. He didn't want to open it, just pushed it away. And he said, ask me a question... Rav Moshe says, claps, okay. Hi nishkein ger, she is nishkein giyores, mutar lah, they can get married."*

When Rav Ginzberg returned to Israel and asked Rav Elyashiv why he would officiate at a wedding based on a ruling he disagreed with, Rav Elyashiv revealed his profound concern for future generations:

*"I'm concerned that they'll get married and they'll have a child... and it'll be 20 years from now, 25 years from now, and they'll be ready for shidduch. And then they're going to hear, oh maybe there was something in it, tumul, when they got married... I said if they hear 25 years from now, 30 years from now, that Rav Elyashiv was mesader kiddushin, they'll know there was no she'eilah in the kiddushin."*

### 2.2.2 Rav Elyashiv's Knowledge of Rav Moshe Feinstein

Rav Ginzberg once questioned Rav Elyashiv about Shabbos clocks, stating that Rav Moshe Feinstein prohibited their use. Rav Elyashiv emphatically responded, "There is no such Rav Moshe." After researching, Rav Ginzberg found Rav Moshe's ruling in a publication called Torah HaReh and brought it to Rav Elyashiv, who then raised eleven questions about Rav Moshe's psak.

When asked how he could be so familiar with Rav Moshe's teachings despite never meeting him, Rav Elyashiv shared a pivotal story. When Rav Aharon Kotler first visited Israel, Rav Elyashiv approached him with a difficult get (divorce) question. Rav Kotler immediately called Rav Moshe Feinstein, who provided guidance in a 40-minute phone conversation.

*"Rav Aharon ignored the chair. So he thought maybe Rav Aharon didn't realize there was a chair there. So Rav Elyashiv like pushed the chair against Rav Aharon's feet. So Rav Aharon went and pushed the chair back, kicked the chair away... So Rav Elyashiv said, I just have to ask the Rosh Yeshiva. I gave you a chair. Why didn't you, why didn't you sit down? The same, for the same price. He says, kahi da'atcha? I'm talking to Rav Moshe Feinstein on the phone, I'm going to sit while I'm talking to him?"*

Witnessing this profound respect, Rav Elyashiv resolved to study everything Rav Moshe had written, developing a deep knowledge of his rulings.

## 2.3 Responding to Personal Tragedy

### 2.3.1 The COVID Experience and Divine Providence

Rav Ginzberg shared his near-death experience with COVID in 2020. Hospitalized for six and a half weeks with three weeks in a coma, doctors gave him only hours to live. His wife was called to say goodbye, given only 12-15 minutes with him due to COVID protocols.

*"She came, I don't remember, but she came and she said goodbye I guess, but baruch Hashem Hakadosh Baruch Hu did nissim that there's no explanation. The doctors do not understand. When I went to see the doctor a few months later, I was back to myself and I went to thank him, he said you don't understand, there were 13 people in the ICU and you were the worst. And the other 12 never made it out."*

Upon returning to his study after months of recovery, Rav Ginzberg noticed his sefer "Divrei Chachamim" that he had published 40 years earlier. Taking this as a sign, he spent the next year and a half completely revising and expanding it.

### 2.3.2 Transforming Tragedy into Legacy

Rav Ginzberg also shared the heartbreak story of losing his 17-year-old daughter. Born with a rare iron-processing condition that affected her liver, she received a liver transplant at just 12 days old—at the time, the youngest liver transplant patient in the world. She lived a vibrant, active life until age 17, when complications arose and she passed away.

In response to this loss, Rav Ginzberg established "Ohel Sarah Leah," a program inspired by Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman that connects singles seeking marriage with couples struggling to have children. The singles pray for the couples to have children, and in turn, this becomes a segulah for the singles to find their matches.

*"She died at 17. She wasn't zocheh to have her own family, her own children. If we could make this work, if we could even make two couples, two shidduchim, one baby born, that baby will be her zechus, her, that will be her, that will be her legacy."*

What began as a small initiative has grown to facilitate over 7,000 marriages and more than 2,130 births in seven and a half years—results that Rav Ginzberg describes as "not al pi derech hateva" (not according to the natural order).

Additionally, Rav Ginzberg built a beautiful shul on Har HaZeitim near his daughter's grave, serving hundreds of families from two nearby communities. What started as an intention to donate a few siddurim transformed into a 5.5 million dollar project that has become one of Jerusalem's most beautiful synagogues.

## 2.4 Understanding Unanswered Prayers

When asked how to maintain faith when prayers seemingly go unanswered, Rav Ginzberg offered a profound perspective: prayers are always answered, just not always in the way we expect.

*"The tefillos were answered. We were zocheh to such incredible siyata d'shmaya in things that we started in memory of for my daughter. That defies, defies imagination."*

He shared a story he had recently heard about a modern woman whose son was born with a serious eye problem. Following the advice of the Steipler's son, Rav Sheinberg, she supported a kollel fellow for a year in exchange for a blessing for her son's healing. However, the eye condition worsened, requiring surgery with uncertain prospects for preserving vision.

Decades later, this son—against his parents' modern orientation—developed an extraordinary passion for Torah learning, eventually becoming the top bachur in Yeshivas HaNegev and marrying the Rosh Yeshiva's daughter. When the Rosh Yeshiva asked about the young man's distinguished lineage, his mother explained that her son had no special yichus, but Rav Sheinberg's blessing had transformed not his physical eye but his spiritual one:

*"The bracha didn't work on the physical eye. But that bracha changed his eye to a spiritual eye that no matter what we put in front of him, no matter what we tried, the only thing that gave him any pleasure in life was only a sefer in front of him."*

This story perfectly illustrates Rav Ginzberg's understanding of prayer: "Sometimes we see tefillos where what we want to happen, happen. And sometimes we know that it happened, we know that tefilos work, we just don't necessarily don't see it."

## 2.5 Conclusion

Most moving is Rav Ginzberg's perspective on seemingly unanswered prayers: "I believe that every tefillah for my daughter allowed us to have this incredible siyata d'shmaya to have these incredible successes on the things that we started for her that just is going beyond even human comprehension." This understanding transforms the pain of loss into a legacy of blessing, illustrating how tragedy can become the soil from which new life and new meaning grow.

In both his collection of gedolim's teachings and his personal example, Rav Ginzberg demonstrates that Torah wisdom extends far beyond halachic rulings to encompass a profound vision of how to

navigate life's deepest challenges with faith and dignity.

Through these stories—whether standing before Torah giants, enduring unimaginable personal trials, or watching dreams transform into enduring legacies—Rav Ginzberg teaches us that the path of a Jew is one of perseverance, connection, and vision. Every encounter, every loss, and every unanswered question becomes part of a greater narrative of Divine purpose. His life affirms that by anchoring ourselves to Torah, to our mesorah, and to heartfelt tefillah, we too can draw strength from our challenges and transform them into vehicles of eternal impact.



## About Rav Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg



Rav Eliezer Ginzberg has had the unique privilege of close relationships with many of the greatest Torah leaders of the previous generation. For over 50 years, he has been "yotzei v'nichnas" (going in and out) of the homes of *gedolim*, including learning with Rav Elyashiv for 13 months every Motzei Shabbos, serving as one of Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky's two regular drivers in his later years, and being among the ten people who davened with Rav Moshe Feinstein in his home minyan when Rav Moshe was no longer able to leave his house.

Rav Ginzberg is the author of *Divrei Chachamim*, a sefer containing thousands of *she'eilos* in all parts of *Shulchan Aruch*, particularly *Orach Chaim*, along with hundreds of *hashkafa* questions he asked various *gedolim*.



## 3 Rav Daniel Kalish

### The Power of Friendship and Jewish Unity

#### 3.1 The Value of Authentic Friendship

Rabbi Kalish began his shiur by expressing his deep appreciation for the gathering of friends, explaining that despite his busy schedule, he made time for this event because of the profound importance he places on friendship.

*"Friendship is precious. Friendship is a real thing... To me that's something precious. I wanted chevra from Waterbury to come in to see friendship. Friendship's not meant for, it's like an 18-year-old. I watch Shai with his group. I like hearing when Rav Hillel says me and Shai are friends. Rav Goldberg says friendship's a big thing. It's a very big deal."*

Rabbi Kalish reflected on how his perspective on friendship has evolved. As a younger man, he admitted he was often cynical about yeshiva students who would leave their studies to attend a friend's wedding. Now, he sees things quite differently, asking rhetorically: "My son's friend has a l'chaim in Baltimore, what's your heiter not to go? You can make a Yid smile?"

He shared that his father, despite being extremely busy, attended every simcha to which he was invited, understanding the importance of bringing joy to fellow Jews.

#### 3.2 Friendship in Jewish Tradition

The value of friendship is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, as Rabbi Kalish illustrated through several sources:

##### 3.2.1 The Gra on Eruv Techumin

Rabbi Kalish cited the Vilna Gaon's teaching that one is permitted to establish an eruv techumin (which extends one's Shabbat boundaries) for the sake of a mitzvah. The Gra explained that two Jews meeting each other constitutes a mitzvah, warranting such an accommodation.

*"The Gra, the Gra says that you can only put an eruv techumin for tzorech mitzvah. The Gra says two Yidden to meet each other, you could put an eruv techumin, that's a mitzvah of course."*

This teaching is based on the principle "lo nivra adam ela bishvil chaveiro" (a person is created only for the sake of another), emphasizing the inherent value of human connection in Judaism.

### 3.2.2 Hazal on Group Study

Rabbi Kalish also referenced the teaching of Chazal: "hizhader mipnei chavurah she'mehem teitzei Torah" (be careful in the presence of a group, for from them Torah emerges). This illustrates that genuine Torah insights often emerge from group study and shared learning experiences.

*"Torah comes out of a chavurah. 'Shnayim sheyoshvim v'ein beineihem divrei Torah'... If there's nothing between them, they're just connected, divrei Torah, that's divrei. Harei zeh when people are like a metzius, I'm this, you're that, I don't know, that's meshalei leitzanut, that's leitzanut. This is divrei Torah."*

## 3.3 Breaking Down Artificial Divisions

A central theme of Rabbi Kalish's message was the need to move beyond artificial divisions within the Jewish community. He expressed his appreciation for groups that transcend conventional boundaries:

*"I like by our people breaking down walls. I like when one people, it's us. There's no, I don't see a them. I haven't figured out if I'm Mizrachi or Charedi, I don't know. Not sure. Not sure. But I know we belong to both. It's us. Us, equal, us. Us, us Charedim, us Mizrachi, us Tzionim, us, we're us. It's nonsense. We make man-made divisions, they're cute stuff."*

Rabbi Kalish emphasized that while different segments of Jewish life (Charedi, Mizrachi, YU, Lakewood) have their place and value, they are ultimately human constructs. What is divinely ordained is simply our identity as Jews: "What's God made is I'm a Yid. I'm a Yid. I'm a Yid, that's God made."

This message of unity was reinforced by a powerful story about a hostage in Gaza who continued to make brachot on food despite his circumstances. When the Hamas captor said "atah lo dati" (you're not religious), the Israeli replied "ani Yehudi" (I am a Jew).

## 3.4 Insights from the Berditchever Rebbe

The centerpiece of Rabbi Kalish's shiur was an insightful interpretation of a teaching from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (the Berditchever Rebbe) on the Torah portion of Emor.

### 3.4.1 The Double Expression in Emor

Rabbi Kalish explained that in Parashat Emor, there is a seemingly redundant expression: "Emor el hakohanim bnei Aharon, v'amarta aleihem..." (Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them...) (Vayikra 21:1). Rashi questions this double language of speaking.

The Berditchever offers an explanation that initially appears to be about preventing kohanim from becoming arrogant. He suggests that by identifying them as "bnei Aharon" (sons of Aaron), the Torah is reminding them that their status comes from earlier generations, not their own merit.

### 3.4.2 A Deeper Understanding

However, Rabbi Kalish offered a more nuanced interpretation of the Berditchever's teaching. Rather than being concerned about kohanim feeling "too good," the Berditchever was addressing what we might today call "imposter syndrome" - the feeling of inadequacy despite one's position:

*"The Berditchever is saying like this. The kohanim are about to be tasked with a big mission. If they don't know their greatness, then there's going to be an arrogance that comes from insecurity... The Berditchever is saying that Hashem said to Moshe, tell the kohanim that all the gadlut you have, you're worthy, you're born for this. You were made for this, you're shayach to this."*

This interpretation transforms the message from one of humbling the kohanim to one of empowering them by helping them recognize their inherent greatness and fitness for their role. When they truly understand that they are meant for this role, they will not experience the false pride that comes from insecurity.

## 3.5 The Greatness in Every Jew

Rabbi Kalish expanded this teaching to apply to all Jews, emphasizing that every Jew has tremendous spiritual potential:

*"A Yid has big things, pump up a Yid. And that's what Hashem was telling Moshe, tell them, be marich on it. The gadlut inside of them, tell them where they come, tell them what's inside of them. We're all, if we're inspired, we feel our neshamot, we go to different tzaddikim... it raises us up. We touch a little bit of our neshamot, our eish feier of one for Hashem. A big madregot, each one of us, our own ohr, a big big ohr that the world absolutely needs."*

This understanding reframes the relationship between tzaddikim (righteous leaders) and ordinary Jews. The role of tzaddikim is not to be separate and elevated above others, but to help every Jew recognize their own greatness, their own connection to Hashem, and their own capacity for righteousness.

### 3.6 Songs Shared During the Shiur

The shiur was interspersed with niggunim (melodies) that embodied the themes of Jewish unity and spiritual awakening:

1. **The Berditchever Niggun** - A wordless melody attributed to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, characterized by its soul-stirring qualities. Rabbi Kalish noted that its wordless nature allows each person to bring their own meaning to it.
2. **"Awake My Love"** - Based on "Uri Uri" from Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs 4:16), this song calls for spiritual awakening, reflecting Rabbi Kalish's message that there are only "sleeping Jews and awake Jews" - those who are aware of their spiritual potential and those who have yet to realize it.
3. **Yisrael B'tach BaShem** - From Tehillim (Psalms 115:9): "Israel, trust in Hashem; He is their help and shield."
4. **Shirah Chadashah** - References the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15), where the unified Jewish people praised God together at the shore of the Sea of Reeds.
5. **Elokai Neshamah** - The morning prayer acknowledging that the soul within each person is pure and was given by God, reflecting Rabbi Kalish's emphasis on the inherent value and holiness of every Jew.

### 3.7 The Story of Mrs. Noah Miller

Rabbi Kalish concluded his shiur with a powerful story about a woman named Mrs. Noah Miller, who had been raised in a communist kibbutz in Israel and was distant from Judaism. Her son had become religious, which created a rift between them. When Rabbi Kalish and eight other young Torah scholars moved to Waterbury, they befriended her despite her distance from traditional observance.

Over time, Mrs. Miller became more involved in the community, attending a siyum ha-Shas (celebration of completing the Talmud) and eventually rekindling her relationship with her son. Though she passed away before Sukkot, her legacy continued in an unexpected way:

*"For two and a half years I've been looking for a kollel in Blue Ridge. I felt it would lift up the city... After Sukkot, I settled a Yid, talmid chacham. It turns out the tzaddik who moved to town... This Yid is Mrs. Noah Miller's grandson. And to dream, when we moved to town, to dream, it's not believable."*

This story dramatically illustrated Rabbi Kalish's central message: never overlook the potential in any Jew. What appeared to be an unlikely source of Jewish continuity and leadership - a woman distanced from tradition - ultimately produced a grandson who would become a pillar of Torah in the community.

### 3.8 Conclusion

Rabbi Kalish's shiur wove together themes of friendship, Jewish unity, and the recognition of every Jew's inherent greatness. By drawing on both traditional texts and personal experiences, he

presented a vision of Jewish life that transcends artificial divisions and focuses on the divine spark within each person.

His interpretation of the Berditchever Rebbe's teaching transformed it from a message about humility into one about empowerment and recognition of one's true worth and purpose. This understanding has profound implications for how we view ourselves and others in the Jewish community.

The shiur concluded with the powerful story of Mrs. Noah Miller, which served as a living example of his message: "Don't overlook any Yid. Yidden have tremendous kochot." This narrative reminds us that we cannot know where Jewish leadership and inspiration will emerge, and that every Jew contains immeasurable potential for greatness.



## About Rav Daniel Kalish



Rav Daniel Kalish is a highly regarded mechanech (educator) and rosh yeshiva (head of yeshiva) known for his engaging and inspiring teaching style, particularly with teenagers. He is currently the Menahel (principal) of the Mesivta of Waterbury. Rabbi Kalish learned at Yeshiva of Far Rockaway and the Yeshiva Mir in Jerusalem, and is known for his "wonderful shmoозes" (conversations) that encourage personal growth and connection to Jewish life. He has been recognized for his ability to connect with young people and help them understand and embrace Jewish values.

Drawing from both traditional sources and personal experiences, Rav Kalish brings a unique perspective that bridges different segments of Jewish life. His approach to Torah combines deep textual analysis with practical applications for modern life, emphasizing the spiritual greatness inherent in every Jew.



## 4 Rav Ephraim Wachsman

### Our Connection to Torah: Beyond Knowledge to Heart

#### 4.1 The Torah Belongs to Us, Not the Angels

Rabbi Wachsman opened his shiur by addressing the famous Gemara about Moshe Rabbeinu's ascent to Heaven to receive the Torah. When the angels protested that the Torah should remain in Heaven with them, Hashem instructed Moshe to grasp His Throne of Glory and respond to their claim.

*"So Hashem says to Moshe Rabbeinu, grab onto my Kisei Hakavod and answer them. And he says, look in the Torah, klum l'Mitzrayim yiradetem? You went down to Mitzrayim? Klum av v'em yeish lachem? Do you have a father and mother? Mek-abdin, kabeid es avicha? Do you have kinah? Do you have sinah? None of the things that the Torah is given for applies to you."*

The Rabbi posed a fundamental question: wasn't this an obvious argument? Anyone opening the Torah could see it was written for human beings, not angels. Why did the angels make such a claim?

##### 4.1.1 The Angels' True Argument

Rabbi Wachsman explained that the angels understood the Torah was meant for humans to perform its mitzvot. However, they claimed the deeper aspects of Torah - its hod (splendor), its secrets, its endless depths - those belonged in Heaven.

*"But there's a hod in the Torah. There's a depth in the Torah, there's secrets in the Torah. There's endless, endless, the sod. All that, that's for us. Tena hodcha al hashamayim. That part of the Torah, the splendor of the Torah. That's not for basar, they need to do the maaseh mitzvos, but all these things is not for them."*

But Moshe's response was profound: if there's something in the Torah that's not for you, then it's not your Torah. You can't claim part while rejecting another part.

## 4.2 Our Inheritance Through Marriage to Torah

### 4.2.1 The Mashal of the Billionaire's Daughter

Rabbi Wachsman illustrated our relationship to Torah through a powerful mashal:

*"Imagine there's somebody who dreams, he dreams of becoming a billionaire. He figures, let's say, how can I become a billionaire? He doesn't have any skills, doesn't have a degree, doesn't know anything about finance. He says he can work, he can make 25 dollars an hour. So he figures out, if I work 24 hours a day for the next 150,000 years, he can make a billion dollars. There's no way... There's one way he could become a billionaire. If he happens to marry the billionaire's daughter."*

This mashal explains our relationship to Torah. The verse states "Torah tziva lanu Moshe morasha kehilas Yaakov" - Torah is our inheritance. But the Gemara says "al tikri morasha ela me'urasa" - don't read it as inheritance, but as betrothed.

### 4.2.2 Marriage Through Amal

The key insight is how one becomes "married" to Torah:

*"Because you know how you get married to the Torah? You get married to the Torah through amal. If a person works, he overcomes a difficulty. He sets aside time he may want to use for something else, he says, you know what, I'm going to give away that, and I'm going to use that for Torah. That sacrifice for the Torah, that sacrifice is what makes him married to the Torah."*

Angels can never achieve this connection because they have no yetzer hara to overcome, no sacrifice to make. Their knowledge comes without struggle, and therefore they cannot be truly connected to Torah.

## 4.3 The Test of the Heart

### 4.3.1 What Shamayim Measures

Rabbi Wachsman shared a teaching from Rav Dessler, received through the chain of tradition from the lions of Kelm:

*"Rav Dessler said, he heard I think from the Rav Nochum Wolf who was the son of the Alter fun Kelm, he has b'kabbalah, b'kabbalah from the lions of Kelm, that in Shamayim they don't farther, they don't give you the big test, they don't farther your mind. They only test your heart."*

The measure of a person is not how much Torah knowledge they possess, but how much they struggled and sacrificed for that knowledge.

### 4.3.2 Artificial Intelligence and Real Intelligence

Drawing a contemporary parallel, Rabbi Wachsman noted:

*"I say today everybody's talking about, you know, artificial intelligence. I guess there's a shortage of real intelligence, they need to create an artificial intelligence industry. But what does it mean? What's the message? You know what the message is? Anything that a machine can create is not real. It's not real. It's not you. Even our intelligence is not us."*

What makes us uniquely human is our capacity for sacrifice, for overcoming challenges - something no computer can replicate.

## 4.4 Every Individual's Unique Mission

### 4.4.1 The Return of Our Neshama

Rabbi Wachsman explored the profound meaning behind saying "Modeh Ani" each morning:

*"So Ribono Shel Olam the Medrash, he takes every night millions of neshamos go up. B'yadcha afkid ruchi, say, I give you. In the morning, he never gets mixed up. You never get back somebody else's soul... Would that be so terrible? Would it be so bad to wake up with the Chasam Sofer's soul? Or to have Rav Chaim Kanievsky's brain?"*

The answer reveals the unique value of each person:

*"The answer is, if Hakadosh Baruch Hu would give us Rav Shimon bar Yochai's soul, our lives would be worthless. There'd be no point in us living. Because the only reason I exist is because of who I am, and who you are, and each one of us has the mission, the obligation to give Hakadosh Baruch Hu what only he can give."*

### 4.4.2 Unique Contributions to Torah

The Ramchal teaches that Hakadosh Baruch Hu needs someone to make Him King from every single challenge in existence. Each person, shaped by their unique circumstances and experiences, has an irreplaceable role in this cosmic mission.

## 4.5 The Importance of Sefirat HaOmer

### 4.5.1 Living in the Moment

Rabbi Wachsman emphasized how Sefirat HaOmer teaches us to value each moment:

*"That's why the whole importance of Sefiras Haomer. Every day counts. You miss one day, you lose the whole thing, you can't count. So what's the message? The message is that every day is filled with the whole thing. Every moment of life is filled with your whole life."*

### 4.5.2 The Skulener Rebbe's Lesson

He shared a powerful story illustrating this principle:

*"I remember once, I was with the old Skulen Rebbe... There was a bochur who became a chosson. He just wanted to tell the Rebbe that he's a chosson. And it was, the gabbai was running out. He runs over, he says, Rebbe, I'm a chosson. Everything stopped. He took his hand in his two hands and he was smiling and giving him brachos and telling him, it went on as if he had all the time in the world."*

The lesson: whatever Hashem places in our path at this moment is the most important thing in the world right now.

## 4.6 Learning with Yegiah

### 4.6.1 The Baby's Forgotten Torah

Rabbi Wachsman addressed why a baby forgets all the Torah learned in the womb:

*"So why don't you stand up for an isha me'uberes? The gedolei hador would. So because we don't give, we don't give honor to Torah without yegiah... Why does he forget everything? Because we want that when we learn Torah, if I'll remember it from then, I won't have the same yegiah."*

The struggle itself is what creates the connection to Torah, making the eventual understanding far more precious than effortless knowledge.

## 4.7 Practical Guidance for Baalei Batim

### 4.7.1 Creating an Ohel Torah

When asked about the successful baal habayis, Rabbi Wachsman emphasized:

*"The if a person lives and he has an ohel Torah, you need to feel you have an ohel Torah. Means, I got to get to my shiur. I'm waiting. Do I know this? I'm chazering this. If you feel a pressure from your learning, you're on the right track."*

#### 4.7.2 Gemara as Bread

On the balance between different areas of Torah study:

*"However, that said, still the basic bread and butter has to be Gemara for somebody who's capable of it... Gemara, Talmud is b'gematria pas. It's bread. Everything else is meat, potato, there's dessert, there's delicacies, they're all delicacies, but you can't live without bread."*

### 4.8 The Preciousness of Our Struggle

#### 4.8.1 The Sfas Emes on Chassidim at War

Rabbi Wachsman concluded with a powerful teaching from the Sfas Emes about Chassidim writing Torah questions from the Russian front lines:

*"He said the ha'idosei vachem hayom es hashamayim v'es ha'aretz. Ha'idosei means witness. Ha'idosei was a lashon of jewelry... Says ha'idosei, with such yungeleit, I can, they are like the jewels. Ha'idosei bachel, with you, I will adorn Shamayim va'aretz."*

#### 4.8.2 Moshe's Humility Before Our Generation

The Mitteler Rebbe taught that Moshe Rabbeinu's humility came from seeing our generation:

*"And he saw the last dor before Moshiach. And he said, how are they able to do it?... It says, there's so little opportunity, we're so hardened by everything that's going around. He says, what, Moshe Rabbeinu said, what brings them to shul? What brings them to the shiur? I wouldn't be able to do it. He became an anav just from seeing that."*

### 4.9 Questions and Responses

During the question period, several important themes emerged:

### 4.9.1 On Limited Time for Learning

Rabbi Wachsman advised having both breadth and depth - an "Olam Haba masechta" that you know well, while also maintaining a seder to cover everything.

### 4.9.2 On Tefillah in a Fast-Paced World

Acknowledging the challenge of rushed davening, he suggested creating minyanim of like-minded people who want to daven more slowly and meaningfully.

### 4.9.3 On the Value of Showing Up

To a questioner learning Daf Yomi with limited understanding, Rabbi Wachsman affirmed the value of consistency while encouraging growth: "Every day make an effort to understand one thing that you didn't understand yesterday. Fight for it."

## 4.10 Conclusion

Rabbi Wachsman's shiur presented a profound understanding of our relationship with Torah that transcends mere intellectual achievement. The true measure of Torah learning is not the quantity of knowledge acquired, but the quality of connection forged through struggle, sacrifice, and dedication.

His message resonated particularly strongly with the baalei batim present, acknowledging their unique challenges while affirming the immense value of their efforts. In a world that often measures success by external achievements, Rabbi Wachsman reminded us that Hashem measures the heart - our willingness to sacrifice, to struggle, and to show up consistently despite all obstacles.



### About Rav Ephraim Wachsman



Rav Ephraim Wachsman serves as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Meor Yitzchok in Monsey, New York, and is renowned throughout the Torah world for his profound insights, passionate delivery, and ability to connect complex Torah concepts to practical life applications.

He is a sought-after maggid shiur and keynote speaker at major events, including the Agudas Yisroel Convention, Torah Umesorah gatherings, and Dirshu Siyumei HaShas. His shiurim — whether on halacha, hashkafah, or mussar — are widely disseminated and cherished by listeners of all backgrounds. Rav Wachsman is particularly known for his ability to uplift and inspire, often addressing the pressing challenges of emunah, bitachon, and personal growth in the modern world.

## 5 Rav Mordechai Finkelman

### Marriage to Torah: The Journey from Pesach to Shavuos

#### 5.1 A Tribute to His Rebbe

Rav Finkelman opened his shiur with a heartfelt tribute to his recently departed Rebbe, Rav Moshe Wolfson zt”l, whose yahrzeit was approaching. Despite being nearly 100 years old, Rav Wolfson’s passing was sudden - he davened with his community on Shabbos morning and was niftar on Motzei Shabbos.

*“But so I try to start every Shavuos this year with something from him. Something from my Rebbe. Like a inyan you see in the Gemara of Moshe b’Yeshiva al kivrei.”*

This connection to his Rebbe’s teachings permeated the entire shiur, as Rav Finkelman shared insights from the Arizal about Moshe Rabbeinu’s neshamah and its connection to our preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah.

#### 5.2 The Opening of Heavenly Doors

##### 5.2.1 From Pesach to Pesach Sheni

Rav Finkelman explained the mystical understanding of the period from Pesach through Pesach Sheni (the Second Pesach), drawing from the Zohar and the teachings of Rav Shimon bar Yochai. On the 14th of Nissan, when the Korban Pesach is brought, a profound spiritual connection occurs:

*“And it’s such a connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu that doors of the Shamayim open up. And the Matronisa is the lashon of the Zohar that Rav Shimon bar Yochai brings, the Shechina sits and waits for us to visit. For 30 days the doors stay open.”*

The concept of ”yesod” - today being the first day of yesod in the approach to Shavuos - represents a brand new beginning in our spiritual preparation for receiving the Torah.

### 5.2.2 The Story of Pesach Sheni

The institution of Pesach Sheni arose from a remarkable request. Those who were tamei (ritually impure) from handling the burial of Nadav and Avihu couldn't participate in the Korban Pesach. Rather than accepting their exemption, they approached Moshe with a profound plea:

*"But they said to Moshe Rabbeinu, lama nigara? We don't want a mitzvah for free. We don't want to get schar without doing it. We want to spend money and buy that sheep and bring the korban and eat the Korban Pesach. We don't want to be less than everybody else. We don't want it for free."*

This teaches us a fundamental lesson about our relationship with mitzvos - the desire to actively participate rather than receive spiritual reward without effort.

## 5.3 Where There's a Will, There's a Way - A Jewish Perspective

### 5.3.1 The American vs. Jewish Understanding

Rav Finkelman contrasted the American saying "where there's a will, there's a way" with the Jewish understanding of effort and divine intervention:

*"We know from the Akeidah, we learn that oness Rachmana patrei. Right? And if you if Hashem blocks us from doing something, if we show Hakadosh Baruch Hu we want to do something, it's a Chazal, very different than the American idiomatic expression. The Americans say where there's a will there's a way. That's what the Americans say. We know it's not always true."*

He illustrated this with the story of an elderly childless couple from Jerusalem who, despite all their efforts and living two years in Meron near Rav Shimon bar Yochai's kever, remained childless but would receive reward for their desire and effort.

### 5.3.2 The Lesson of the Akeidah

The story of Avraham and the Akeidah demonstrates this principle powerfully. When the angel stopped Avraham from sacrificing Yitzchak, Avraham requested to at least perform hatajas dam (drawing a drop of blood), having come so far in his willingness to sacrifice. The response was absolute - "al taas lo meuma" (don't do anything to him).

*"So it says Nimrod Hamelech, der Oybershter wanted his Klal Yisrael. You don't have to do anything as long as you wanted to. If I stop you, you get full schar. Oness Rachmana patrei. If you're an oness, if Hashem doesn't let."*

Our Chazal teach: "Ein davar ha'omed bifnei haratzon" - nothing stands in the way of will. We

receive reward for our will, demonstrated through our effort.

## 5.4 The Middos of Sefirat HaOmer

### 5.4.1 The Seven Foundational Middos

Rav Finkelman explained the progression through the seven weeks of Sefirah, working on the seven fundamental middos that prepare us for receiving the Torah:

**Chesed and Gevurah:** Opposing *middos* – *chesed* is embrace and love, *gevurah* is repelling and strength. We need both to embrace good and push away bad.

**Tiferes:** The harmony that blends the opposing *middos*, enabling us to reject what's wrong while maintaining proper relationships.

*"Tiferes is the harmony. That even when you have to push away the bad, do it nicely. Don't turn somebody off. Explain, I'm so sorry but I can't come to your party, it's just not, you know, the way we would have a party."*

### 5.4.2 Practical Application: The Wedding Story

Rav Finkelman shared a detailed story about a talmid's wedding that illustrated these principles in action. When asked to be mesader kiddushin at a wedding in a Conservative temple with mixed dancing, he navigated the situation with Tiferes - maintaining his standards while preserving relationships:

*"So I said, really, you know, I feel bad, but your father-in-law has a Rav. No one is expected to be more religious than their own Rav. You know, the Rav is the one who guides the flock. And they're wonderful people you're with. But I can't be there."*

The story concluded with the father-in-law creating a mechitzah and kosher music until after bentchen, demonstrating how proper approach can influence others positively.

### 5.4.3 Netzach and Hod

**Netzach:** Perseverance – sometimes in *ruchniyus* you must push through and get your way, doing what's right even when it's difficult.

**Hod:** Subservience and giving in. In *gashmiyus*, it's *vittur* (yielding) on unimportant matters to maintain peace. In *ruchniyus*, it represents subservience to Hashem.

*"My Rebbe said, a small tefillah in that week, which ended yesterday, before last yesterday, is as powerful all the rest of the year as many tefillos put together. Because it's the week of really representing emunah."*

## 5.5 The Highest Middos: Yesod and Malchus

### 5.5.1 Yesod - Kedusha and Moral Elevation

Yesod represents living on a higher moral level, exemplified by Yosef HaTzaddik:

*"Yesod is kedusha. It's living on a higher level in morality. Yesod is bris kodesh is Yosef Hatzadik who not only was moser nefesh not to give in to Potiphar's wife at the age of 17, all alone in Mitzrayim. Imagine he lived in Times Square squared."*

Yosef's resistance to temptation while completely alone, with no one to answer to, represents the ultimate in moral integrity.

### 5.5.2 Malchus - Divine Sovereignty

Malchus is about becoming sovereign over ourselves, being able to say no to ourselves and accepting Hashem's malchus, which makes us regal in our own conduct.

## 5.6 Chochma, Bina, and Daas - The Three Levels of Torah

### 5.6.1 The Approach to Shavuos

After the seven middos comes Shavuos, representing the three highest levels: Chochma, Bina, and Daas - the three levels of Torah understanding:

*"Chochma is the simplest level, black and white knowledge. Bina, we try to understand it and learn and be mevin. And that brings us daas, intimate knowledge of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's Torah, which means intimacy with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, closeness with Hashem."*

### 5.6.2 The Language of Intimacy

Rav Finkelman explained that daas represents the closest possible knowledge, using the example of "vayeda Adam es Chava ishto" - the Torah's description of the most intimate human relationship:

*"When it wants to say how close Adam v'Chava were, husband and wife, it says vayeda Adam es Chava ishto, lashon shel daas is the closest knowledge. The closest that a person*

*can be. That's why our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu by Shlomo Hamelech is Shir Hashirim. Husband and wife is the closest relationship in the world."*

## 5.7 The Built-in System of Tochecha

### 5.7.1 Divine Love Through Correction

Rav Finkelman addressed the tochecha (rebuttal) in Parshas Bechukosai, explaining it as a built-in system of divine love:

*"What's the tochecha? It's a built-in system Hakadosh Baruch Hu made in the world not to let us get lost. That if chas v'shalom we assimilate too much among the goyim like happened in Mitzrayim, in the first parsha, vativalei haaretz osam, says the Midrash, we went to their theaters and stadiums, we mixed with the goyim and we started to change."*

When Jews began assimilating in Egypt, Hashem made the Egyptians hate them, forcing separation to preserve Jewish identity.

### 5.7.2 The Smoking Analogy

Using a contemporary analogy, Rav Finkelman compared this to the natural consequences of harmful behavior:

*"So why did der Oybershter do that? Now he says, der Oybershter why make me like this? I want to be well. I didn't do this to you, you did it to yourself. It's a built-in system. Stop. You know, go to smokers anonymous. Do something for yourself. You know, I gave you warnings."*

## 5.8 The Zohar's Mashal of Unconditional Love

### 5.8.1 Rav Shimon bar Yochai's Teaching

Rav Finkelman shared a powerful mashal from Rav Shimon bar Yochai about Hashem's unconditional love for the Jewish people:

*"He says, a moshel to a I'll just freelance translate it without the beautiful words of the Zohar, the Aramaic. A person that loves a certain woman and he wants her to be his wife. He wants her to be his wife, but she went to live on a street of tanneries... Aval kol hon shebaolam, you could pay him all the money in the world, he doesn't want to*

*go to that place that smells like that... Aval, but because she's there, to him, it's like a perfume market."*

This mashal explains the verse "v'af gam zos bihyosam b'eretz oyvayhem" - even when we're in the worst spiritual places, Hashem still pursues us with love.

### 5.8.2 The Missing Vav

Rav Finkelman noted the mystical significance of the missing vav in "l'chamosam":

*"L'chamosam is missing a vav... So l'chamosam without a vav, l'chamosam because you're the kallah of Hashem. Hashem loves you. He wants you to stay married to him. He's going to bring you back. There was never a divorce. Only a separation."*

## 5.9 The Three Regalim as Stages of Marriage

### 5.9.1 The Marriage Metaphor

Rav Finkelman presented a beautiful framework understanding the three regalim as stages of marriage to Hashem:

*"Pesach is the tenaim. It's the conditional contract, we're going to get married in a while. And certain conditions have to be met, which is the Sefiras HaOmer. The middos. Derech eretz kadmah l'Torah. And then you wonder, then the Torah, it doesn't say a word about kabbalas haTorah on Shavuos."*

**Pesach:** The *tenaim* (engagement contract)

**Sefiras HaOmer:** The preparation period working on *middos*

**Shavuos:** The *chuppah* (wedding ceremony)

**Sukkos:** Moving in together – our homes become the holy space

### 5.9.2 The Importance of Preparation

The fact that the Torah doesn't explicitly mention Kabbalas HaTorah on Shavuos teaches us that the preparation is the ikar (main thing):

*"Because the ikar is the preparation. That's what the Siv Shalom says. Pirkei Avos is called Avos because it's a father, like the Avos Nezikin, the Avos Melachos in Shabbos... And for the Sfas Emes, the toldah of Pirkei Avos is kabbalas haTorah. Derech eretz kadmah l'Torah."*

## 5.10 The Sanctity of Language

### 5.10.1 Lashon Hakodesh

Rav Finkelman explained the elevated nature of Hebrew as Lashon Hakodesh:

*"Romemtanu mikol lashon. Hashem lifted us up more than any language in the world. Our language is elevated. Lashon Hakodesh. What's what's holy about it? Says the Ramban, there's no curse words, there's no, we're so refined. There's not a word in Lashon Hakodesh about personal parts of the body that have to be covered."*

Even when referring to private matters, Hebrew uses euphemisms like "mei raglayim" (water from the feet) rather than crude terminology.

### 5.10.2 Yiddish as Purified German

He extended this concept to Yiddish:

*"And that's what Yiddish was in Europe. The Yidden took German, cleaned it up. I used to laugh when I was a child, everyone spoke Yiddish around me. And there's no curses in Yiddish. They cleaned up German... They would what would they say to each other? Zolst vaksn vi a tsibele mitn kop in der erd. You should grow like an onion with your head in the ground."*

## 5.11 Shabbos as a Mirror

### 5.11.1 The Blessing of Mon

Rav Finkelman explained how Hashem blessed Shabbos with the mon (manna):

*"And the Midrash borcho bamon. Hashem blessed it with the mon. You're not allowed to pick the mon. There's nothing to do but think about Hashem on Shabbos... If you think about Hashem on Shabbos, you'll see Hashem is fair. Hashem has a cheshbon. It's a day of emunah."*

### 5.11.2 The Mirror Effect

The mon had the property of tasting like whatever one thought about, making it a mirror of one's spiritual state:

*"Shabbos is a mirror. Whatever you make of the Shabbos, that's what it is. A mirror, whatever you look like, that's what you see in the mirror... If we learn Torah, we reflect the Torah. If a person is sitting in the theater, he's reflecting that. We're a mirror."*

## 5.12 The Current Spiritual State and Future Redemption

### 5.12.1 The 80/20 Parallel

Rav Finkelman drew a parallel between our current situation and the Exodus from Egypt:

*"If you count how many Jews there are in the world, it's approximately 20*

However, there's a crucial difference: the 80

### 5.12.2 The Promise of Universal Return

Unlike in Egypt where those who chose not to go were lost during the darkness, the future redemption will include everyone:

*"The chiluk is they're all going to come with us to Eretz Yisrael. I told the bachurim, I really see this pshat in Kaddish. Before Amen yehei shmei raba, we speak about Moshiach coming. v'yitzmach purkanei v'yikareiv meshichei... So what I was saying, when Moshiach will come, it'll be yehei shmei raba mevorach. All the whole world is going to say Hashem echad u'shmo echad."*

## 5.13 The Unity of Nissan and Shavuos

### 5.13.1 Resolving Conflicting Teachings

Rav Finkelman resolved the apparent contradiction between two teachings about when the redemption will come:

*"And I think that's what brings emes to the two conflicting Chazals. B'Nissan nigalu u'v'Nissan asidin ligoel. And Rav Shimon bar Yochai writes b'Shavuos yifkun m'galusa. On Shavuos you're going to go out of galus."*

His resolution: according to the Ramban, Sefirah is Chol Hamoed, connecting Nissan with Sivan as one continuous Yom Tov. Therefore, whenever Moshiach comes between Erev Pesach and Shavuos, both teachings are fulfilled.

## 5.14 Conclusion: Going with Pride

Rav Finkelman concluded with the prayer "v'havieinu komemiyus l'artzeinu" - that we should go to our land with pride:

*"Moshiach will come, we'll go over to him, Sholom Aleichem Moshiach, we brought you. We came into New York to get chizuk. We brought you. The other 80*

His shiur was a powerful call to appreciate our role in bringing about the redemption through our dedication to Torah learning and spiritual growth. The zechus of baalei batim who take time from their busy schedules to seek spiritual elevation represents the very actions that hasten the coming of Moshiach.

The shiur wove together mystical teachings, practical guidance, and historical perspective to present a comprehensive vision of our journey from the freedom of Pesach to the spiritual marriage of Shavuos, ultimately leading to the final redemption when all of Klal Yisrael will be united in serving Hashem with full knowledge and commitment.

Rav Finkelman's message leaves us not only with a vision of the past and future but a mandate for the present. Each moment of Sefiras HaOmer, every small act of growth, kindness, or Torah learning, is part of the larger story of Klal Yisrael's journey toward spiritual intimacy with Hashem. We are not passive observers but active participants in the redemptive process. By cultivating our middos, honoring our traditions, and yearning for closeness with the Divine, we collectively write the next chapter in that sacred marriage — one step, one mitzvah, and one tefillah at a time.



### About Rav Mordechai Finkelman



Rav Mordechai Finkelman serves as Mashgiach Ruchani at Yeshiva Derech Ayson in Far Rockaway, New York. A devoted *talmid* of his revered Rebbe, Rav Moshe Wolfson zt"l, Rav Finkelman is known for his profound insights into the spiritual dimensions of the Jewish calendar and his ability to weave together mystical teachings with practical guidance for daily Jewish living.

His connection to the Boca Raton community spans many years through his close relationships with community leaders and his participation in their spiritual growth initiatives.



# 6 Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum

## The Wisdom of Uncertainty and Self-Discovery

### 6.1 The Opening Story: A Lesson in Honesty

Rabbi Kestenbaum began his session by sharing a story from his Rebbe, Reb Peretz zt”l, about Reb Peretz’s father and his extraordinary level of honesty (ehrlichkeit). The story involved a mentally unwell guest who always praised the fresh linen at their house. On one occasion when there hadn’t been time to change the sheets, the father couldn’t contain himself:

*“So Reb Peretz’s father was like squirming in his seat, like, cause this time it wasn’t fresh. So Reb Peretz’s father couldn’t, couldn’t, couldn’t hold himself back, you know, or intentionally he said, don’t be so sure. Don’t be so sure. He had to, he had to say something.”*

This story served as the foundation for Rabbi Kestenbaum’s central message about the importance of maintaining uncertainty in our spiritual and practical endeavors.

### 6.2 The Central Teaching: ”Don’t Be So Sure”

#### 6.2.1 The Problem with Certainty

Rabbi Kestenbaum shared a profound insight about the dangers of being overly certain about our life choices and spiritual path:

*“I am not sure that I should be running this yeshiva. I am not sure I should be doing everything I’m doing. I’m doing the best I can with what I think Hashem wants from me. And I don’t think a person ever should be sure. I don’t think a person should be sure, I’m sure this is what I should be doing, I’m sure this is the right thing.”*

This admission of uncertainty, even about his role as a Rosh Yeshiva, demonstrated remarkable humility and spiritual awareness.

### 6.2.2 Why Uncertainty is Valuable

Rabbi Kestenbaum explained the practical and spiritual benefits of maintaining healthy uncertainty:

*"So I'm not so so so I am sure, farkehrt, right? If I'm sure, then I'm doing it with all my passion. I'm sure, I'm sure, I'm sure. I think the answer, the reason why I think it's a problem, and I wonder about about this about this person, is when you are sure, it's going to be very hard to be moved from your place."*

When we're certain, we become closed to other possibilities, unable to adapt when circumstances change or when Hashem presents us with new opportunities.

### 6.2.3 The Balance of Commitment and Openness

Rabbi Kestenbaum clarified that uncertainty doesn't diminish passion or commitment:

*"And it doesn't have to take away any of your passion. You know, you may not be sure that you should be doing something, but once you're doing it, you can be sure that you got to give it all you can, you got to give it all you have. But we don't have to be so sure about everything we're doing."*

This teaching represents a sophisticated understanding of how to live with both dedication and flexibility.

## 6.3 Olam HaMidos: Writing from Experience

### 6.3.1 The Authenticity of Personal Struggle

When asked about the pressure of living up to his book on character development, Rabbi Kestenbaum revealed the authentic source of his insights:

*"I don't claim to practice what I preach. I claim to try to practice what I preach. I don't feel that I'm, I don't feel I'm writing Olam HaMidos that I am claiming to be the king of midos... all the flaws in the in the Olam HaMidos are my own. How do I know about a crazy, I don't know about a person getting so angry and a person getting so jealous? How do I know about all these things? I know about these things because I experienced them."*

This honest admission transforms the book from theoretical discourse to practical wisdom born from personal experience.

### 6.3.2 The Bookstore Encounters

Rabbi Kestenbaum shared humorous incidents where people in bookstores confronted him about not revealing he was the author of Olam HaMidos:

*"And my answer would be, yeah, I agree with you. It's a good question. It doesn't really make sense that I wrote Olam HaMidos. It doesn't make sense. I don't, I don't, I'm not the biggest baal midos. There are much greater people. Those great people may be too great to be related to some of the flaws in the sefer, but uh, we're just trying. We're just trying."*

## 6.4 Parenting Teenagers: Fundamental Principles

### 6.4.1 The Core Insight: It's Not Your Child

When asked about parenting teenagers, Rabbi Kestenbaum shared what he considers the most fundamental principle:

*"And that is that we have to realize that it's not our child. It's Hashem child. Most of the parenting flaws, I always tell parents when I was a rav in Waterbury, because you know, like, you know, giving them advice. I would say, you know, you think, you know, you think the rav so amazing, can hug the child with the long hair and he can look overlook the kid's not wearing yarmulke. It's not a big deal. You also could be a rav in Waterbury."*

The distance that allows a rav to be patient with struggling children is the same emotional distance parents need to cultivate with their own children.

### 6.4.2 Understanding Our Reactions

Rabbi Kestenbaum emphasized the critical importance of self-awareness in parenting:

*"You need to ask yourself this question with your kids, you need to ask the question with your wife, you need to ask the question with your people at work. Can you really be honest and figure out what's really behind what's going on? And when you're reacting to your child, is it really about the child? Is it really about Hashem?"*

Many parental reactions stem from personal embarrassment, worry about neighbors' opinions, or taking the child's behavior as a personal reflection rather than genuine religious concern.

### 6.4.3 The Examples of Our Forefathers

Rabbi Kestenbaum reminded parents that even the greatest figures in our tradition faced challenges with their children:

*"You could be great, you could be a big tzaddik and your kid, Avraham Avinu had Yishmael. Yitzchak had an Esav. Hashem gave us this a child. And we're supposed to do our best with them, but it's not ours. We don't control him. He doesn't reflect us."*

### 6.4.4 The Virtue of Patience

Perhaps the most emphasized point in Rabbi Kestenbaum's parenting advice was patience:

*"And that's another big word I'll tell you with parenting, and again, it's another, you know, it's a long shmuess, but patience, patience, patience. There are people that are very frumer at 20 and unfortunately are not frumer at 40, and we don't need that. But what we do need to know also is there are people that are that are not frumer at 20 and at 40 are superstars."*

He shared a personal example of finding his son learning Daf Yomi on his iPad right before Shabbos, demonstrating how patience allows us to appreciate our children's growth at their own pace.

## 6.5 Educational Philosophy: The Issue of Tracking

### 6.5.1 The Complexity of Academic Levels

When asked about tracking students by ability level, Rabbi Kestenbaum acknowledged the complexity of the issue:

*"It's a great question. It's funny when I was younger, wow, I feel really old, I could say when I was younger. Um, but when I was younger, I used to be, I used to feel like tracks was a big problem. And now that I'm a little bit older, I actually realize that it's not very simple."*

He recognized that when students have vastly different learning abilities, some form of differentiation might be necessary.

### 6.5.2 The Real Issue: Attitude, Not Structure

Rabbi Kestenbaum identified the core problem with tracking systems:

*"But the problem is not the tracks. The problem is the attitude of the rosh yeshiva and the rebbiim towards the kids. If the rosh yeshiva and rebbiim, I I had such nachas from this... If the bochurim feel that the rosh yeshiva and the rebbiim respect the kids for who they are, it doesn't make a difference if how well you learn the Tosafos. It makes a difference how much effort you're putting in."*

### 6.5.3 A Personal Example

Rabbi Kestenbaum shared a powerful story about a student who struggled with learning:

*"And what did he quote me from? He said, you know, a few years ago I was in Rav Kestenbaum's yeshiva and there was a guy there that struggled to read. And he would take a gemara and he would write every every single word he wrote with a pencil, he had an Artscroll. And Rav Kestenbaum would go crazy and talk about how special this bachur is."*

This student, who received the most respect in the yeshiva, demonstrated that effort and character matter more than natural ability.

## 6.6 The Root of Bullying

### 6.6.1 A Shocking Insight

Rabbi Kestenbaum shared a profound observation about the source of bullying in schools:

*"I want to tell you where bullying comes from. Bullying comes from the kid in the class that asks a stupid question or the kid in the class that's making trouble and the rebbi or teacher rolls their eyes. That's where bullying comes from. When the children sense that you value and respect every single one of them, they don't bully each other."*

This insight places significant responsibility on educational staff to model respect for every student.

### 6.6.2 Creating the Right Environment

When students feel valued and respected by their teachers, they naturally create an inclusive environment:

*"They want to be in an environment, they want to be in a place where everyone feels good about themselves. They're not bullying... If the kids sense that everyone's respected here, you they don't want to bully. We we love it here. Everyone's everyone's nice to each other here. Everyone respects each other here."*

## 6.7 The Challenge of Chinuch Today

### 6.7.1 The Teacher Quality Problem

When confronted with a direct question about inadequate teachers, Rabbi Kestenbaum acknowledged the reality while offering perspective:

*"So, first of all, you know, someone, I don't remember who said it. Was it Rabbi Orlowek? Someone said that the solution to the chinuch problem would be putting, would be paying the teachers, paying the rebbeim higher salaries. Right. So it is a problem. You have really talented people that maybe now want to enter chinuch because um it doesn't pay all that well."*

### 6.7.2 The Need for Different Types of Educators

Rabbi Kestenbaum noted that sometimes the most effective teachers are those who think differently:

*"So, what happens is the ADHD person is not typically going to be cut out, certainly at 20 years old, at 21 years old, 25 years old to go into chinuch. But the problem is that he has an ability to reach those kids better. Right. Than other people, the other ADHD kids, because he thinks like them, he relates to them, he carries himself a certain way."*

### 6.7.3 The Solution: Education and Understanding

Rather than simply criticizing teachers, Rabbi Kestenbaum suggested systemic improvements:

*"If you ask me what the solution would be, I think there needs to be more education of of understanding kids, of how to treat kids, how to respect kids. They they need to go through if I would suggest you got to pay them to do it maybe, but to go through some type of training in this."*

## 6.8 The Path to Self-Discovery

### 6.8.1 The Most Important Message

Rabbi Kestenbaum concluded with what he considered his most crucial teaching:

*"But I'll I'll I'll end with this just so it won't be a thing because this will be the most important message I can give you and better than being here for another half an hour is you're doing it already, but I would encourage you, encourage myself to really work on understanding ourselves."*

### 6.8.2 Practical Self-Examination

He provided concrete guidance for self-awareness:

*"When you get angry, ask yourself, why is this getting me angry? When you're getting upset, ask yourself what's going on beneath the surface. You will find the entire world of wisdom within yourself. And it it's it is life-changing. It is life-changing to start being aware and learning yourself."*

### 6.8.3 Going Deeper Than Surface Reactions

Rabbi Kestenbaum emphasized the importance of digging beneath immediate emotional responses:

*"Don't just say, I got so angry because that annoys me. Ask yourself why it's annoying you so much. Other things don't annoy me so much. Why does that guy get me so upset? Another guy doesn't get me upset. Maybe it reminds you of a third cousin from 10 years ago that triggered you. I don't know, but try to figure it out."*

### 6.8.4 The Ongoing Journey

Rabbi Kestenbaum humbly acknowledged that self-discovery is a lifelong process:

*"Olam HaMidos is is my own book. I wrote the book about myself. Uh, you know, and again, I'm not there. But I wrote it for my own self-discovery. And I'm still discovering myself, and I'm still blinded, even with trying. I'm still blinded. We're very blinded."*

## 6.9 Conclusion

Rabbi Kestenbaum's session provided profound insights into some of the most challenging aspects of Jewish life: maintaining humility in our certainties, raising children with patience and perspective, and creating educational environments that honor every individual. His teachings emerged not from theoretical knowledge but from honest self-examination and practical experience.

The central theme of "don't be so sure" represents a sophisticated spiritual approach that balances commitment with openness, passion with flexibility. This wisdom particularly applies to parenting, where our ego involvement can cloud our ability to serve our children's true needs.

His emphasis on self-discovery as the foundation for all growth resonates throughout his teachings. Whether dealing with difficult students, challenging children, or our own character flaws, the path forward begins with honest self-examination and the humility to acknowledge what we don't know about ourselves.

Beyond the practical lessons and emotional depth, Rabbi Kestenbaum's message encourages a shift in mindset—a Torah-driven embrace of inner complexity. Rather than striving for rigid perfection or simple answers, his approach invites us to cultivate nuance, to view our flaws not as disqualifiers but as starting points for growth. In a world that often celebrates certainty and quick fixes, his humility, honesty, and reverence for the process itself stand as a profound model of spiritual maturity.



## About Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum



Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum serves as a distinguished *mechanech* and author, renowned throughout the Torah world for his profound insights into character development and human psychology. He is best known for his seminal work *Olam HaMidos*, which has become a staple in Torah libraries and *mussar* learning worldwide.

His engaging speaking style and deep understanding of the inner workings of the human soul have made him a sought-after lecturer in yeshivos, seminaries, and communities across the globe. Rav Kestenbaum's approach blends classical *mussar* teachings with contemporary psychological awareness, offering practical guidance for spiritual growth and emotional refinement in everyday life.

## 7 Rav Ron Yitzchok Eisenman

### Truth, Mesorah, and the Focused Life

#### 7.1 Personal Connection to Israel

Rabbi Eisenman opened by sharing his deep personal connection to the current situation in Israel, having three sons there - two tour guides whose businesses have been affected by the war, and a third son who has already completed three stints in reserve duty:

*"My third son, it's already finished his third stint in reserve. He's 36 years old. He's been called up for over 300 days already, uh, in the West Bank, in an anti-terrorist unit... He lives in Mitzad in the tip of Gush Etzion. He's a tour guide. He said they couldn't sleep the whole Friday night. Not because of the chatunot this time, but they heard, they heard all the bombing in Gaza and literally the houses were shaking."*

This personal stake in Israel's welfare informed much of his perspective throughout the discussion.

#### 7.2 The Foundation of Sincerity

##### 7.2.1 Beyond Appearances

When asked about blending different worlds while maintaining authenticity, Rabbi Eisenman emphasized sincerity over external appearances:

*"I mean, I I I think sincerity, I think sincerity, you know, how a person dresses and how that, I mean, honestly, I think we all realize is is, unfortunately, and fortunately, we both know people who dress in certain ways and it's obviously could be very deceiving. I think sincerity is a big thing."*

##### 7.2.2 The Example of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein

Rabbi Eisenman shared a powerful example of true sincerity transcending external appearance:

*"You know, in in my life, you know, right before Pesach, we had the 10th yahrzeit of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, zecher tzaddik livracha. He was clean shaven his whole life. And I have to admit in my life, he was probably one of the two or three people that I ever met who who honestly, I I could say was was an eved Hashem. I I I don't see how a person couldn't have spent time with him and and not and not sense his his sincerity, his his total, you know, literally he was a total eved Hashem."*

Rav Lichtenstein's complete dedication to serving Hashem, despite not conforming to certain external standards, demonstrated that true spirituality lies in sincerity of purpose rather than appearance.

## 7.3 Navigating Disagreements with Respect

### 7.3.1 The Importance of Civil Discourse

Rabbi Eisenman advocated for maintaining respectful dialogue even amid strong disagreements:

*"I personally was a very big advocate, very big advocate that people should vote in the Zionist, in the Zionist elections, the ZOA elections. I I said it publicly and I wrote it publicly. And I didn't understand other opinions of other great rabbanim. But there's a way to say it. You say it civilly and respectfully and this and not put and not and not ad hominem. And we could still talk to each other. We could still appreciate each other."*

### 7.3.2 A Lesson from Political History

He shared a historical anecdote that illustrated how civil discourse was once possible even across party lines:

*"Only years later did I find out it had to be over, Carter was selling the jets. And they had to override it. You know who who was the the senator who tried to override it? It was the junior senator from Delaware, it was Joe Biden, who broke with the Democratic president, who got some Republicans to join him. Nowadays, it's impossible. It's impossible. So that carries over in our lives too."*

The deterioration of bipartisan cooperation in politics reflects a broader challenge affecting religious discourse as well.

## 7.4 The Complexity of Religious Issues

### 7.4.1 Israel: A Nuanced Reality

When discussing disagreements about Israel policy among Torah leaders, Rabbi Eisenman acknowledged the complexity:

*"Israel, the idea of the army and the idea of the charedi society and obviously I have strong opinions. I mean my son did the army and whatever, but but but to be very honest with you, my grandchildren from the other two children don't do the army. They don't. The other they don't... The situation in Israel obviously is is a bit more complex."*

His own family reflects the diverse approaches within Orthodox Judaism to military service in Israel.

### 7.4.2 Rejecting Monolithic Thinking

Rabbi Eisenman emphasized that Judaism rarely presents monolithic positions:

*"Honestly, since we're talking openly, I think one issue that we've had in this world is that we've become so monolithic. Like some people tell me like, what does Judaism hold about this? Judaism hardly ever holds about anything. Judaism almost always is never monolithic. The word Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad is a machloket Rishonim what that means."*

Even the most fundamental declaration of Jewish faith is subject to different interpretations among the Rishonim.

## 7.5 The Challenge of Modern Communication

### 7.5.1 Rewards for Divisiveness

Rabbi Eisenman acknowledged the contemporary challenge where divisive behavior is rewarded:

*"And in the religious life, it's like that too... even in our world, frankly, you're rewarded for being uh, saying a knaot'dige statement. The person who makes a real, you know, zealous statement, wow, that that's going to make it into, you know, the blogs."*

### 7.5.2 The Problem with Religious Media

He shared a pointed critique of how religious media can spread division:

*"That you even in our thing like Rabbi Goldberg said, to put on the front page of Yeshiva World News, Yeshiva University runs a to'evah club. It's horrific. It's terrible. Make it sound like Rabbi Hershel Schachter is a, I don't know what. It's a very, it's an internal issue that had to do with YU. Nobody else had to be involved in that whole discussion."*

This example illustrated how internal institutional challenges can be sensationalized for divisive purposes.

## 7.6 The Reality of Spiritual Struggles

### 7.6.1 Private Battles

Rabbi Eisenman spoke honestly about the hidden struggles many face:

*"Look, I honestly, I think a lot of times, many times even in the older generation, there are a lot of people in their uh 30s, 40s, 50s who uh are privately struggling. They're privately struggling. Not assimilation, but I would calling it uh burnt out... I'm not talking out addictions, that's obviously another issue. But um, yeah, the the I I I look, with this thing now we have right here, you have literally what we have over here is accessible the whole world at your fingertips."*

### 7.6.2 The Deception of Appearances

He emphasized how appearances can be misleading:

*"Sometimes the families which look the most functional, with the kids dressed alike in the same outfits on Shabbat and the wife always looks very presentable and the husband knows all the moves and grooves, that often could be the most dysfunctional family. And the family that, you know, the husband's wearing blue pants and a brown blazer and you know, if his tie is half on, that uh, you know, are the nicest people."*

## 7.7 Addressing Modern Challenges with Compassion

### 7.7.1 The Plague of Addiction

Rabbi Eisenman addressed the sensitive topic of pornography addiction with remarkable compassion:

*"Look, the the the plague of of of pornography addiction is um I mean, as as I I think it was R' Eliezer Brody told me this... if we would if we would have to pasul edut,*

*any person who, you know, who looked at pornography, so 98.9*

Rather than condemning, he emphasized understanding and support.

### 7.7.2 A Pastoral Approach

His response to a congregant struggling with addiction demonstrated his pastoral sensitivity:

*"He called me and he told me. What his wife expected, I III don't know. I said to him, I said, I listened to him. Then I said, I can't imagine the pain you're in. I can't imagine the pain you're in. I said, III I'm sure, I'm sure if you could go ahead and you can take it back and you can rewind rewind the whole thing, you know, you'd un- and this must be unbelievably humiliating for you to call me."*

### 7.7.3 The Importance of Compassion

He advocated for compassion over condemnation:

*"The worst thing we can do for those people is to write them off. The worst thing I could do for that guy is to tell him, you know what? You're just shamutz. That's it. What what kind of thing is that to tell a person?... would you tell it to a person who who overeats? I mean a person who, people I mean, you look at how many people in America are struggling with obesity. Would you go ahead and just tell the person, oh, that's it, you can't control your food, forget it, you're lost?"*

## 7.8 The Power of Honest Discourse

### 7.8.1 Living in an "ArtScrollian Universe"

Rabbi Eisenman critiqued the tendency to present overly sanitized versions of reality:

*"But we we live, we often live in an ArtScrollian universe. I mean, the ArtScrollian universe is, you know, at the end of the day, everybody ends up from, you know, the rabbi gave the greatest answer and, you know, and this guy was saved and this guy came back and if you're a rabbi, you know that that's not really life."*

### 7.8.2 The Value of Admitting Uncertainty

He advocated for intellectual honesty:

*"So sometimes I think we could be a little honest. I don't think there's anything wrong with me saying like I'm not privileged to understand. I don't have to be the defender of uh, you know, everything. And we could be honest, to be honest."*

### 7.8.3 Judging Religion by Practice

Rabbi Eisenman challenged a common saying:

*"I'll give you one phrase that I think is, my opinion is wrong, others could disagree. Don't judge a religion by its adherents. I think that's ridiculous. Of course, judge a religion by its adherents. What are you supposed to judge it by? By the book? Everything looks good in the book... Obviously, if they're only judge something how it is in practice."*

## 7.9 Finding Inspiration Amid Challenges

### 7.9.1 Drawing Strength from Others

Despite acknowledging various struggles, Rabbi Eisenman found inspiration in the dedication of others:

*"Even here, I'm getting much much more from this than you're getting it... Because I'm seeing a bunch of whatever 20-some guys who took off from work, who flew in from Boca, left beautiful Florida, came over here to whatever pastoral Passaic, not too pastoral... and you took off time and you came here for one purpose, to strengthen yourself. That that's an unbelievable - you're giving me chizuk. You're giving me chizuk."*

### 7.9.2 Recognizing the Good

He emphasized the importance of seeing positive aspects:

*"This apart is also it always there's always beautiful things to see. There's always beautiful things to see. There's also, but I don't think we should put our heads into the sand with the struggles. But that doesn't preclude us from seeing beautiful, a lot of, a lot of beautiful things... I mean, truthfully, I mean, you know, chesed among us, I don't think anyone can compare. The chesed that, you know, the people do."*

## 7.10 Practical Guidance for Spiritual Growth

### 7.10.1 Setting Boundaries

Rabbi Eisenman shared practical advice about managing technology:

*"I mean even for myself, I don't, thank God, except for WhatsApp, I don't do social media, thank God. I have enough issues keeping up. But like someone sent me a link, you know, Facebook. I just sent them back, my phone won't open Facebook, thank God. So it won't open Facebook. People send me Instagram, my phone doesn't open Instagram."*

### 7.10.2 Including Rather Than Excluding

His approach to helping those struggling was inclusive:

*"But a person who's caught into the trap, I think it's important that that person we give them a lot of chizuk. And make them feel just the opposite, include them in more, include them in more. Get them into a shiur, learn with them bachavruta, have compassion for that person."*

## 7.11 Building an Inclusive Community

### 7.11.1 The Transformation of Ahavas Israel

Rabbi Eisenman shared the remarkable story of how his synagogue evolved:

*"This shul, this shul, when I came here in 1997, the shul had a mixed seating and had a microphone. For the first two years I was here, under the direction of Rav David Feinstein, zicrono livracha, and yivadel lechayim tovim, and R' Meir Stern and R' Hershel Schachter, I I I quote unquote officiated. We had two minyanim in my first two years here. One mixed minyan with a microphone for the old crowd."*

This gradual transformation demonstrated how change can be accomplished with patience and respect for all community members.

### 7.11.2 Encouraging Participation

His approach to community building emphasized inclusion and encouragement:

*"I always push everyone, always push everyone. Whenever times a guy gets, I woke up late, I was embarrassed to come. Don't be embarrassed to come. I wake up late too sometimes. Everyone push always like women whatever they can come, whatever woman, you have a women's shiur, she could come at some part of it."*

## 7.12 The Balance of Torah Learning and Life

### 7.12.1 Shared Learning Experiences

Rabbi Eisenman advocated for couples learning together:

*"So I think we have to encourage, you know, and frankly, you know, if you're married, which sounds like you are, so you should learn with your wife. You should learn with your wife also, set up, tell her over a dvar Torah say include her in there. It's very very important."*

### 7.12.2 Honest Feedback

He shared a humorous but telling example of his wife's feedback on his speeches:

*"Always every week when I come home from Shabbat, I always say, how was the drashah? And my wife tells it to me honestly, it's almost always the same answer. It's too long. Too long. Why do you have to tell that story at the beginning? You didn't have to tell that story. Nobody cares about that story. Just get to the point."*

## 7.13 Finding Humor in Service

### 7.13.1 The Refreshing Nap

Rabbi Eisenman concluded with characteristic humor about his Shabbat speeches:

*"So people once so somebody asked me, Rabbi, are you insulted that that I fall asleep? I said, just the opposite. I said, the more people that fall asleep, could be I get more schar. Why? Because then the men come home and their wives tell them, you know, every time you go to Rabbi Eisenman's shul, you come home so refreshed. What what is it about his shul that you come home so refreshed?"*

This self-deprecating humor reflected his ability to find meaning and joy even in unexpected places.

## 7.14 Conclusion

Rabbi Eisenman's session provided a masterclass in navigating the complexities of contemporary Orthodox Jewish life with sincerity, compassion, and wisdom. His approach to contentious issues - whether involving Israel, religious authority, or personal struggles - consistently emphasized understanding over judgment and inclusion over exclusion.

His personal journey from different educational backgrounds to community leadership demonstrates that authenticity doesn't require conformity to a single model. Rather, true service to Hashem and the Jewish people emerges from genuine commitment to Torah values while maintaining openness to diverse expressions of Jewish life.

The transformation of his own synagogue from a mixed-seating institution to a thriving Orthodox community serves as a powerful example of how patient, respectful leadership can guide meaningful change without alienating those at different stages of their Jewish journey.

Perhaps most significantly, Rabbi Eisenman's willingness to address sensitive topics like addiction with compassion rather than condemnation offers a model for pastoral care that recognizes the full humanity of every individual. His approach acknowledges that struggle is part of the human condition while maintaining hope for growth and healing.



### About Rav Ron Yitzchak Eisenman



Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenman serves as the Rav of Congregation Ahavas Israel in Passaic, New Jersey. Known for his thoughtful writings in *Mishpacha Magazine* and his published works, Rabbi Eisenman represents a unique approach to Torah leadership that bridges different segments of Orthodoxy.

His approach to pastoral care emphasizes meeting people where they are in their spiritual journey, whether addressing sensitive issues like addiction with understanding rather than condemnation, or encouraging participation regardless of one's current level of observance. Drawing from his diverse educational background and personal experiences—including having children who represent different approaches within Orthodox Judaism—Rabbi Eisenman advocates for civil discourse and intellectual honesty, rejecting monolithic thinking in favor of acknowledging the complexity inherent in Jewish life and law.



## 8 Reb Ralph Rieder

### Living with Divine Presence: Business, Learning, and Community Service

#### 8.1 The Foundation: Shivisi Hashem L'negdi Tamid

##### 8.1.1 The Central Principle

Reb Ralph opened by sharing the fundamental principle that has guided his entire life:

*"The first thing is that Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid. I was taught as you know my Yeshiva days as I was leaving Yeshiva into into enter the world that Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid. You have to have Hakadosh Baruch Hu in mind whatever you do, whether you learn, or you daven, you play ball, you work, you educate your children, you have to have Hashem's presence in front of you."*

This awareness of God's constant presence transforms every activity into an act of divine service.

##### 8.1.2 Elevating Every Action

The practical application of this principle extends to all aspects of life:

*"And that that's really such a fantastic guide because even when I tell my kid when you play ball, if you have in mind I'm doing it so that I should have energy to learn or I should have energy to daven or energy to work in order to make money to support my family and give tzedaka, then everything you do, everything you possibly do every minute is really elevated."*

When every action is connected to serving Hashem, even recreational activities become spiritually meaningful.

## 8.2 The Dual Approach: Heart and Mind

### 8.2.1 Balancing Passion and Intellect

Reb Ralph emphasized the importance of combining emotional and intellectual approaches to Torah:

*"One of the things I my wife and I established early on is that both for ourselves as well as for our children is to have two approaches, parallel approaches to raising kids and participating in life. And that is you have to have the avodah, the passion of a Chasidisha Chossid, a real passion and at the same time you have to use your mind cerebrally to appreciate Hakadosh Baruch Hu."*

### 8.2.2 The Practical Implementation

This balance manifests in daily practice:

*"So you have your heart and your mind, really your mind is the moach shalit al halev which is always first. But if you have that balance and you raise your kids that way to daven with a lot of passion and learn with a lot of passion and Shabbos, be passionate and at the same time you have the intellectual piece of balancing it and understanding it, you really raise great kids, boys both and girls."*

## 8.3 The Power of Daily Learning

### 8.3.1 Dual Chavrusos

Reb Ralph's commitment to learning is exemplified by his maintenance of two daily learning partnerships:

*"Personally I I always had two chavrusas. One was that taught me Chasidisha Chasidic world and the other one was a Litvishe Rosh Yeshiva and I've been learning with them with the Chasidisha one for about 37 years. Every day we learn and it's amazing... And at the same time there's nothing like learning Gemara. So I had for like 26 years I've been fortunate to learn with a Rosh Kollel from the West Side, Rebbe Blumberg and we learn every day for an hour."*

### 8.3.2 The Sandwich Approach

His Rebbe's advice shaped his daily structure:

*"When I left Yeshiva to go into the business world, my Rebbe, Rebbe Koppelman was my my Rebbe, main Rebbe. He he told me to make your day into a sandwich. In other words, you learn in the morning and you learn at night and do what you have to do during the day. But if you balance it with a sandwich approach of learning in the morning and learning at night, just a very rich life."*

## 8.4 Time as Sacred Resource

### 8.4.1 Rav Moshe's Teaching

Reb Ralph shared a fundamental insight about allocating time for spiritual purposes:

*"You know, Rav Moshe Feinstein was known to say that as much as you devote a percentage of your money for tzedaka, you also have to devote a percentage of your time. You have to give whether it's 10*

### 8.4.2 Personal Implementation

Despite working 13-14 hour days, he maintained this commitment:

*"And I heard that when I was young and and I you know, when I started to work, I used to work like 13, 14 hours a day. It was taxing, but nevertheless, always made time to do my learning and and and and always tried to devote a part of my time for for tzedaka whatever it cause whether it was a chevra kadisha or or other things."*

## 8.5 The Birth of the Modern Siyum HaShas

### 8.5.1 Divine Inspiration

The transformation of the Siyum HaShas began with a simple observation and bold vision:

*"And in 1986, 87, I well there I went there was a siyum around 1981 which was had about 3,000 people. Maybe 3,400 people I think was the total and during that cycle of learning it it occurred to me that, you know, learning Shas is fantastic. Why not have something larger? So I called up Rebbe Sherer who I knew a little bit and I said I'd like to meet you and I have an idea."*

### 8.5.2 The Madison Square Garden Proposal

The conversation with Rabbi Sherer revealed the scope of the vision:

*"And I told him I think that we should make a Siyum HaShas on a much grander scale. Why 3,400 people? Let's this is such a beautiful thing. It's kavod haTorah. Let's do something really big. So he said, well what do you think? So I said I think we should go to Madison Square Garden. So he looked at his face. He said, to do that in America? This was in 1986, 87. He said, that would be incredible."*

### 8.5.3 Faith and Partnership

The financial commitment demonstrated extraordinary faith:

*"He says, so I I was doing pretty well. I said, I I can help financially but you fill up the seats. There were 18,500 seats. I said, you fill up the seats and I'll I'll help you with the money."*

### 8.5.4 Divine Assistance

The story illustrates how Heaven supports Torah initiatives:

*"Three weeks before the siyum, he calls me up and he says, you have money? I said, sure, what for? He says, well, we only sold half the seats. So you're going to have to make up the other half which is 9,000 seats. So I said, let's let's just daven. And two days before the siyum started, we were over sold and had to go into the Felt Forum which was another couple of thousand seats."*

## 8.6 Business Ethics and Kiddush Hashem

### 8.6.1 The Guiding Principle

Reb Ralph and his partner established their business on a foundation of sanctifying God's name:

*"So I I have a partner who's a very frum guy also. And we went into business about 26 years ago together with one principle. Of course we wanted to make money. We also wanted to devote our and make and and make money in order to our take care of our families and give tzedaka, but the one of the guiding principles we had was to make a Kiddush Hashem in every part of our work. Really a Kiddush Hashem."*

### 8.6.2 Practical Application

A real estate deal demonstrated how integrity leads to success:

*"So we bought a piece of property and it had a lot of crime. So we went to meet the mayor and council and said, look, you know, we bought this property. It's there's a lot of crime here. Let's be partners and tell us what you want us to do. And and we'll do it and maybe you can help by sending some police or enforcement over there."*

### 8.6.3 The Results of Honesty

Their transparent approach transformed skepticism into partnership:

*"And three months later we met them and these were really they were Irish Irish people, Irish the town was Irish. And and the senator got up and said, I never saw people like you guys. He said, what can I do for you?... So, not only did he respect us, but we made a ton of money. See how how Hakadosh Baruch Hu works? We were honorable, we were straight with them, perfectly straight and we made a Kiddush Hashem."*

## 8.7 The Hungarian Torah Tradition

### 8.7.1 Family Background

Reb Ralph's upbringing reflected the balanced Hungarian approach to Jewish life:

*"So, I come from Hungarian background and very similar to the Brooksteins... There were three sisters actually, two Brooksteins and a Frankel. I've never met more honorable people in my life... Never heard Lashon Hara. Never heard Lashon Hara. Shrilly Badgey was your great grandfather was a big Talmid Chacham."*

### 8.7.2 The Chasam Sofer Influence

The Hungarian tradition emphasized integration of learning and worldly engagement:

*"And the Hungarian, you know, upbringing in the 30s and 40s was was very balanced... And they had Talmidei Chachamim, Rabbonim usually from the Chasam Sofer. And the Chasam Sofer influence was really balanced. He he he he believed in having balabatim who learned and many Hungarian communities had this balance of learning and working."*

## 8.8 Practical Guidance for Balance

### 8.8.1 Managing Stress and Priorities

When asked about managing business stress while maintaining family and learning commitments:

*"So, remember I mentioned about the sandwich? Starting your day and ending your day. So I used to get up very early in the morning because I wanted to say Tehillim to start my day and I wanted to learn before I went to shul... And if you have that, I found, then you have your you say your Tehillim, you connect to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and you learn and then you go to shul, you start your day with tremendous amount of ruchnius, a tremendous amount of power."*

### 8.8.2 Prioritizing Relationships

The importance of maintaining marriage and family relationships:

*"A friend of mine told me as I was young married, he says, make sure you take your wife away for a night every two months. One or two nights. And it was hard, you know, your kids, babysitters, but tremendous help for Shalom Bayis. And I always tell my kids, you got to do it. No matter what, I'll babysit. Every two months, just go away for a night or two."*

## 8.9 Divine Guidance in Life Decisions

### 8.9.1 Trusting in God's Direction

When asked about his inspiration for major initiatives:

*"Honestly, I believe that if you live your life with Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid and that you're totally under his wings, he will instruct you how to raise your kids, how to do your business, how to do profession. He he you just feel, you feel you're connected. You he just directs you. And I really believe that."*

### 8.9.2 Prayer as Foundation

His advice for career decisions:

*"So, when young people ask me that question, I have two answers. Number one, daven, that always helps. You got daven. Daven to Hashem and he will guide you. If you*

*daven, he will guide you.”*

## 8.10 Kesher Yehudi: Building Bridges

### 8.10.1 The Organization’s Mission

Reb Ralph’s involvement in bringing religious and secular Israelis together:

*”So I got involved in fantastic organization in Eretz Yisrael called Kesher Yehudi... They are the most amazing group. They have their goal is to take the sinah between the non-religious and the religious. That’s that’s a social experiment. And how do they do that? They currently have 7,000 partners, which means 14,000 people. A Chareidi and and somebody who’s not yet religious.”*

### 8.10.2 The Nova Shabbatons

A particularly moving initiative emerged from the Nova festival tragedy:

*”I told this lady, look, you know, you’re doing fantastic things, but let’s deal with the Nova. She said, what should we do? I said, let’s let’s let’s make a Shabbaton for them. So we advertised in about eight hours, we had 200 people signed up... You can’t imagine these girls when they lit candles. I get a little emotional when I think about it. Half of them were crying. They lit candles first time in their life.”*

### 8.10.3 Transformative Results

The impact on the Nova survivors was profound:

*”We did five Shabbatos. We have I think about 250 or 260 Novas have chavrutas. About 200 are keeping Shabbos to some extent. They’re different people... I would get such hugs from the guys saying, you gave us life, you gave us chaim. We didn’t know what we were looking for.”*

## 8.11 The Mechina Program

### 8.11.1 Pre-Military Leadership Development

Kesher Yehudi’s work with pre-military programs:

*"There are 80 mechinos from one end of Israel to the other... So, the Kesher Yehudi could afford to be involved with 32 mechinos. There's average of about 50, 50 kids in a mechina, so we have about 1600 kids. They meet at least once a month but sometimes once a week. And you can't imagine, you can't imagine the relationship between these Chareidim who some have, you know, beards and some are Litvish, all kind, and these boys and girls."*

### 8.11.2 Complete Success Rate

The results exceeded all expectations:

*"So would you believe it? The success rate of wanting to have relationship post because now they go into the army, 100*

## 8.12 Navigating Organizational Politics

### 8.12.1 A Historical Lesson

Reb Ralph shared how he navigated disagreement with Agudah policy:

*"In the uh, I think it was the 70s, there was a big push to get the Russian Jews out, right? And there was a gathering in the mall, uh in the Great Lawn in Washington D.C... And the Moetzes came out against it. And I felt so strong... So I called my father and I said like, I mean I just joined the Agudah a year, my father was a part of the Agudah, like the Agudah said no, but I I feel really strongly."*

### 8.12.2 Rabbi Sherer's Wisdom

The guidance he received resolved the dilemma:

*"So I called him up Motzaei Shabbos... So I said, look, what am I supposed to do? I I joined you and uh he said, look, the Moetzes came out with a statement, but you have your Rav, which you all have your Rav. He said, you follow your Rav. The Moetzes have to do what they have to do. He says, I would go in a second, but I'm employed by Agudah."*

This taught him that organizational positions don't override personal rabbinic guidance.

## 8.13 Future Vision: Expanding Achdus

### 8.13.1 The Next Siyum HaShas

Plans for the upcoming Siyum reflect continued growth:

*"So, we're friendly with him. We're also friendly with uh Sruly Bornstein. We rented already three places, which so we have MetLife, which is about 100,000. We have Prudential, which is another 18,000, and Barclays, which is another 18,500. So that's about 140. And I think that'll work. Everybody's invited."*

### 8.13.2 A Vision for Unity

The discussion led to concrete ideas for promoting achdus:

*"At the Siyum HaShas, not part of the program, until the program begins, find somebody in the stadium different than you and say hello. Connect over the Daf, connect over Gemara... You know what, I'm going to make a note. I shouldn't forget. It's a great idea. Infuse Ahavas Chinam."*

## 8.14 Learning to Say No

### 8.14.1 The Challenge of Multiple Commitments

When asked about managing numerous responsibilities:

*"Yeah, it's an excellent question. It's an excellent question... if somebody approaches me with something that would take time, you know, if it's a check, it takes a second, right? But you know, and then also you have to decide how much you want to, how how it talks to you."*

### 8.14.2 The Decision-Making Process

His criteria for accepting new commitments:

*"So I see if it um, you know, if it's something that's important, right? That and and I feel that I I can contribute, you know, with energy and time, I'll find the time. Uh if if I feel it's important and for some reason Hashem sent this person to me to ask me and and I feel that I can contribute, then I'll find the time."*

## 8.15 Conclusion

Reb Ralph Rieder's life exemplifies the successful integration of deep Torah learning, business achievement, and transformative community leadership. His approach demonstrates that living with constant awareness of God's presence (Shivisi Hashem L'negdi Tamid) can elevate every aspect of human endeavor.

His role in transforming the Siyum HaShas from a modest gathering into a celebration that fills stadiums illustrates how individual vision, combined with divine guidance and practical action, can impact the entire Jewish world. The exponential growth of Torah learning that resulted shows how one person's commitment to kavod haTorah can have far-reaching consequences.

The Hungarian Torah tradition that shaped him - balancing passionate devotion with intellectual rigor, integrating worldly success with Torah values - offers a model for contemporary Orthodox life. His daily commitment to dual chavruses for nearly four decades demonstrates that consistent learning remains possible even amid demanding business and communal responsibilities.

Perhaps most significantly, his current work with Kesher Yehudi in Israel shows how the principles that guided his earlier success continue to bear fruit. The remarkable transformation of hundreds of Nova survivors and thousands of pre-military students demonstrates that authentic Torah living attracts even those far from traditional observance.

His approach to business ethics - making every transaction a Kiddush Hashem - proves that spiritual principles and material success can reinforce rather than conflict with each other. His honest dealings not only brought financial benefit but created lasting relationships based on mutual respect.



### About Reb Ralph Rieder



Reb Ralph Rieder represents the embodiment of the Hungarian Torah tradition that seamlessly integrates deep learning, successful business ventures, and passionate community service. A devoted student who has maintained daily *chavrusa* learning for decades, Reb Ralph is perhaps best known for his pivotal role in transforming the Siyum HaShas from a modest gathering into the massive celebration of Torah learning that fills stadiums today.

His approach to life reflects the balanced Hungarian Jewish model of the Chasam Sofer tradition, where business success serves Torah goals and community leadership flows from authentic Torah living.

# 9 Rav Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger

## Ki Hem Chayeinu: Torah as Our Life Force

### 9.1 The Central Message: Ki Hem Chayeinu V'Orech Yameinu

#### 9.1.1 Living the Words We Say

Rav Schlesinger opened his shiur by challenging the assembled group to examine the authenticity of their daily prayers:

*"Uvahem nehege yomam valaila. You have to realize Hakadosh Baruch Hu and every word of our mouth has to be truthful with a full meaning of it. And on a daily basis I think to myself Ki hem chayeinu v'orech yameinu uvahem nehege yomam valaila. Let me go back to my today's schedule from when I get up till now."*

This introspective challenge demands that we examine whether our actions align with the words we recite daily about Torah being our life and the length of our days.

#### 9.1.2 The Business Appointment Mashal

To illustrate the level of commitment Torah should command, Rav Schlesinger used a powerful analogy from the business world:

*"In the world of business, if you have a certain appointment with a potential customer, that you really think that this will change your whole hatzlacha in your business. And it's scheduled month ahead, Tuesday afternoon 4:00. It comes Tuesday, and whether it's your wife, or whether it's hamishpacha or your friend needs you for something, you turn everything around to make sure that this appointment at 4:00 should stay in its place."*

#### 9.1.3 The Medical Analogy

He reinforced this concept with another compelling comparison:

*"In the medical world, somebody is a heart patient, he needs to take his pills on a daily basis, at a certain time and a certain, everything will make sure that this pill should be taken. The message of *ki hem chayeinu v'orech yameinu* means that our *krias Shema*, it's *im haTorah*. And our shaychus to Torah should be something that can never be compromised."*

## 9.2 Torah as Non-Negotiable Priority

### 9.2.1 The Uncompromising Commitment

Rav Schlesinger emphasized that Torah learning must be treated with the same urgency as life-saving medicine or crucial business opportunities:

*"Whether we go on a trip, and whether we have tirdos, and whether whatever it takes. But it has to be exactly like this appointment that I'm waiting for already for six months. And I'm, nothing will stand in the way and everything will be around this appointment to make sure our, whether it's a half hour or hours, or whatever *Krias Shema laTorah*."*

### 9.2.2 Preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah

This mindset serves as essential preparation for receiving the Torah on Shavuos:

*"And I truly believe that this is a machshava for kabbalas haTorah. To make sure that if we're going to Shavuos, we can really appreciate the Torah in such a way. *Ki hem chayeinu v'orech yameinu*. And therefore show Hakadosh Baruch Hu that from all our daily schedule, there's one hour we cannot be mevater on. And this is the hour of Torah."*

## 9.3 The Wisdom of Rav Koppelman

### 9.3.1 A Direct Link to Pre-War Greatness

Rav Schlesinger shared his extraordinary yichus in Torah learning, connecting directly to the great pre-war Torah luminaries:

*"And I'll share with you, I was zoiche to be a talmid of somebody which I'm not sure that you know, it was, his name was Rav Koppelman. I'm originally born in Eretz Yisrael, but raised in Europe. My father, my mother hareini kaparas mishkava, raised our mishpacha in a town called Strasbourg, in France... And from there I went as a bar mitzvah bochur to learn in a yeshiva called Lucerne in Switzerland. By ish tzaddik me'od, Rav Koppelman."*

### 9.3.2 The Legacy of Rav Shimon Shkop

The connection to Torah greatness runs deep:

*"He was a talmid muvhak of Rav Shimon Shkop if you ever heard of Rav Shimon Shkop in Grodna. And actually, he was the only one by the petira of Rav Shimon Shkop by the war in 1939 and he was mekaber Rav Shimon Shkop in Grodna. He saved the kesavim of Rav Shimon Shkop."*

This detail demonstrates the sacred responsibility of preserving Torah wisdom across generations, especially during times of destruction.

## 9.4 The Bracha of Ahava Rabba

### 9.4.1 The Overwhelming Prayer

Rav Schlesinger shared his Rebbe's profound insight into the morning bracha of Ahava Rabba:

*"He explained in the same bracha, not by Maariv, but Shacharis, but the bracha of Ahava Rabba. When we ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu the following words. We have to think what we're asking, especially now in the days before kabbalas haTorah. V'sim b'libeinu... L'havin u'lehashkil, lishmoa, lilmod u'lelamed, lishmor v'laasos u'lekayem es kol divrei Talmud Torasecha b'ahava."*

### 9.4.2 The Audacious Request

The magnitude of what we request in this bracha is staggering:

*"If you really taitch those words, basically you want everything on a golden plate. V'sim b'libeinu bina l'havin u'lehashkil, lishmoa, lilmod u'lelamed, lishmor v'laasos u'lekayem es kol divrei Talmud Torasecha b'ahava. So when he asked the question, he gave it as a moshol, as a poor, poor man knocking by the door of a big gvir and asking him, 'I would like to ask you for 10 million dollars.' What are you talking about?"*

## 9.5 The Life-and-Death Nature of Torah

### 9.5.1 Rav Koppelman's Answer

The resolution to this apparent chutzpah lies in understanding Torah's essential nature:

*"If this poor person comes to the door of this gvir and he tells, he explains to him, I need this amount of money because if not, I'm going to be dying. This will save me from chaim, from maves l'chaim. Then the request is understood. If learning and Torah by us is a bonus, is something extra, then we have no right to come to the Ribono Shel Olam and ask him, give."*

### 9.5.2 Torah as Our Breathing Machine

The ultimate insight reveals Torah's role in our spiritual existence:

*"But if we come to the real understanding that our dveikus in Torah, this is our life. This is our breathing machine that holds our breath. And without it, we have no chaim. We have no life b'chlall. Then we are entitled to come and ask this bakasha, so many things in one second."*

This metaphor of Torah as a breathing machine powerfully illustrates how essential Torah is to our spiritual survival.

## 9.6 The Rav Saadia Gaon's Teaching

### 9.6.1 What Makes Us a Nation

Rav Schlesinger invoked the fundamental teaching of Rav Saadia Gaon about Jewish identity:

*"So I want to give you a bracha and be kolel all of us in this bracha that im yirtzeh Hashem, the hachana to Shavuos should give us the real understanding that as the Rav Saadia Gaon says in the, in his sefer, the whole Klal Yisrael ein umah then only because of the Torah. This makes us different than the whole world."*

### 9.6.2 The Connection to Hashem

The deeper we connect to Torah, the closer we become to the Divine:

*"And the more we connected to Torah, then the more we davuk in Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We should all be zoiche to feel the real ki hem chayeinu v'orech yameinu."*

## 9.7 Establishing Proper Priorities

### 9.7.1 Ikar and Tafel

Rav Schlesinger emphasized the crucial distinction between primary and secondary concerns:

*"And all the other things we need to it, Ribono Shel Olam should also give us. But we should realize where our ikar is and where our tafel is. And realize that the ikar what we need is more tefillah, Torah and mitzvos and gemilus chasadim."*

### 9.7.2 Everything Else Follows

When we establish the correct priorities, everything else falls into place:

*"And everything else that we need for it, obviously health, and im yirtzeh Hashem parnassah, and hakoved, and yiheye nachas from all the children, and b'ezras Hashem. And b'karov, im yirtzeh Hashem, be zoiche."*

## 9.8 The Hope for Geulah

### 9.8.1 Connecting Kabbalas HaTorah to Final Redemption

Rav Schlesinger linked our preparation for Shavuos to the ultimate redemption:

*"We're hoping the kabbalas haTorah that we'll be zoiche again, im yirtzeh Hashem, and we'll be zoiche to the geulah asida. Amen."*

This connection suggests that our proper relationship with Torah hastens the final redemption.

## 9.9 The Mission in America

### 9.9.1 A Mystical Understanding of Geography

Rav Schlesinger shared a kabbalistic perspective on why certain Jewish communities thrive while others struggle:

*"There's a kabbalah of tzaddikim explaining the reason why if you go to those places like France and Germany and Poland, Yiddishkeit is very shvach there. And other places like, you know, Bucharest and Satmar and Sanitz, because as we know, obviously it's dvarim amukim but for the chet shel Adam Harishon, the whole world got some parts of the chet, it has to be mesukin through the galus."*

### 9.9.2 Where the Great Ones Have Been

The explanation reveals a profound spiritual principle:

*"In France, in Germany, in Poland, there were so many, the Rishonim were there already, all the gedolei olam, and they took care of everything. But in Bucharest and there's no Rishonim and no, no Rav Akiva Eiger and no Chasam Sofer and no Reb Chaim's and no, so we have to take care of it."*

### 9.9.3 Our Contemporary Mission

This understanding creates a sense of mission for contemporary Torah communities:

*"So we should be zoiche im yirtzeh Hashem to bring in the kedusha in those places and through that to be mekarev the whole world to the geulah asida."*

This teaching suggests that establishing Torah communities in places where great Torah leaders hadn't previously lived serves a cosmic purpose in the process of tikkun olam.

## 9.10 The Bracha and Vision

### 9.10.1 A Collective Blessing

Rav Schlesinger concluded with a bracha that encompassed all present:

*"Appreciate very much the visit and the zechus of being able to see such chosheve Yidden. And you should continue im yirtzeh Hashem in this makom hanikra to be mekadesh Shem Shamayim. Amen. Im yirtzeh Hashem."*

This blessing recognized the inherent holiness in a group of Jews dedicating time to spiritual growth and Torah inspiration.

## 9.11 Conclusion

Rav Schlesinger's brief but profound shiur challenged every participant to examine the authenticity of their relationship with Torah learning. His central message - that Torah must be treated as truly "ki hem chayeinu v'orech yameinu" (they are our life and the length of our days) - demands that we approach Torah learning with the same urgency we would give to life-saving medicine or crucial business opportunities.

The connection he provided to pre-war Torah greatness through his Rebbe, Rav Koppelman, and the chain extending to Rav Shimon Shkop, offered participants a direct link to the unbroken tradition of Torah transmission. This yichus comes with responsibility - to preserve and transmit Torah

wisdom with the same dedication shown by those who saved Torah writings during the darkest periods of Jewish history.

His interpretation of the bracha of Ahava Rabba transforms our morning prayers from routine recitation to profound recognition of our total dependence on divine assistance for Torah understanding. When we truly recognize that Torah is not a bonus or extra activity but our very life force - our spiritual breathing machine - then our requests for divine help in learning become not audacious demands but desperate pleas for survival.

The mystical explanation of why Torah communities flourish in certain places while struggling in others provides contemporary meaning to our communal efforts. Those living in places where great Torah luminaries had not previously established communities carry the special responsibility of bringing kedusha to these locations, thereby contributing to the cosmic process of tikkun that will ultimately bring the geulah.

Rav Schlesinger's message resonated particularly powerfully with the assembled baalei batim, who face the challenge of maintaining authentic Torah priorities amid the pressures of business, family, and community responsibilities. His call to examine our daily schedules against our daily prayers - to see if our actions truly reflect our stated belief that Torah is our life - provides a practical framework for spiritual self-assessment.



## About Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger



Rav Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger represents a unique bridge between the pre-war Torah world and contemporary Jewish life. Born in Eretz Yisrael but raised in Strasbourg, France, he was privileged to learn as a bar mitzvah *bachur* in Lucerne, Switzerland, under the tutelage of the legendary Rav Koppelman.

His Rebbe was a direct *talmid muvhak* of Rav Shimon Shkop of Grodno and was present at Rav Shimon Shkop's *petira* in 1939, saving his writings for posterity. This direct connection to the great pre-war Torah luminaries gives Rav Schlesinger's teachings a depth and authenticity that reflects the unbroken chain of Torah transmission from generation to generation.



## 10 Rav Moshe Leib Rabinovich (Munkatcher Rebbe)

### The Purifying Power of Preparation: Torah, Unity, and the Soul's Longing

#### 10.1 The Sacred Nature of Preparation

The Rebbe began by welcoming the group of mevakhim (seekers) who had traveled from their community to spend time with gedolei Torah before Shavuos. He emphasized that their journey itself represented something profound about preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah.

*"What brings you to New York now? So it's a group of baalei batim who took time off two days from early yesterday till the last flight tonight. Mevakesh, mevakesh Hashem. Go around meeting with roshei yeshiva and rabbonim... they took off work and gave up parnassah two days just to come before Kabbalas HaTorah, before Matan Torah, Shavuos, to come to be inspired."*

The Rebbe connected their pilgrimage to the original gathering at Har Sinai, noting that "Maamad Har Sinai, we were all together. Nobody was oif, nobody was like this, and this chair, that chair, everybody was together."

#### 10.2 The Gemara's Teaching on Tumah and Taharah

##### 10.2.1 The Original Chet and Its Consequences

The Rebbe explained a profound Gemara about the spiritual transformation that occurred during the preparation for receiving the Torah. He described how the original sin of Adam HaRishon brought a spiritual impurity (tumah) into the world through the nachash's influence on Chava.

*"The Gemara adds something Torah Shebaal Peh which we don't have in Chumash, which is that when the nachash got mixed in with Chava, he brought on her, let's call it, an influence of tumah... But this tumah lasted for hundreds of years till a certain time when the tumah changed to taharah."*

### 10.2.2 The Moment of Purification

The remarkable aspect of this teaching is when this purification occurred - not when the Torah was given, but during the preparation itself:

*"The Gemara didn't say till we were mekabel haTorah. The Torah says till the time we were standing before Har Sinai. The Ribono Shel Olam didn't give us the Torah yet. We didn't say naaseh venishma, nothing, nothing happened yet. But we were there, waiting, preparing for Kabbalas HaTorah. From that Gemara, we learned a gevaldige, a gevaldige limud, which is, the question said, preparation for Torah... The preparation for Torah itself, that was metaher the Klal Yisrael."*

This teaching reveals that preparation for Torah is not merely instrumental - it has intrinsic spiritual value and transformative power.

## 10.3 The Alshich's Insight on "Dayeinu"

### 10.3.1 The Question from the Haggadah

The Rebbe cited the Alshich HaKadosh's explanation of a puzzling passage in the Pesach Haggadah. The Haggadah states that if Hashem had merely brought us to Har Sinai without giving us the Torah, "dayeinu" - it would have been enough.

*"There's one paragraph, it says like this, everybody remembers it probably from Pesach, ilu, if the Ribono Shel Olam would just kirvanu l'Har Sinai. If the Ribono Shel Olam would just put us near Har Sinai, velo natan lanu es haTorah. He didn't give us the Torah in the end, but he just brought us to be there, preparing for Kabbalas HaTorah, dayeinu."*

### 10.3.2 The Alshich's Resolution

The Alshich resolves this apparent contradiction by connecting it to the Gemara about spiritual purification:

*"Because that Gemara explains us that the tumah of the nachash, whatever that means, in yonim, which stayed with us for so many years, when we were standing before Har Sinai, it left us. So that's dayeinu. That's why we say dayeinu, it's enough."*

This insight transforms our understanding of preparation - it is not merely a means to an end, but a spiritually transformative process in its own right.

## 10.4 The Profound Nature of Sefiras HaOmer

### 10.4.1 The Machlokes Among Rishonim

The Rebbe explained the debate among Rishonim about whether counting the Omer in our time (without the korban omer) is a mitzvah d'Oraisa or d'Rabbanan, with the Rambam holding it remains d'Oraisa.

*"There's a big machlokes in the Rishonim if this is bizman hazeh when there's no korban omer, if it's a mitzvah d'Oraisa or just a mitzvah d'Rabbanan. The Rishonim that believe that it is a d'Oraisa... What's the purpose of that? Why can't we just look up in the calendar, we know when Shavuos is, what's the problem?"*

### 10.4.2 The Sefer HaChinuch's Explanation

The Rebbe emphasized the Sefer HaChinuch's powerful explanation of the counting, comparing it to a prisoner marking days until freedom:

*"He says, if somebody, let's say, he uses that moshel. He's in jail, now, God forbid. And he knows in 50 days he's going home... Everybody had like a calendar crossing out dates. One day less, one day less, one day. He know when he's going home, when his term is up. And he was just counting because that's the only thing he was waiting for."*

The Rebbe explained that without Torah, we are spiritually imprisoned:

*"Hachinuch explains that Sefiras HaOmer is just like a person which is sitting in jail... So is Sefiras HaOmer. Sefiras HaOmer, says, is to alert us that we without the Torah are just like somebody who's in jail... Our emotions and everything, it's the only thing to think about when we're going to get the Torah."*

### 10.4.3 The Kabbalistic Dimension

The Rebbe also mentioned the Kabbalistic understanding found in Nusach Sefard:

*"Mekubalim, as probably some of you know, have a completely different shitah. That's Nusach Sefard and all the siddurim we say, Harachaman hu yitahareinu mikliposeinu u'mitumoseinu. He's metaher somebody's neshamah from all the shmutz and all the things."*

He noted that both approaches ultimately converge - the intense longing for Torah inherently purifies the soul.

## 10.5 The Nature of Brachos and Personal Effort

### 10.5.1 His Grandfather's Teaching

The Rebbe shared a profound teaching from his grandfather, Reb Michal Salazar, about the limitations and proper understanding of brachos:

*"But somebody came and said, rebbe, should give me a bracha that I should be a tzaddik, I should be this. He says, I can't give you a bracha. Because my brachos are not going to make you a tzaddik. If you want to be a tzaddik, you have to work for it, and you have to put your life away to be a tzaddik. Brachos doesn't work for that."*

### 10.5.2 The Balance of Divine Help and Human Effort

The Rebbe explained that while brachos have power for material matters, spiritual achievement requires personal effort combined with divine assistance:

*"The kohanim can't, don't have the power to bless you with that. That's something that each one of us has to work for. And the Ribono Shel Olam helps us... The question is only how much the blessing does and how much each person can do for himself."*

## 10.6 The Munkatcher Approach to Kabbalas HaTorah

### 10.6.1 A Unique Synthesis of Emotion

The Rebbe described the distinctive Munkatcher tradition regarding Kabbalas HaTorah:

*"Interesting is the Munkacs where I come from, I don't know if any other place that was like that. It was the Kabbalas HaTorah of Reb Michal Salazar and his father, it was a mixture between crying and happiness. Crying was asking like somebody's asking, like a poor man is knocking on the door, I want, I need food for."*

### 10.6.2 The Desperate Need for Torah

This emotional approach reflects a deep understanding of our spiritual dependence on Torah:

*"Ribono Shel Olam, give us the Torah, or else we drown. We have nothing. So puste velt, there's nothing out there for us to do unless we have the Torah. Torah teaches us the derech, Torah teaches us how to run the family, how to treat a wife, how to treat the parnassah, the children, everything is in the Torah. Without it, we're lost."*

The Rebbe quoted Dovid HaMelech: "to'eh ani keseh oved" - I wander like a lost sheep, emphasizing our need for Torah's guidance.

## 10.7 Unity Beyond Labels

### 10.7.1 The Question About Modern Orthodoxy

When asked about the term "Modern Orthodox," the Rebbe responded with wisdom about the artificial nature of many religious labels:

*"I never heard those years the word Modern Orthodox. I know three divisions: Orthodox. Lehavdil... Reform, Conservative. Then as the years went by, then something else is Modern. What does that really mean?"*

### 10.7.2 The Chassidic Perspective on Unity

The Rebbe concluded with a powerful Chassidic teaching about the fundamental unity of all Jewish souls:

*"Do you know what Chassidus would say to these words? Chassidus would say, different nusach, different hats, different shtreimel, different this, different that. That's only the guf. The neshamah is one and the same. Ish echad b'lev echad. That's the point Chassidus stressed. The neshamah is the same neshamah. No difference."*

## 10.8 The Story of the Munkatcher Passport

### 10.8.1 The Historical Account

The Rebbe shared the authentic version of the famous "Munkatcher Passport" story, distinguishing between the documented account and later embellishments. The original story, printed in Munkatcher seforim, involved a talmid who couldn't travel to a bris due to passport issues.

*"The Rebbe once told us a story about a melamed, I think all the way back from the Rebbe Reb Zusha, his brother. That somebody needed a passport, he had to run away or else his life was in danger. And at that time, there was this story, the Rebbe gave him a piece of paper and just made some kind of scribble there."*

### 10.8.2 The Three Responses

When asked to provide such a mystical passport, the Munkatcher Rebbe gave three responses in Yiddish:

*"Dos ken ikh haynt nisht. Nowadays we can't do it. Dos vil ikh haynt nisht. In other words, even if I could do it, I don't want to do it. The third is Dos tor men haynt nisht. Means with that you're not allowed to do it, even if you could give it."*

The Rebbe explained these represented different levels of explanation - for the general public, for chassidim, and for those who understood the deeper spiritual implications.

## 10.9 Conclusion

His teachings demonstrated how classical sources speak to contemporary challenges, emphasizing that:

1. **Preparation has intrinsic value** – The journey toward spiritual goals transforms us even before we reach our destination.
2. **Unity transcends labels** – While different communities may have varying customs, the Jewish *neshamah* remains fundamentally one.
3. **Personal effort is essential** – Divine assistance comes to those who genuinely strive for spiritual growth.
4. **Torah is our lifeline** – Without Torah guidance, we are spiritually lost.

Beyond these pillars, the Rebbe's words reminded us that the soul's yearning itself is sacred. Whether expressed through travel, tears, tefillah, or time invested in preparation, the act of seeking becomes a holy offering. In a world of distractions and superficiality, the sincere desire to connect—to Torah, to truth, to Hashem—becomes our most potent tool for transformation. In that seeking lies the purity that once stood at Har Sinai, and through it, we merit to stand there again each year, renewed and uplifted.

This journey, the Rebbe emphasized, is not linear but cyclical—each year offering a new chance to refine our hearts and re-approach Har Sinai with greater clarity. The longing we cultivate during Sefiras HaOmer, the humility we bring to our learning, and the achdus (unity) we foster within Klal Yisrael form the spiritual vessels that receive the light of Torah. Kabbalas HaTorah is not confined to one moment in history but is reborn in every soul that prepares itself with sincerity and yearning. In that sense, every Jew becomes a mountain—humble yet elevated, ready to receive.

In the end, the Rebbe's words leave us with a charge: to treat our days of preparation not as mere waiting rooms for revelation, but as sacred ground in and of themselves. The sanctity of Har Sinai began before a single word was spoken, forged in the unity, longing, and humility of a people willing to pause their lives in pursuit of something higher. When we internalize that truth, we discover that every moment of yearning, every step toward Torah—no matter how incomplete—becomes part of the revelation itself.

The Rebbe's teachings remind us that spiritual greatness is not reserved for moments of clarity or triumph, but is often forged in the quiet struggle to prepare, to long, and to become. It is

in the decision to journey, to count, to cleanse, and to ask—not always with certainty, but with sincerity—that the soul finds its elevation. As we stand before each new Shavuos, and before each new day, we are given the gift to choose preparation as transformation, and to let that choice shape who we are becoming.



## About The Munkatcher Rebbe



Rav Moshe Leib Rabinovich serves as the current Munkatcher Rebbe, continuing the illustrious dynasty founded by his ancestors. Known for his deep Torah scholarship and warm approach to all Jews regardless of background, the Rebbe combines traditional Chassidic wisdom with practical guidance for modern Jewish life.

The Rebbe is also renowned for preserving pre-war Hungarian Chassidic traditions while responding sensitively to contemporary challenges. Whether addressing communal gatherings or offering private counsel, his words are infused with sincerity, humility, and a deep sense of achrayus (responsibility) for Klal Yisrael. He has inspired generations through his unwavering commitment to Torah values, his dignified presence, and his ability to uplift and unify diverse segments of the Jewish people.



# 11 Rav Yisroel Reisman

## The Power of Kavanah in Tefillah Through the Gra's Teaching

### 11.1 The Eternal Battle for Kavanah

Rav Reisman began by acknowledging one of the most universal struggles in Jewish spiritual life - the battle to maintain proper intention and focus during davening and other mitzvot.

*"One of the continuous battles is the battle to have Kavanah whether in davening or in or in Kriashma... It's a forever struggle to stay focused in our Shmoneh Esreis. Really everything we want, we try to be mevakeish."*

He emphasized that this is not a peripheral concern but rather central to meaningful Jewish practice, affecting how we approach our most fundamental acts of service to Hashem.

### 11.2 The Gra's Revolutionary Approach to Shmoneh Esrei

#### 11.2.1 The First Bracha's Crucial Importance

Rav Reisman shared a transformative insight from the Vilna Gaon's commentary on the Siddur, focusing on the critical importance of the first bracha of Shmoneh Esrei:

*"Chazal say that the crucial place to have Kavanah is in the first bracha of Shmoneh Esrei. According to the Shulchan Aruch, if someone's in middle of Shmoneh Esrei and realizes he didn't have Kavanah in the first bracha, he's got to repeat himself. Got to repeat the Shmoneh Esrei."*

#### 11.2.2 The Structure of Praise

The Gra explains that while we find Moshe Rabbeinu's tefillah beginning with "HaKel HaGadol HaGibor VeHaNorah," one might wonder why we add additional praise in Shmoneh Esrei. The Gra's insight is revolutionary:

*"So the Gra says we don't. The Gra says that the the praise of Shmoneh Esrei are just those four words, Kel Gadol Gibor VeNorah. What we do afterwards is we translate or explain each of the four."*

This means we are not adding to Moshe Rabbeinu's formula but rather elaborating and deepening our understanding of each word.

### 11.3 Unpacking Each Element of Praise

#### 11.3.1 Understanding "HaKel" - Kel Elyon

The first word, "Kel," is explained through "Kel Elyon" - emphasizing God as the One who is above all:

*"What does Kel mean? Kel means God. A lot of words mean God. So we say Kel Elyon. When we say Kel, we mean, in Yiddish they say the Eibishter, the one who is, the one above."*

#### 11.3.2 The True Meaning of "Gadol" - Gomel Chasadim Tovim

Rav Reisman shared a fascinating insight about the word "Gadol":

*"So it may interest you that the word Gadol as it appears in in Tanach, almost always does not mean physically large. I think the Michtav M'Elieyahu writes that Gadol beNach means oseh chesed."*

He illustrated this with the example of "HaMaor HaGadol" (the great luminary) referring to the sun:

*"The sun is called the HaMaor HaGadol. One might think because it's such a gigantic heavenly body. But it's not. The HaMaor HaGadol, the sun is the biggest giver in creation. The sun gives us light, gives us warmth, gives us the seasons, photosynthesis, everything grows only because of the sun."*

#### 11.3.3 Redefining "Gibor" - Koneh HaKol

The Gra's explanation of "Gibor" proved particularly surprising:

*"Koneh HaKol is usually translated. How do you translate Koneh HaKol? He owns everything. He owns everything. So the Gra says no. And he admits that koneh sometimes means to acquire. He says here it's from the language of the mesakein, to repair. He says Koneh HaKol means God repairs things."*

Rav Reisman connected this to the natural healing processes observable in creation:

*"Most things get, uh, get better on their own. Some things are not meant to get better. But you have a cold, it generally gets better on its own. Most things heal themselves, uh, in nature. HaKadosh Baruch Hu is Koneh HaKol, the great, the great repairer."*

He referenced Dr. Lewis Thomas's observation that "the doctor's secret is that most things get better on their own," connecting this medical insight to the theological understanding of God as the ultimate healer and repairer.

#### 11.3.4 The Wonder of "Norah" - Zocher Chasdei Avos

The final element, "Norah," relates to the miraculous survival of the Jewish people:

*"Daniel said to remove, uh, the word Norah... He said, daven in the HaKel HaGadol HaGibor. Because Klal Yisrael is in galus, Ayeh Norosav? Where do we see the wonders of Hashem? So don't daven it if you don't see it. Then Anshei Knesses HaGedolah put it back. Ayeh Norosav? He said you see it in the survival of of the sheep among the 70 wolves."*

This refers to the ongoing miracle of Jewish survival throughout history despite persecution and challenges.

### 11.4 A Practical Tool for Enhanced Kavanah

#### 11.4.1 The Method

Rav Reisman described his practical application of the Gra's teaching:

*"I start Shmoneh Esrei and sometimes I do it with my fingers, I count, nobody notices. The, uh, I say HaKel HaGadol HaGibor VeHaNorah. And then, that much I could have Kavanah for, four words. If I make it till the beginning of the four words before I started daydreaming."*

He then methodically goes through each explanation: - HaKel = Kel Elyon - HaGadol = Gomel

Chasadim Tovim - HaGibor = Koneh HaKol - VeHaNorah = Zocher Chasdei Avos Umeivi Goel

### 11.4.2 The Power of Practical Application

Rav Reisman emphasized that this technique works because it engages the mind actively:

*"Now, someone complain, you're not davening Shmoneh Esrei, you're learning Shmoneh Esrei. I said, I don't care, if it works, it works. You know, like, uh, if the Gaon taught it this way and it's his son, Reb Avraham actually wrote it, then it's good enough for me."*

## 11.5 The Key to Lasting Impact

### 11.5.1 Repetition Creates Memory

Rav Reisman shared a crucial insight about how to make teachings stick:

*"When you hear different speeches and different drashos, they all contribute to inspire a person. But it's hard to remember exactly what you heard a year or two ago. If you daven your next Shmoneh Esrei and you do this, and the one after, you do it three, four times, you'll do it. Then if I meet you in 10 years, you'll remember what I spoke to you about here here in the shul."*

### 11.5.2 Use Creates Retention

He illustrated this with personal experience:

*"And one of the boys comes over to me afterwards, I heard this from you six years ago. I said, really? He said he was part of a Chicago eighth grade that came and you remember it? He remembers it because he uses it. If you use it, you remember it."*

## 11.6 The Philosophy of Spiritual "Tricks"

Rav Reisman advocated for a pragmatic approach to spiritual growth:

*"We need tachbulos ta'aseh lach milchama. Shlomo HaMelech says to do your battles with tachbulos, with all kinds of trickery, whatever you could do to, uh, uh, to make it work. And, uh, it's my trick. I hope it should work."*

This reflects his understanding that the yetzer hara requires strategic combat using whatever tools prove effective.

## 11.7 Addressing Practical Questions

### 11.7.1 The Challenge of the Yetzer Hara

When asked about the propriety of using notes in one's siddur, Rav Reisman responded with characteristic honesty about the spiritual struggle:

*"We are we are so desperate not be daydreaming that I'll take whatever it is. You know, it's just so, someone says to me, can you prove there's a God? I said, I can't prove there's a God. I can prove there's a yetzer hara. Stand and think about the Yankees for five minutes. You can do it. Now try to have Kavanah in Shmoneh Esrei. It takes, it takes 10 seconds, 20 seconds, and everything comes to mind from supper to, uh, the stock market, like everything."*

### 11.7.2 Language in Prayer

Regarding davening in English versus Hebrew, Rav Reisman provided clear halachic guidance:

*"Yes. Yeah, there's a Mishna in Sotah that tells us which things, uh, can only be in Hebrew. But tefillah is one of the things that could be in, could be said in English... But a person's goal should be to, to be able to get to the Lashon Kodesh."*

He explained the distinction between davening with a minyan versus individually, noting that davening with a minyan provides additional spiritual support that makes other languages more acceptable.

## 11.8 The Challenge of Yeshiva Education

### 11.8.1 Academic Focus vs. Spiritual Development

When asked about yeshiva education's approach to tefillah, Rav Reisman acknowledged institutional limitations:

*"The Yeshiva is primarily an academic institution. It has to be focused on teaching. Uh, there are, there are occasions where shmuessen is given where we talk about davening, we talk about these things. Um, for whatever reason, it's harder to get the boys interested or even to show up for it."*

He emphasized that academic excellence must remain the primary focus, while acknowledging the challenge this creates for spiritual development.

### 11.8.2 The Need for Personal Initiative

*"And people say why don't they teach Nach? Because they teach Nach, the boys don't show up. You know, it's, uh, a person has to has to be willing to do it on his own. The the primary focus of Yeshiva, of any academic institution, has to be academic excellence."*

## 11.9 Shabbos as Spiritual Anchor

### 11.9.1 The Power of Shabbos Transformation

When a participant shared his experience of spiritual transformation on Shabbos versus weekdays, Rav Reisman responded with deep appreciation:

*"You have a very holy neshama if Shabbos influences you that much. Be'ezras Hashem. Be'ezras Hashem. It's wonderful."*

### 11.9.2 Strategic Spiritual Warfare

His advice reflected his strategic approach to spiritual growth:

*"I think you got to try to, you know, you try to wear away the opposition a little at a time. When you fight a battle, you don't, you don't fight head on. You try to attack at the edges, at the uh, at the weak points."*

### 11.9.3 The Ultimate Goal

Rav Reisman concluded with the fundamental purpose of our spiritual work:

*"That's why we have Tosefes Shabbos to try to the job in Olam HaZeh is to pull as much chol into kedusha as possible. That that's the whole tafkid of Olam HaZeh."*

## 11.10 Conclusion

Rav Reisman's shiur provided both profound Torah insight and practical spiritual guidance. His presentation of the Gra's understanding of the first bracha of Shmoneh Esrei transforms our comprehension of Jewish prayer from rote recitation to deep engagement with fundamental theological concepts.

The key lessons from his teaching include:

- 1. Practical spirituality requires concrete tools** – Abstract inspiration alone is insufficient; we need specific techniques and “tricks” to maintain focus and intention.
- 2. Understanding enhances devotion** – When we comprehend the deep meaning behind our prayers, our *kavanah* naturally improves.
- 3. Repetition creates lasting change** – Consistent application of spiritual techniques transforms temporary inspiration into permanent habit.
- 4. Strategic approach to spiritual growth** – Like military strategy, spiritual development requires tactical thinking and persistent effort at the edges of our capabilities.
- 5. The primacy of first impressions** – The beginning of our prayers sets the tone for the entire experience, making the first *bracha*’s *kavanah* crucial.

Rav Reisman’s approach exemplifies how traditional Torah wisdom can be made accessible and immediately applicable to contemporary Jewish life. His emphasis on practical tools for spiritual growth, combined with deep respect for classical sources, provides a model for meaningful religious practice in the modern world.

Through the Gra’s insights, he showed how each word of our prayers contains layers of meaning that, when properly understood and applied, can transform our entire davening experience from a challenge into a profound encounter with the divine.



## About Rav Yisroel Reisman



Rav Yisroel Reisman serves as a prominent Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn and is the Rav of Agudath Yisrael of Madison, a large and respected kehilla in Flatbush. He is widely recognized for his ability to make complex Torah concepts accessible and practical for contemporary Jewish life. Known for his clear explanations and practical guidance, Rav Reisman combines deep scholarship with an understanding of the challenges facing modern Jews in their spiritual service.

His approach emphasizes finding practical tools and “tricks” to enhance one’s connection to Torah and tefillah, recognizing that spiritual growth requires both inspiration and concrete methodology. His insights, often grounded in Tanach and halacha, resonate with both yeshiva students and laypeople alike, bridging the gap between the beis midrash and everyday life.



## 12 Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein

### Truth, Mesorah, and the Focused Life

#### 12.1 The Legacy of Focused Living

##### 12.1.1 His Father's Defining Characteristic

When asked about aspects of his father that the public might not fully appreciate, Rav Lichtenstein highlighted a fundamental trait that defined Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's entire approach to life:

*"Whoever knew him, knew, I would say, one of the defining factors of who he was was the fact that he, he didn't waste a second. Wasn't, there was no such thing as wasting time. That didn't exist at all. It wasn't like, there was no schmoozing stam and there was no doing stam. Everything he did was very, very oysgecheshboint and and l'shem shamayim."*

##### 12.1.2 The Totality of Purpose

This wasn't merely a professional demeanor but a complete life philosophy:

*"But when he goes home, he'll, he'll, you know, sit down and and relax and have a different hanhaga, which with him wasn't very much not like that. He was very, very, very focused on that time is limited and we're here for a purpose in the world and and to make sure to utilize 110*

This teaching reveals that true Torah greatness involves a comprehensive integration of purpose across all aspects of life, not compartmentalized religious behavior.

#### 12.2 Navigating Truth Within Tradition

##### 12.2.1 The Challenge of Personal Growth and Mesorah

Addressing the complex question of how individuals evolve within traditional frameworks, Rav Lichtenstein provided profound guidance on balancing personal truth-seeking with respect for mesorah:

*"Every person grows in where he sees the emes. And when you see the emes, you, you know, you need to get attracted to it. And as you're saying that there's a mesorah, so mesorah teaches us what the emes is. You know, I'm I'm an einikel of Reb Chaim also. So, obviously had different, very, very different ideas and I see a direct link to Reb Chaim. But each person needs to grow in his own way, in whatever as he sees the emes."*

### 12.2.2 Truth Guides Its Own Path

The fundamental principle underlying authentic growth:

*"Then, once you see the emes, so then it automatically brings you there. As it says, emes yoreh darko."*

This reflects the understanding that genuine truth has an inherent magnetic quality that draws sincere seekers toward it, even when it requires adaptation or evolution from previous positions.

## 12.3 Maintaining Relationships Across Hashkafic Differences

### 12.3.1 The Foundation of L'Shem Shamayim

When asked about maintaining family harmony despite differing hashkafic paths, Rav Lichtenstein provided a formula centered on sincerity of purpose:

*"If the father and son are both ehrlich on it and doing it l'shem shamayim, there won't be any rift or any hard feelings. You know, when people are doing it more, you know, are not focusing completely that whatever we're doing is for the Ribono Shel Olam, so then your own personal negios come in more."*

### 12.3.2 Mutual Recognition of Divine Service

The key insight about preserving relationships:

*"But if you are focused that, you know, this is, this is all avodas Hashem and this is, we're here to service Hashem, and the child understands that and he's going in a different direction because he wants to fulfill the ratzon Hashem, so then he'll get along with his father no matter how his father is."*

This teaching emphasizes that genuine disagreements rooted in sincere service of Hashem need not create personal animosity, as both parties recognize the other's pure intentions.

## 12.4 Balancing Family Life and Torah Focus

### 12.4.1 The Prerequisites for Success

Addressing the challenge of maintaining Torah focus while meeting family obligations, Rav Lichtenstein began with foundational requirements:

*"Aleph is your wife has to be on board. There has to be shalom bayis in in a way that your wife and you are going in the same direction, that you both want to serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu and understand as the Mesillas Yesharim writes in the first line, that a person is brought to this world in order to get to Olam Haba, and this is just a prozdor."*

### 12.4.2 The Sanctification of Mundane Activities

The solution lies in expanding our understanding of avodas Hashem:

*"But, if again as I said before, if the focus is bechol ma'asecha yihyu l'shem shamayim, bechol derachecha da'eihu as the Rambam says, so then when you're eating, it's a mitzvah, and when you're sleeping, it's a mitzvah, and when you're schmoozing, it's a mitzvah, because you're all doing this to service Hakadosh Baruch Hu and we're all human beings."*

This approach transforms apparent conflicts between family time and Torah study into a unified service of Hashem.

## 12.5 The Nature of Truth in Our Generation

### 12.5.1 The Challenge of Ikveta d'Meshicha

When asked about finding "one's truth" versus "the truth," Rav Lichtenstein addressed the contemporary confusion around truth:

*"You know, so obviously, you know, it says it in in Ikveta d'Meshicha, it says ha'emes ne'ederes. The truth will be not there. You know, today we live in a tkufah where people are so confused that even if you speak the truth or what you believe to be the truth, not necessarily does anyone else see it because that's part of the klala of of Ikveta d'Meshicha."*

### 12.5.2 The Role of Mesorah and Guidance

Despite these challenges, truth remains discoverable:

*"But there are certain things that a person can see that is false and other things are true. Now you need usually help from your rabbonim, you need a mesorah on it, it doesn't happen by itself. But there are a lot of things that a person can see that that's the truth."*

### 12.5.3 The Example of the Vilna Gaon

Rav Lichtenstein illustrated how truth attracts sincere seekers:

*"Came along the Vilna Gaon. And the Vilna Gaon changed a lot of things that were until the time of the Vilna Gaon. Now, he didn't deliberately come and say, I'm changing everything. He saw things in a certain way, and everyone realized the kedusha and the gadlus of the Gaon. So all of a sudden, all over Vilna and in other places in Europe, the Beis Knesset HaGra, Minhagei HaGra, people following the Gaon. They saw an emes in it."*

## 12.6 Priorities and Value Systems

### 12.6.1 The Question of Time Allocation

When asked about balancing family time with learning, particularly on Shabbos, Rav Lichtenstein addressed the underlying value system:

*"Depends what your focus is, really. L'mashal. If you go to somebody who, for lack of a better word, we'll call him a Yeshiva man, somebody who's brought up in a Yeshiva and lives his whole life, you know, a Yeshiva style life. So if he goes to work, hopefully, if he's a good product of the Yeshiva, Sunday, he comes to the Beis Medrash the whole day."*

### 12.6.2 The Hierarchy of Importance

He challenged contemporary assumptions about family time:

*"So it's really a matter to a certain extent of re-education, of understanding the importance of time and understanding that even though you're brought up with the with*

*this mussar that family time is like the most important thing, you know, in the goyishe world quality time, but it's not. Learning Torah, mili d'kedusha is more important."*

## 12.7 The Story of Rav Shlomo Schwadron

### 12.7.1 A Lesson in Perspective

Rav Lichtenstein concluded with a powerful story illustrating different approaches to time:

*"Rav Shlomo Schwadron used to go to chutz la'aretz. First time he went to England... He comes into shul on Sunday and there's no one there. He had no idea that Sunday is a different day because he was brought up in Yerushalayim his whole life."*

### 12.7.2 The Insight About Free Time

The shamash explained that people daven later on Sunday because they don't work:

*"He said, you don't know that Sunday people don't work, so we daven at 8:00? So Rav Shlomo said, no, I didn't know. And then he proceeds to give a schmooze that if you don't work, you should come at 6:00, not at 8:00. Because now you have a whole day to learn."*

This story encapsulates the fundamental difference in how time is viewed - as an opportunity for growth versus mere relaxation.

## 12.8 The Path Forward

### 12.8.1 Individual Adaptation

Rav Lichtenstein acknowledged that growth is gradual and individual:

*"So if you don't have it yet or you're working on it, so obviously you need more time because you have to feel fulfilled and your family has to feel like you're with them and you're giving them time. But my suggestion is that people, you know, think about it and talk to their Rav about it and learn about it, understanding that as the Mesilas Yesharim says, we're here for Olam Haba, not for Olam Hazeh."*

### 12.8.2 The Ultimate Goal

The direction of growth should be clear:

*"So the real time we have to spend is on avodas Hashem and this should be less. Now, each person it depends on where he's holding in life. You're holding in life where you understand this more, so you diminish it. And if you don't, then you need more time, so you're going to need more time."*

### 12.8.3 Constructive Family Activities

He suggested ways to integrate family time with Torah values:

*"And then families can learn together, they can do other activities, chesed activities together, they can do things that is not just if you look at it from the outside, time that, you know, went away, but time that you did something constructive with it."*

## 12.9 Conclusion

Key insights from his presentation include:

1. **The integration of purpose** – True Torah living involves bringing focused intentionality to every aspect of life, not compartmentalizing religious behavior.
2. **Truth within tradition** – Personal growth and the pursuit of *emes* can coexist with respect for *mesorah* when both are pursued with genuine sincerity.
3. **Relationship preservation** – *Hashkafic* differences need not destroy relationships when all parties maintain *l'shem shamayim* as their primary motivation.
4. **Holistic avodas Hashem** – Family obligations and Torah study can be integrated through the principle of *bechol ma'asecha yihyu l'shem shamayim*.
5. **Value system clarity** – Contemporary Jews must consciously examine and potentially adjust their priorities to align with Torah values rather than secular assumptions.
6. **Gradual growth** – Spiritual development is individual and gradual, requiring patience with oneself while maintaining clear direction toward Torah ideals.

Rav Lichtenstein's message is both timeless and urgent. In a generation filled with noise, distraction, and conflicting values, his clarity about what matters—truth, purpose, and sincere service of Hashem—serves as a spiritual compass. His emphasis on living with integrity in every moment challenges us to reevaluate how we spend our time, how we interact with others, and how we define success in life.

More than a philosophical stance, his approach is a blueprint for daily living. From the value of every minute to the transformative potential of a shared family learning session, Rav Lichtenstein teaches that greatness lies not in grand gestures but in the daily choices to align our lives with Torah values. Whether we are in the beis medrash or the workplace, spending time with children or engaging in avodas Hashem, the question remains the same: Is this being done with *kavanah*, with *l'shem shamayim*? His teachings inspire us to answer with action.

In Rav Lichtenstein's worldview, the pursuit of emes is not an abstract intellectual exercise but a lived reality. It demands humility, self-discipline, and constant recalibration. The Torah is not a compartment of life but its organizing principle. Every interaction, every minute, every relationship becomes a stage upon which one lives out their avodas Hashem. In this model, success is not measured by public recognition but by private alignment with truth and purpose.

Perhaps most inspiring is the gentle, unwavering confidence Rav Lichtenstein displays in the Jewish soul's capacity for growth. He does not call for overnight revolutions, but for deliberate, sincere steps toward greater alignment with Torah values. Whether navigating ideological differences, raising a family, or structuring one's Shabbos, his guidance empowers each individual to elevate their circumstances with clarity, responsibility, and deep faith in the redemptive power of a focused and truthful life.



## About Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein



Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein serves as Rosh Yeshiva and carries forward the illustrious legacy of his father, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l, and grandfather, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l. Known for his incisive intellect and unwavering commitment to Torah values, Rav Lichtenstein represents a synthesis of rigorous Torah scholarship with practical wisdom for contemporary Jewish life.

pose.

His approach emphasizes the pursuit of truth (*emes*) within the framework of *mesorah* (tradition), while maintaining an uncompromising focus on *avodas Hashem* as life's central pur-



## 13 Rav Avrohom Schorr

### Gevurah Sheb'Yesod and the Transformative Power of the Omer

#### 13.1 The Mystical Framework of Sefiras HaOmer

##### 13.1.1 Today's Spiritual Configuration

Rav Schorr began by situating the shiur within the mystical framework of Sefiras HaOmer, explaining the specific spiritual energy of the day:

*"Today is the 37th day in Sefirah. Every week of Sefirah is corresponding to one of the seven middos. And now the sixth week of Sefirah corresponds to the middah of Yesod Tzaddik. We also find that every day of this week is also divided in seven parts. Meaning the first day of yesterday, the 36th day was chesed shebiyesod. Today is gevurah shebiyesod."*

This creates a connection between Yitzchak Avinu (the embodiment of gevurah/yirah) and Yosef HaTzaddik (representing yesod), establishing the theme for the entire shiur.

#### 13.2 The Invisible Sanctuary of Yiras Shamayim

##### 13.2.1 Yitzchak's Field Prayer

Rav Schorr addressed a fundamental question from Tosafos about how Yitzchak Avinu could daven in an open field, when the Gemara considers this chutzpah:

*"Tosafos asks the question, how could he daven in a field? The Gemara says chutzef. Hai man demispallel bebik'ah, if somebody davens in an open field is a chatzifus."*

##### 13.2.2 The Answer from Rimzei HaChochmah

The solution reveals the transformative power of yiras shamayim:

*"The Gemara says in Maseches Shabbos that yirah is called a bayis. Why is yirah called a bayis? Because a person that has yiras shamayim is surrounded by four mechitzos. The yirah itself causes him to be surrounded. It builds a shield around him, it builds a wall around him, between him and the street."*

### 13.2.3 Yitzchak's Invisible Sanctuary

This led to a profound understanding of Yitzchak's spiritual state:

*"The middah of Yitzchak was yirah. So he was surrounded by four walls, four walls of yiras shamayim. So he wasn't in a bik'ah, he was in a bayis. An invisible bayis for us. But in ruchniyus he had a bayis and probably visible for those who could see ruchniyus."*

## 13.3 Biblical Examples of Yiras Shamayim as Protection

### 13.3.1 Yosef HaTzaddik's Declaration

Rav Schorr identified two primary instances in the Torah where yiras shamayim is explicitly mentioned as protection against sin:

*"We find Yosef Hatzaddik when he had a nisayon and said es Elokim ani yoreh. When she was toivayah him for an aveirah. How do you overcome? He said es Elokim ani yoreh, I have fear from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The Torah repeats it. That means the Torah tells you that it's true."*

### 13.3.2 The Midwives' Courage

The second example involves Shifra and Puah:

*"We find another time yirah. Vatireinah hameyaldos es ha'Elokim. It's the other time that we find the Torah Hakedosha associates yirah with the meyaldos, with Shifra and Yocheved... And therefore they were able to overcome Pharaoh."*

## 13.4 The True Nature of Yiras Shamayim

### 13.4.1 Beyond Temptation

Rav Schorr shared a profound insight from Reb Avraham miPshischa about the Gemara's language regarding the midwives:

*"The lashon haGemara in Maseches Sotah is melamed shetava'an lidvar aveirah velo nitpa'u. He was toivayah them to do an aveirah and they weren't, they weren't, what's the right word in English? ...They weren't seduced. What's that right? So they should said the Gemara they weren't oh they didn't do it. It's a very interesting language."*

### 13.4.2 The Fire Analogy

The deeper meaning emerges through a powerful analogy:

*"Says the Reb Avraham miPshischa he, the Gemara is teaching us what yiras shamayim is. Someone will see an inferno, a big fire. Someone will tell him, you know, I want you to walk through the fire. Does he not do it? He doesn't hear what the person is talking to him. You're not talking sense. He doesn't contemplate, should I walk through? Should I not walk through? He realizes fire, I don't walk through fire."*

### 13.4.3 The Complete Barrier

This reveals the ultimate level of yiras shamayim:

*"The Gemara is telling you vatireinah hameyaldos es ha'Elokim, melamed shetava'an lidvar aveirah. It didn't enter their minds. Why didn't it enter their minds? Because an aveirah is fire, so it doesn't enter my mind... That's what yiras shamayim is. Yiras shamayim is a wall. Doesn't talk to me."*

## 13.5 The Source of Moral Strength

### 13.5.1 The Only Thing in Our Control

Rav Schorr emphasized that yiras shamayim is uniquely within human control:

*"Everything a person can blame that he doesn't, he doesn't, he doesn't have the koichos. A person could say, he wants me to learn Torah, I have limited kishronos. I have limited abilities. Everything a person has, he's created, that's his abilities... In yiras shamayim, a person has no limited abilities. It's not not in the Eibishter doesn't control it. It's you that has to bring yiras shamayim."*

### 13.5.2 The Principle of Hakol BiYedei Shamayim

This connects to a fundamental principle:

*"Hakol biyedei Shamayim chutz miyiras Shamayim. Everything a person can blame... Yiras shamayim is in your hands. Yirah, you have an ability to have yiras shamayim."*

## 13.6 Practical Methods for Developing Yiras Shamayim

### 13.6.1 The Rambam's Method

Rav Schorr cited the Rambam's practical guidance:

*"How do you get to yiras shamayim? The Rambam says how you get to yiras shamayim. The Rambam says, if a person picks up his eyes to Shamayim and he looks at the sky, he gets yirah."*

### 13.6.2 The Chidushei HaRim's Explanation

The deeper reason behind this method:

*"Says the Chidushei HaRim that when the Eibishter created the Shamayim, the Rashi brings in Parshas Bereishis, the rakia was merachefer, it was not, it wasn't solid. It wasn't solid. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Rashi says, gave a scream on it and it became solid. It means that the whole rakia exists from yirah. The whole rakia exists from yirah."*

## 13.7 Recognizing the Miraculous in the Natural

### 13.7.1 The Sfas Emes on Teva vs. Nes

Rav Schorr shared a transformative insight about recognizing God's presence:

*"The Sfas Emes says the biggest nes is the teva. The biggest nes that there is, is the teva. Start being, start looking at the world. You take it for granted, but it's the biggest nes there could be. The biggest nes there could be. You breathe, it's the biggest nes there could be."*

### 13.7.2 Practical Exercises in Recognition

He provided concrete examples from Reb Vigdor Miller:

*"The Reb Vigdor Miller walked into the house, he wants to be mechazeik his emunah. He filled up a sink with water. Filled up a sink with water. Stuck his head in until he wasn't able to breathe and then took out his head and breathed. Oh, he appreciated the breath, he appreciated the Eibishter's creation."*

## 13.8 The Connection Between Yitzchak and Yosef

### 13.8.1 The Mystical Link

Rav Schorr explained the deeper connection using Kabbalistic sources:

*"The Zohar Hakadosh says in Parshas Vayishlach he got his years from Avraham, Yitzchak veYaakov. From Avraham, Yaakov veYosef."*

Through a detailed calculation of years, he showed how Dovid HaMelech received his 70 years from the Avos, with Yosef representing the connection to Yitzchak's spiritual power.

### 13.8.2 The Foundation of Kedusha

This led to the practical application:

*"That's what today's day is, gevurah shebiyesod. The koach of being putting down the foundations of kedusha. Yesod is foundations, because that's what a bayis is built on. A bayis is built on foundations. The foundation of a Yid is Yosef Hatzaddik."*

## 13.9 The Chidushei HaRim's Teaching on Separation

### 13.9.1 Backs to the World

Rav Schorr shared a powerful story illustrating the proper Jewish attitude toward the world:

*"And they learned Vayichan sham Yisrael neged hahar. And he asked the einekel, what is the teitch? So he said vayichan sham Yisrael, Klal Yisrael was lived, made tents neged hahar, opposite the mountain. Chidushei HaRim said no, it's not teitch."*

The correct interpretation:

*"Said the Chidushei HaRim, the the meaning neged hahar means with your backs to the world. Means with your backs to the world. That's the, that's the importance of it. Not that you're facing the har. The ikar is that your back is to the world. You're saying no to the world."*

## 13.10 Contemporary Applications and Challenges

### 13.10.1 The Question of Daily Renewal

When asked about focusing on the present despite past failures and future anxieties, Rav Schorr provided practical guidance:

*"That you shouldn't look at the past and the failures of the past. That's why the Eibishter created night that it should be a new day. You meshabei'ach the Eibishter every night in your tefillos. Every night you say goilel ohr mipnei choshech vechoshech mipnei ohr."*

### 13.10.2 The Daily Choice

He emphasized the daily opportunity for renewal:

*"Chidushei HaRim says you make a bracha in the morning al nesinas sekvi binah lehavchin bein yom uvein lailah. It means that you have every day a new ability to pick between day and night. Between right and left. Doesn't matter what you did yesterday."*

## 13.11 Addressing Modern Technology: The AI Question

### 13.11.1 The Danger of Artificial Reality

When asked about artificial intelligence, Rav Schorr identified a fundamental concern:

*"AI has the ability, has the ability, yeah? To take my voice, yeah, put it on a recording, send out a recording that my voice said to do this and this, right? That's the ability to do that? Yeah. Is that pure sheker? It could be... Does that mean that AI is created a metzius of sheker that never existed in the world? That that's correct, yeah."*

### 13.11.2 Technology and Human Happiness

He connected this to broader concerns about technological progress:

*"Are people happier today than they were 50 years ago? In general? No. No. What changed? Technology. Technology. Technology changed... All technology does is takes away from the person more and more time that he doesn't need it anymore."*

## 13.12 The Question of God's "Need" for Us

### 13.12.1 Clarifying a Dangerous Misconception

When asked about contemporary teachings suggesting God "needs" us, Rav Schorr provided clear theological guidance:

*"First of all, first of all, I don't know any makor that says that Hashem needs us. I know mekoros that will say that kivyachol I give strength above with my maasim. I give nachas ruach above with my maasim. There's a very big difference between saying Hashem needs us, and saying that I give nachas ruach and I give strength above."*

### 13.12.2 The Theological Problem

He explained the fundamental issue with such thinking:

*"To say that Hashem needs us means ke'ilu, ke'ilu that Hashem needed to create the world. One plus one is two. If you say Hashem needs us, you're saying Hashem needed to create the world. And v'halo meforash etzlainu is clear that Hashem didn't need to create the world."*

## 13.13 Guidance on Sleep and Time Management

### 13.13.1 The Importance of Proper Sleep

Rav Schorr challenged contemporary assumptions about staying up late:

*"The killer of our generation is being up late at night... All the stories that you heard in your life that a person came to town and the everybody's house was dark and then only the rabbi's house was had light in it. What time do you think that happened? 2:00 AM. 8 o'clock at night."*

### 13.13.2 The Satmar Model

He provided a contemporary example:

*"Last year we visited Satmar. And there the rebbe says that in Monroe, they turn the lights off. They turn the lights off, they go to sleep very early and the beis medrash you can't get a seat at 4:00 in the morning. 10 o'clock they shut the lights off."*

## 13.14 Developing Hunger for Torah

### 13.14.1 The Ultimate Question

A participant asked about developing the same hunger for Torah that one has for food:

*"That hunger that I experience, is there a way to get that hunger when it comes to learning Torah?... They they know that, you know, everybody knows what the Torah is. Torah is a Torah. Because you say by I didn't get the hunger."*

### 13.14.2 The Foundation of Torah Hunger

Rav Schorr provided the key insight:

*"Because you say by night in davening, ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu. The more a person believes ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu, the more his hunger will be there. The more you believe that you really live on Torah and you really exist on Torah, that's the more your hunger will be there."*

### 13.14.3 Recommended Study Materials

For developing this perspective, he recommended:

*"Orchos Tzaddikim Shaar HaTorah. Okay. Orchos Tzaddikim Shaar HaTorah. That's Derech Chovos HaLevavos... There's no sefer that talks about Torah as much as Tanya talks about it."*

## 13.15 Conclusion

Rav Schorr's shiur provided a comprehensive exploration of yiras shamayim as the foundation of all spiritual achievement. Through mystical frameworks, practical guidance, and contemporary applications, he demonstrated how this fundamental middah serves as both protection from sin and the gateway to genuine connection with the Divine.

Key insights from his teaching include:

- 1. Yiras shamayim builds invisible sanctuaries** – Like Yitzchak’s field that became a house of prayer through inner awe, fear of Heaven forms a spiritual enclosure that protects from impurity and distraction.

At its highest level, *yirah* transcends internal struggle. Rav Schorr explained that the most elevated form of fear is not battling temptation but being so attuned to the Divine that sin simply doesn’t register as a possibility—like walking into a fire and instinctively turning back.

- 2. The highest level transcends temptation** – Sin is not entertained, because it no longer exists in one’s field of moral options.

To cultivate such awe, one must recognize the miraculous in the mundane. Rav Schorr emphasized that appreciating everyday phenomena—breath, light, gravity—is foundational to spiritual awareness. Following in the path of Reb Vidor Miller, he encouraged exercises in mindfulness that awaken reverence.

- 3. Seeing the miraculous in nature** – Recognizing God’s presence in *teva* (nature) is the gateway to constant spiritual consciousness.

This reverence is not reserved for holidays or turning points. Rather, each day—every morning—is a divine invitation to start again. Forget yesterday’s stumbles. You were given another sunrise because Hashem believes in your capacity to choose life today.

- 4. Daily renewal is a spiritual opportunity** – Each morning renews our power to choose between light and darkness, *kedusha* and distraction.

In addressing modernity, Rav Schorr called for vigilance. Whether in assessing the allure of AI or the seduction of late-night scrolling, he underscored the need to examine how each innovation affects our soul. Not all advancement is aligned with spiritual progress.

- 5. Technology must be weighed against spiritual well-being** – Just because something is new doesn’t mean it is good for the *neshamah*.

He also clarified a crucial theological boundary: while our mitzvos may bring *nachas ruach* to Heaven, God does not “need” us. To suggest otherwise is a distortion of foundational *emunah*. Hashem created the world out of *chesed*, not necessity.

- 6. Preserving God’s transcendence** – We offer Hashem pleasure through our deeds, but His perfection is not contingent on us.

Rav Schorr’s emphasis on disciplined time management also emerged powerfully. He critiqued the casual dismissal of sleep rhythms and the glorification of late nights, suggesting instead a lifestyle aligned with divine order—early sleep, early rise, and early connection to Torah.

- 7. Time and sleep are spiritual assets** – Living in rhythm with creation enhances clarity, learning, and *avodas Hashem*.

Finally, he offered a roadmap to cultivating a hunger for Torah: *ki heim chayeinu v’orech yameinu*. When one internalizes that Torah is the air we breathe, learning becomes not an obligation but a craving. That awareness, Rav Schorr said, is transformative.

- 8. True Torah hunger comes from internalizing its necessity** – When a person believes that Torah is life itself, a deep and lasting desire to learn naturally follows.

Rav Schorr's synthesis of Chassidic mysticism and grounded *mussar* guidance offers a roadmap for contemporary *avodas Hashem*. His teachings demand both thought and emotion, both structure and surrender. Above all, they call us to live in awe—not as a fleeting feeling, but as a way of being. Through *yiras shamayim*, the ordinary becomes holy, and the soul reorients itself toward eternity.



## About Rav Avrohom Schorr



Rav Avrohom Schorr serves as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin and is recognized as one of the leading Torah personalities of our generation. Known for his profound insights into Chassidic thought combined with rigorous Lithuanian-style Torah analysis, Rav Schorr brings together the best of both worlds.

His approach to mussar and spiritual development emphasizes practical application of deep Torah concepts, making profound ideas accessible to contemporary audiences. He is particularly renowned for his expertise in Tanya and his ability to connect mystical teachings to everyday Jewish living. Through his seforim, recorded shiurim, and widely attended public lectures, Rav Schorr has inspired thousands to deepen their connection to Torah, avodas Hashem, and the inner world of the neshamah.