The Face that Shone



by

Rabbi Elchanan Yoseph Hertzman

THE FACE THAT SHONE

An inspiring biography
and excellent instigation to
emulate the character of
an outstanding person

Rabbi Meir Feist z"l

written by
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translated from
the Hebrew "Pnei Meir" by
Rabbi Yoneh Bergstrum

Jerusalem
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INTRODUCTION

On 12 Iyar, 5735 (April 22, 1975), Rebbe Meir Feist זלה"ה passed away in the United States. He was one of the most extraordinary personalities in the Torah world.

I was fortunate enough to enjoy his acquaintance for almost twenty years; during which he was like a brother to me. There are several facts about his character which are worthwhile publicizing so that others may benefit from their knowledge. These are:

1) Despite his severely handicapped condition, his constant happiness was plainly visible on a face that always shone with an inner light.

2) Despite his condition, he looked at everyone with a good eye and a good heart. He rejoiced in his fellow man's happiness with complete earnestness, and participated in it whenever possible.

3) Although he started learning Torah at an advanced age, he succeeded in attaining high levels of scholarship and Divine service.

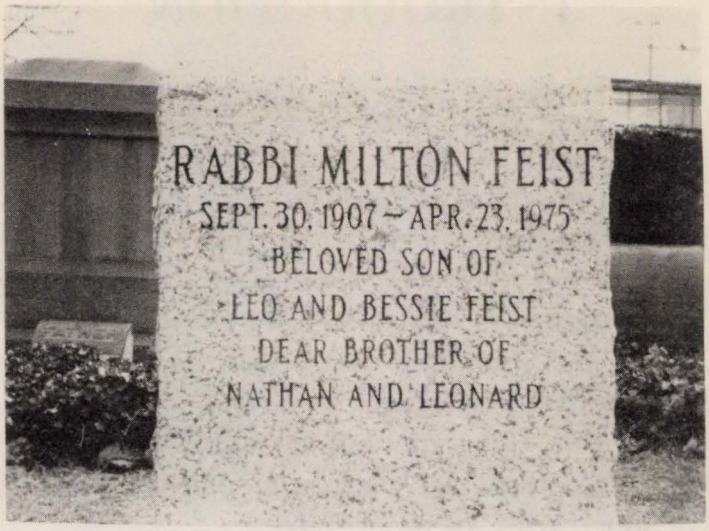
4) Not only was he not a burden to others, but rather, he served the public in many beneficial ways.

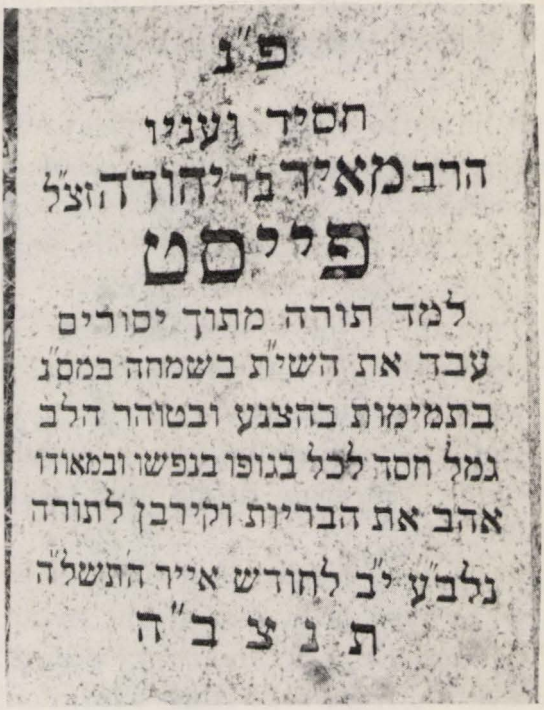
5) His biography prods one to strive for higher and higher attainments in Torah and Mitzvoth. It nullifies all excuses to neglect our toil in these fields.

We may all learn something from his life and it may be said of him, "Through Rebbe Meir, we all stand condemned".

Therefore, I have decided to write briefly of his life and character for the benefit of the public, in the hope that many will be inspired by it, and that his pure soul may find Heavenly uplift through this naaration. He will remain alive through his words, until the resurrection, may it arrive soon. AMEN.

ELCHONON YOSEF HERZTMAN


RABBI MILTON FEIST
SEPT. 30, 1907 – APR. 23, 1975
BELOVED SON OF
LEO AND BESSIE FEIST
DEAR BROTHER OF
NATHAN AND LEONARD


פ"נ
חסיד ועניו
הרב מאיר בן יהודה הלוי זצ"ל
פיליסט
למד תורה מתוך יסורים
עבד את הש"ת בשמחה במס"נ
בתמימות בהצנע ובטוהר הלב
גמל חסד לכל בגופו בנפשו ובמאודו
אהב את הבריות וקירבן לתורה
נלב"ע י"ב לחודש אייר התשל"ה
ת נ צ ב"ה

The Face That Shone

At the age of only four years, Rebbe Meir became permanently paralyzed from his waist down. This left him unable to take even one small step, for he could not stand even with the aid of crutches. From that day on, Rebbe Meir remained bound to and totally dependent upon his wheelchair wherever he went. In addition to being paralyzed, his ribs had formed in such a way that his lungs could not expand normally, leaving him constantly short of breath. Occasionally, he would have to take deep breaths to get enough oxygen. He would do this by raising his shoulders to his ears and then jumping slightly while inhaling. Those People who were with him at that time could not bear to watch this; yet Rebbe Meir not only lived with it, he became a **lamdon** and a tzaddik despite this condition.

Rebbe Meir underwent many different operations, and saw many doctors, hoping to ease his situation, even if only slightly. If he were able to walk with crutches, that, too, would be a great blessing for him. All the operations were unsuccessful, and at the age of twenty, in a final attempt to help him, an experimental surgical procedure was tried. In this operation, the surgeons attempted to reshape his spine, so that he might breathe without difficulty. This to was unsuccessful. One can imagine the tremendous emotional strain that Rebbe Meir went through during this entire ordeal. His youth was spent in hospitals instead of playgrounds, with doctors instead of other children; and he finally remained with the gloomy prospect of spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down.

As impossible as it may seem, his situation was yet to worsen R'L. Soon after his last operation, which the doctors informed him was unsuccessful, his father passed away. He lived with his mother until she died twelve years later, and then went on to live by himself. Rebbe Meir did not want to inconvenience others, so he shopped, cooked, and cleaned his house by himself.

Rebbe Meir was a true **eved** Hashem. He accepted his situation with joy, knowing that everything G-d does is good. Rebbe Meir was never jealous of others; instead, he shared in their happiness and sorrow as though it were his own. His patience was beyond all normal expectations. He would not show discomfort when inexperienced helpers would tilt his wheelchair (thus preventing him from breathing), while carrying him up or down steps. Instead he would thank the person with such warmth, that the individual could not help but feel good. In this manner, those who came to lift Rebbe Meir's spirits often left with their own spirits lifted.

His face shone with joy at all times, and it was impossible to detect any signs of his suffering by looking at him or talking with him.

If we explore Rebbe Meir's life, his ideas, and his actions along with the aid of Chazal, perhaps we can begin to understand and aquire the greatness of character that was so much part of Rebbe Meir's existence.

Chapter Two

"For a day in thy courtyards is better than a thousand; I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my G-d, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalms 84:11). Rashi (**ibid.**) explains the first part of this passage, "Better a day spent in your courtyard and death

tomorrow, than to live a thousand years somewhere else". "Courtyard" in this passage refers to the **Bais Hamedrash**. To live just one day in yeshiva is worth more than a thousand years of life with all the physical pleasures it has to offer.

If we allow ourselves to comprehend the full scope of this Rashi, we realize how fortunate is the life of a **ben Torah**. If one day in yeshiva is equivalent to a thousand years of life, then a lifetime equals millions of years! If only we could incorporate this idea into ourselves, think how much more meaningful our lives would be! It would be that much easier to remain strong in the most difficult of situations, R'L.

Rebbe Meir was this kind of **ben Torah**, living a rich and blessed life. He was able to live happily, without feeling anguish over his handicapped condition. To him, each day that he was able to study Torah was as good as ten or twenty lifetimes without discomfort. This idea was a strong motivating factor in everything Rebbe Meir did and provided him with a strong desire to live.

He was always involved in the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos, so he was visibly happy at all times. As long as he could spend his days learning Torah, the physical world had no significance; for he was already in Gan Eden. "I cannot picture a better Gan Eden that that of sitting here in yeshiva," Rebbe Meir used to say.

In addition to his spiritual development, Rebbe Meir's constant efforts at self-improvement brought him great inner satisfaction, which added to his joy and zest for life.

He exemplified the words of Chazal, "Why do the living complain? It is enough that they are alive!" His only desire was to live, but not as one may be accustomed to think. Rebbe Meir realized the true value of life, as we

have discussed; which is a far better motivating factor than any physical pleasures one may seek. It was this motivation that enabled Rebbe Meir to surmount the "minor" setback of being handicapped and become the **ish shalem** that he was.

Let us dwell on this topic, and mention a **d'var Torah** given by the Alter (spiritual conselor) of Slabodka. "And he said unto them 'Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea'..." (Jonah 1:12). The Alter asked,"Why did Jonah add the extra words'Take me up'? Surely he would have been understood had he only said ,'Cast me forth into the sea'." ———"We see from this," concludes the Alter, "that Jonah asked them to delay his being thrown into the sea for the few additional seconds it took to take him up, (instead of simply pushing him in). Jonah realized that there is nothing more valuable than life, even when a person has already been condemned to die, R'L, for it is impossible to know how much this person can acheive in those few extra seconds." (וע' עוד בזה בביאור הלכה פ' שב:ט סע' ד'.).

Rebbe Meir had great difficulty breathing and for him every breath ws a seperate occasion to rejoice. Chazal say, "Rebbi Levi said in the name of Rebbe Chanina, for each breath a person takes, he must preaise G-d; as it is written, '**Kol haneshama tehallel**'." (Literally, "Every soul shall praise." The Hebrew word for soul is **neshama** (נשמה). This is the same spelling as the word **neshima** (נשימה) meaning breath. Thus, the passage may be read, **"Kol haneshima tehallel"** — Every breath shall praise). While others with his fate might have moaned and cursed with each breath, Rebbe Meir utilized this great gift to praise his Maker.

Chapter Three

Rebbe Meir worked hard at finding the right path in life. He was born in Mount Vernon, New York, where the Jewish community is not large. Rabbi Yehushua Meriminski, the Rav of that community, taught him the aleph-bais. (Incidentally, Rav Meriminski was a grandson of the Chofetz Chaim zt"l). Rebbe Meir began to study Gemara with the aid of a Hebrew-English dictionary that Rav Meriminski had given him. Within a few short years, he became an accomplished **lamdon** who had traversed the entire **shass**.

Rebbe Meir truly did not let anything stand between himself and his goal of becoming an **ish shalem** (a complete spiritual person). Due to the circumstances at the time Rebbe Meir was starting to learn Torah, he was unable to enroll in yeshiva on a regular basis. This meant that he had to study by himself at home. It is very difficult to learn at home, where there are many distractions. This is particularly true when it must be done alone. The Gemara refers many times to the importance of studying with another person, and to the necessity of hearing Torah from a rebbe. Yet, Rebbe Meir, who persisted in his efforts as always, reached a level similar to that of Abraham, who "taught himself Torah." This, of course, was accomplished while he suffered from breathing difficulties and paralysis.

When Rebbe Meir completed **shass**, a repast was held in Rav Meriminski's house. Rav Menachem Mendel Zaks, son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim, was also present at this meal. Before long, Rav Zaks and Rebbe Meir became deeply engrosed in a Talmudic discussion that encompassed many different areas of **shass**. Rav Zaks

noted with great praise Rebbe Meir's wide knowledge and deep understanding of **shass**. He was particularly impressed with how Rebbe Meir, who could not even read Hebrew just a few years before, managed to complete **shass** in this short time. (This was related to me by Rav Zvi Hirsch, shlit'a, who was present at that **seudah**). While Rebbe Meir had been taught by Rav Meriminski, he also had a close relationship with Rav Yaakov Levine, z'l. Rav Levine was a disciple of Rav Boruch Ber Lebowitz, the dean of the Kaminetz yeshiva in Europe.

Rebbe Meir became involved in helping his fellow Jews, even before he left Mount Vernon. He helped Rav Meriminski translate one of the Chofetz Chaim's works, **Bais Yisroel**, into English; so that those who did not read Hebrew could benefit from the Chofetz Chaim's wellspring of knowledge.

Eventually, Rebbe Meir had to support himself, so he went into the business of selling sheet music to musicians and orchestras. He managed the store alone, from his wheelchair. Although this occupied much of his day, Rebbe Meir considered Torah study uppermost and upheld the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (1:15) "Make your study of the Torah a regular habit..." He would spend every free moment in his store learning. Rebbe Meir retired when he was sixty-four, so that he could spend his last remaining years totally enveloped in Torah learning. (Rebbe Meir entered the Lakewood yeshiva, where he remained until he died at the age of sixty-eight). When we realize that his business involved him in many contracts, loans, and the

like, it becomes clear how difficult it was for Rebbe Meir to close his business. His strong commitment to Torah, however, enabled him to recognize what was most important.

Rebbe Meir constantly found ways to make even his work a service to G-d, so that he could always be doing mitzvos when time did not allow for Torah study. This was apparent to anyone who conducted business with him. He saw his business as a way to help others, and tried very hard to provide the best service. As a result, he achieved a reputation as an honest man, and many people, whether they were salesmen or customers, often talked of Rebbe Meir as being more a friend than a businessman. (I hope to write more on this particular point later, with G-d's help.)

Rebbe Meir moved to New York, where he continued to study Torah with unrelenting dilligence. I remember that whenever I happened to call on him I would find Rebbe Meir literally sweating over a Gemara. He often spoke in yeshivos, and delivered many a **d'var Torah** to the working public in shuls around the metropolitan area.

Rebbe Meir worked hard to fulfill himself as a Jew. Even when he did not feel well, he still spent his usual amount of time in learning in such a way that it was impossible to tell if he were ill. He would say, "People would not miss a day's work because they felt tired, and business is surely of no less worth than Torah and Mitzvoth!" Seeing Rebbe Meir in bed was testimony that he was really ill. (See Chapter 10).

He learned **Yorah De'ah** and **Mesechta Chulin** many times and was quite expert in them. He would say, however, that although he had been ordained as a Rabbi,

he could not be called so, for he would not actually answer questions of a halachic nature. (Rebbe Meir feared he would be tested in heaven on **Yorah De'ah** if he publicized the fact that he had smicha, and that he would not be able to pass the test. Therefore he decided not to take upon himself the yoke of answering **sha'alos** (halachic questions).

He was well versed in Mussar and Chassidus, which added to his insight on life and its purpose. He understood many difficult concepts that are found in the Kabbalah and he would recite all his prayers from the Siddur HaRama'k, (**Tefilah LeMoshe**). This Siddur contains many kabbalastic interpretations of the prayers. (Rebbe Meir used this Siddur even for **Birchas Hamazon**).

It is now becoming clearer to us how Rebbe Meir thought, and how he incorporated these thoughts into himself. It was with such devotion that Rebbe Meir was able to rise from the depths of despair to the towering summit of perfection from where he could view the true panoramic beauty of this world.

Chapter Four

Even the most stubborn of men found thir hearts drawn towards Rebbe Meir's until the two touched and became as one. Rebbe Meir's strong understanding of Hashem and the purpose of life brought with it a desire to share this knowledge with others. He saw every person an a burning ember that could be ignited into a bright flame with which the darkness that shrouds this world like the cloak of death could be pushed aside. He saw this in everyone; from the most simple-minded to the most

brilliant of individuals. It is written in **Tanna D'bei Eliyahu**, "...and He does not treat the rich differently from the poor, but gives them the same opportunities (to attain **yiras shomayim**)." Rebbe Meir believed that everyone could understand what he did, and truly wished to see them studying and praising their Creator. It was this desire to help others that brought Rebbe Meir to educate many souls which had been wandering in search of the truth.

He worked closely with those he was able to bring back to yiddishkeit and held their hands for the entire journey. He was in constant communication with them, giving advice on each new matter that threatened to complicate their already difficult situation. (Since these **ba'alei teshuvah** were adjusting to a new life and new philosophies, many of them came to seek Rebbe Meir's compassionate understanding. They remained steadfast due to his inspiring insight and strong desire to help them, which is truly characteristic of a **talmid chochom**).

He never lost contact with these ba'alei teshuvah. They visited him often, and when that was impossible or impracticle, they wrote letters which Rebbe Meir answered promptly.

Once, a young drug addict broke into Rebbe Meir's house in search of money that he desperately needed to support his expensive habit. Rebbe Meir was in the house at the time, and was confronted by the thief. He entered into a conversation with this addict, and convinced him of how far he had fallen, and where he was heading. The young man was simply so overpowered by Rebbe Meir's friendliness, that he was convinced enough to give up his habit. Rebbe Meir brought him to a competent doctor with

experience in helping drug addicts, and soon this "confused" boy was cured and on his way to leading a normal life.

This young man could not help but realize how fortunate he was to come upon this Torah scholar, and he saw how different the Torah world is from the harsh and selfish world of the secularists. He saw that Rebbe Meir really cared about others since his first thoughts were of concern for him rather than how to save his own money. Speaking with Rebbe Meir at the time of his aborted robbery, he sensed that Rebbe Meir spoke from his heart.

We find that although Avraham Avinu ע"ה had attained a high level of holiness, and his understanding of G-d was unmatched by anyone, he would still associate with the general populace by inviting them into his tent to eat and drink. He wished to instill within them the basic principles of **emunah** (belief in G-d). On the passage, "...and he planted an **eshel** in Be'er Sheva, and he called there on the name of the L-rd, the everlasting G-d," (Genesis 21:33), Rashi explains: Through that eshel, (the Hebrew word eshel is written אשל. It is usually translated as "tamarisk" or some other kind of tree. It can also be interpreted as an acronym אכילה שתיה לינה which means — eating, drinking and sleeping and thus be translated "inn" or "hotel"), G-d's name became known throughout the world. (As the passage relates — "and he called there on the name of the L-rd," Rashi continues, "When his guests had finished their meal he would ask them to bless the One who gave them sustenance. He would reason, "You think it is I who fed you? It is the One who said "Let the world be," that has fed you, so thank Him." Just as Rebbe Meir strove to be like our forefathers, so we must

emulate their greatness, as it is written, "A person must always ask himself, 'When will my deeds match those of my forefathers?'"

Keeping this last thought in mind, let us discuss the importance of teaching others Torah.

Chapter Five

Preferably, whatever, is taught to the general populace, no matter how simple it may seem, should be taught by a **talmid chochom**, (scholar). One must not think that this is counterproductive, G-d forbid, because the talmid chochom could be learning at a much deeper level, while other, less scholarly people could teach **halachos** or Chumash, (or even aleph-bais); this is a gross error. The benefits reaped from having the scholar teach these people are threefold:

(1) The actual information that is given over is more precise and is therefore more substantial.

(2) That which is said by a **talmid chochom** is treated with more importance. This will eventually attract more people to the group.

(3) Many times, a person's learning will inspire him toward spiritual betterment. The **talmid chochom** is best equipped to steer them in that direction.

I have not written anything new, for the Chofetz Chaim has already alluded to much of this in his **sefer, Nidchei Yisroel**, (Chapter 14). To quote the living words of this Torah giant, "...the **talmid chochom** should not minimize the importance of this mitzvah by reasoning that others may teach the masses while he devotes his energies toward studying Torah on a deeper level, for this is not so."

Granted, when there is no other, any person who is quick to fulfill G-d's commandments should run to perform this mitzvah, and he will be aided and guided by heaven to do the right thing. If a **talmid chochom** seizes this opportunity, however, he will give it much more meaning; the masses will assemble to hear his thoughts, and he will guide them on the proper path and show them what they must do. He should not be concerned about the time he is taking from his own studies, for it is written in **Tanna D'bei Elyahu**, (Chapter 13), that as a reward for teaching the populace Torah, G-d bestows upon him wisdom and understanding. As it is written there, "Any **talmid chochom** who teaches Torah to the masses for the sake of Hashem, who does not treat the rich or the poor preferentially, but gives them all equal opportunity to learn, and educates them as one; the L-rd helps them and blesses him with understanding and genius. He is also given a place with the tzaddikim, (righteous), Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. About that person it is written, 'From his soul's toil shall come satisfaction; with his knowledge he shall justify the righteous before many.' " (Isaiah 53) These are the immortal words of the Chofetz Chaim.

The passage cited from Isaiah is referring to one who devotes himself to helping the public. In fact, the entire chapter (53:3-12) speaks of this topic. As it is written, "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and aquainted with grief." (This refers to the Jewish nation. Many times the scriptures will refer to the Jewish nation in the singular ——Rashi) "...And suffered sorrows we have caused... but it pleased the L-rd to bruise him" [so that his suffering might atone for others (the gentiles —

Metzudas Dovid)], "...Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

Similar to the Chofetz Chaim's words, Rav Shlomo Alkavetz writes in his **sefer** on Shir Hashirim **Ayeles Ahovim**, (1:3). "One might be tempted to excuse himself from the mitzvah of teaching others because of his own desire to study Torah, for it is vast and who can complete it? He should not worry, for he has been guaranteed that his own crown will not be smaller. Instead, the knowledge comes to him of itself, as a privilege to those who teach Torah. In addition, that which he did not understand before is clear to him now. As Rashi says, "They (the mitzvoth) become clear to him automatically, without his requiring great thought when he learns them." This idea may be found also in the **sefer Panim Yafos** on Chumash, (Kedoshim), on the passage, "Thou shalt rise before the hoary head" (Leviticus 19:32)."

The Talmud (**Nedarim** 55a) gives the following interpretation to the passage, "...and they traveled from Midbar to Matanah, and from Matanah to Nachliel, and from Nachliel to Bamos." (These names are also common Hebrew words, and the Talmud is utilizing this in its interpretation i.e., **midbar** = desert/ **matanah** = gift/ **nachliel** = inheritance of G-d/ **bamos** = heights. "If one makes himself a desert which is open to all, (so one who teaches Torah is open to all), the Torah is given to him as a gift, for it is written, "from Midbar to Matanah." Since the Torah is given to him as a gift, G-d "inherits" him, as it is written, "from Matanah to Nachliel." Since G-d "inherits" him, he rises to greatness, as it is written, "from

Nachliel to Bamos." If he then thinks himself to be elevated above others, G-d casts him down, as it is written, "which overlooks the plains (or valley)." If this man repents, he is elevated once more, as it is written, "Every valley shall be elevated" (Isaiah 40:4)."

The Chasam Sofer comments on this Gemara, "The Torah is given to him as a gift. This person's putting aside his own desires so that he may teach his students enables him to understand more than his intellectual capacity allows. The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him, and he becomes like an ever gushing spring of water." (Others have compared this interaction to two matches that, when struck together, are both ignited).

The "Iyun Yaakov" also speaks of the reward one receives for devoting his time to teaching Torah. He cites a Talmudic passage from Tractate **Temura**, (16a), which reads, "The poor and the ignorant meet toghether: the L-rd enlightens both of them" (Mishlai 29:13). When a student approaches his rebbe and asks of him, "Teach me the Torah;" if the Rebbe fulfills this request then "The L-rd enlightens ..." (In view of what we have just learned, the Rebbe is called the "ignorant" because he still has much to learn himself — Rashi). If the Rebbe refuses, then, "The rich and the poor meet together; G-d is the Maker of them all" (ibid. 22:2) The one whom G-d made wise He now makes ignorant, and the ignorant one becomes wise." Thus writes the Gemara.

On the latter passage Rashi explains, "G-d is the maker of them all, — G-d is making them anew; the rich man, poor, and the poor one, rich."

With the aid of the aforementioned Gemaros and their commentaries, we have been shown that G-d sharpens the

mind of one who devotes part of his time to helping others learn Torah. Instead of losing, he actually gains new insights into Torah, and eventually rises to greatness. If he ignores the pleas of those who beseech him, he will forget even that which he has learned already, G-d forbid.

Rav Yisroel S'tam, a disciple of the Saba of Kelem, became the Rav of a community which was composed mainly of simple Jews. These people had never opened a **sefer**, and did not know even the most basic of Jewish laws. Rebbe S'tam visited the people in their homes to show them how to prepare the oven so that it could be used on the Sabbath. He would have to douse the flames and cover them, which naturally entailed much labor, and invariably got him covered with dirt and ashes. He realized that his congregation would not understand a **halacha** by learning it in the abstract context of the **Shulchan Aruch**, so he carried his responsibility to its limit. He taught them every **halacha** in this manner, and they eventually were performed all mitzvos with the utmost attention paid even to details.

A well known Rosh Hayeshiva, with whom I am personally aquainted, was asked by the director of an orphans' home to teach the children about Judaism. He accepted the offer, and taught these children to daven. To the brighter students he taught Chumash with Rashi. I found it difficult to watch this **gadol**, who would normally be expounding upon the intricasies of the Talmud, involving himself in such a task.

I asked him to explain what he felt while he was teaching these children. He replied, "G-d taught us the Siddur, Chumash and Rashi at Mount Sinai, just as he gave us the Kabbalah and the Talmud."

It is written in the **Zohar**, (Vayikrah 73), "Come and see the first words of Torah that G-d gave us; the aleph-bais that He taught our children. These are words that the nations of the world cannot comprehend and certainly cannot utter. Even the angels and the holy spirits above them are not able to grasp that which we utter in the name of our L-rd."

The Chofetz Chaim lived up to what he wrote on this topic many times. He could not speak enough about the importance of using **talmidei chachomim** as elementary school teachers, and tried to influence schools to make this a regular practice.

The **Sefer Hachasidim** writes (chap. 155), "...and when your son reaches schooling age, be careful to choose a competent and G-d fearing rebbe, so that your son will learn to fear G-d, as it is written, "The fear of G-d is the first step toward wisdom". That is, while teaching your son Chumash, his rebbe must extract the principles of "**yiras shomayim**" (fear of G-d) to be found therein. These include: respect for the Torah and for those who are well-versed in it; that G-d is our provider and He alone gives us sustenance; and that G-d's glory fills the universe. As the child grows, he must teach him about Gan Eden, (the world to come), and Gehennom, (purgatory). He expounds further on this in chapter 304 of **Sefer Hachasidim**.

In the work, **Menucha Ukedusha**(שער התורה"א אות ה), it says, "If the teacher is a G-d—fearing person, he will bring forth the tenets of religion contained within the Chumash, such as:

1) The blessed and successful life that awaits those who serve G-d faithfully;

2) How G-d watches over the righteous lest they become endangered; as Avraham was saved from Nimrod, Avimelech, and Pharaoh; and as Yaakov was saved from Lavan and Shechem; as is indeed the lesson of the events surrounding Joseph's exile in Egypt; and all other such portions of Torah.

"As the child grows further, and he is taught of the punishment that awaits the wicked; the rebbe must explain it with patience and understanding so that he impresses upon his students' hearts. Thus, they will be able to shield themselves from Satan's trickery as they enter their fourteenth year."

The Chofetz Chaim felt this could only be accomplished with a G-d-fearing teacher. (עי"ש ועיין "הדרך הנכונה בהוראת התנ"ך: להגאון ר. אהרן קטלר זצ"ל)

Chapter Six

Rebbe Meir was a wonderful person to be with. He greeted all people with warmth and fondness, as it is written, "...and receive all men cheerfully" (**Avos** 3:16). He greeted all with such a warm countenance that conversation with him penetrated deeply into the listener's heart. He respectfully listened to others before speaking, and they felt him to be genuinely interested in their thoughts.

Occasionally, people would unwittingly call upon Rebbe Meir at an inconvenient time, to tell him their troubles. Rebbe Meir never lost his patience, though, and followed their words intently, even when they began to repeat themselves. Rebbe Meir's humility, and his being a man of principle, enabled many troubled souls to pour out their hearts to him as it is written, "If there is trouble in a

man's heart let him speak it out".

Although he treated his time preciously, and was careful not to waste it in idle speach, he would allow himself to speak at length when advising others, if he felt it to be necessary. His manner of speaking exemplified the **posuk**, "Its ways are pleasant ways, and all its paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17).

It is writen in **Pirkei Avos**, (1:16), "Shammai says, make your study of the Torah a regular habit; say little but do much; and receive all men cheerfully." The commentaters explain that the placement of "Torah study" next to "greeting all men cheerfully" teaches us that even in the midst of Torah study, one must respond to others with a friendly and cheerful greeting. He will find that as a result of his cheerfulness, he is able to study with greater ease. (ב"מדרש שמואל" כתב וכיו"ב "בית לאבות").

I would like to add that "saying little" and "greeting all men cheerfully" are placed in the same Mishna to show us that although one must be careful not to waste his words, he must take time to greet all men properly.

During his last years in Lakewood, many **bochurim** (students) used Rebbe Meir's telephone to make personal calls. They would knock on his door at all hours, to be greeted by this bent figure in a wheelchair with the warmth and hospitality we have inherited from Avraham Avinu. We might have considered it an intrusion on our privacy, but Rebbe Meir loved to help people, and never made it known that they were interrupting him. In fact, Rebbe Meir's door was always open; when he was not at home, he placed a note on the door with a map showing where he could be found.

Rebbe Meir strove to be close with everyone, and

honored every person as though he were a king's son. His love of **b'nai Torah** was one of, "to hug him and kiss him".

Rebbe Meir ignored no one and no creature, for the L-rd created all things with a purpose, as it is writtten, (**Shabbos** 77a), "Rebbe Yehuda said in the name of Rav, all that has been created by G-d, has not been created in vain."

Chapter Seven

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what the L-rd asks of you,it is but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8).

Why is it written, "to love kindness," when the more normal form would be "to do kindness"? The sefer **Ahavas Chesed** (ח"ב פ"א) poses this question, and derives that one must do kindness out of love. That is, one must not feel inconvenienced at all, just as a father will do anything for his son because his love for him is so great. This is how a Jew must be at all times!

Rebbe Meir loved kindness, and helped everyone with joy and happiness.

Rebbe Meir gave charity with a full heart, even when there were many requests in the same day. He treated each solicitor as if he were doing him a favor. The "Chafetz Chaim" draws attention to this point, and said that if people enter a shop and "bother" the shopkeeper with requests for charity or other favors, Heaven forfend that he should consider these things as an intrusion, rather he should look upon it as a stroke of good fortune, and greet

them with as friendly a face as he greets his favoured customers who come to buy in large quantities from him.

What is the reason "to walk humbly with G-d," and "to love kindness," are written together? "To walk humbly etc." is modifying the first half of this passage, meaning that one's kindness must be performed with humility. Indeed, determining whether one posseses humility is a sure method of knowing whether one's act of kindness are motivated by forces other than love for a fellow Jew.

Rebbe Meir once provided me with invaluable assistance in helping publish a **sefer** I had written. When asked if I could mention this in the acknowledgements, Rebbe Meir replied, "In Heaven they know". He felt this way about all of his deeds, and expended much time and effort to conceal them. He often played key roles in his communities' development, but was able to hide that fact through resourceful and often ingenious methods. Fleeing from honor and fame was as important to Rebbe Meir as was improving any other personality trait, so he worked hard at perfecting this **midah** (characteristic).

Rabeinu Yonah writes (שערי תשובה שער ג' נ"ד) "...and one is obliged to think and consider how to help one's friend in proper and correct ways. This is one of the principles of **gemilas chasadim** (kindness), as it is written, "Ointment and perfume rejoice a man's heart: so does the sweetness of a man's friend who gives hearty counsel (Proverbs 27:9)."

We have two questions to ask regarding his choice of words:

1) Has he redundantly stated "to think and consider" (lit. "to think thoughts")?

2) What is the difference in meaning between "proper" and "correct"?

One explnation might be that "thinking" means once or twice, while "thinking thoughts" implies that one is deeply involved in his friend's problem, as one who thinks thoughts of how to alleviate his own difficulties. This also explains why Rabeinu Yonah chose "bring forth" instead of "give", for bringing forth applies to that which must come from deep within the heart.

"Proper" is used when referring to any advide which does no direct harm to the advised, while "correct" indicates that one has considered the possible side effects that would occur if his advice were followed.

Acting this way is not special piety, but rather it is the duty of every Jewish soul. Rabeinu Yonah writes, "...one is obliged..."

Rebbe Meir put thought upon thought into efforts to help those in need of advice. This they actually sensed! Moreover, he also did this for those whom he knew were troubled, but were ashamed to seek his advice.

Occasionally, Rebbe Meir's love of **chesed** showed itself through the veil of humility he had so intricately woven.

Once, a neighbor of Rebbe Meir lost his job and spent many hours worrying about the future of his family, and his ability to support them. Rebbe Meir wanted to help, but did not want to offend this person. He developed a plan in which he would pay this neighbor to "tutor" him, although he did not need it. [This person assumed that it was common for a cripple to pay for a **chavrusa** (learning partner)]. Rebbe Meir thus helped support this man, but more importantly, he helped fill the empty hours that the

man would have spent worrying. They learned together on a regular basis, until the man found another job.

One hot summer day, a student of his came to visit him. Rebbe Meir promptly offered this **bochur** a cold drink. When the **bochur** offered to get the drink in order to spare him the trouble of moving about in the wheelchair, Rebbe Meir responded, "YOU are MY guest, so I must honor you!" He did not allow the student to get the drink.

(A similar story happened with the Chofetz Chaim. A guest once arrived at the Chofetz Chaim's house, when the Chofetz Chaim was elderly and weak. When the visitor saw him straining under the heavy load of sheets and blankets that were to be used for his bed, he offered his assistance. The Chofetz Chaim refused, asking, "Would you think of putting Tefillin on for me?" Just as the mitzvah of Tefillin is better performed without assistance, so too the mitzvah of **gemilas chesed** is the responsibility of the host.Similar to this is a story of an eighty-year-old man in a small town in Eretz Yisrael. During the winter he offered to let some **bochurim** sleep in his home for the night. He did not have enough blankets, so he went to borrow some from a neighbor. The **bochurim** offered their help, to which he replied, "I am strong enough to perform this mitzvah myself..." (ע' מופת הדור פרק י' אות נ"א).

After he subrtacted exactly what he needed to support himself, Rebbe Meir designated the rest for charity. Usually, that amount was more than the Talmudic limit of one-fifth, and often it equalled about one-half of his entire earnings. He based his actions on the opinion of the Ahavas Chesed, who wrote that the limit of one-fifth applies only to one's physical possessions, such as a house or land. It does not apply to one's fixed income. In

addition, if one is actually confronted by beggars, the limit does not apply either (ibid). (Needless to say, this limit does not apply when there is a life in danger).

We have been speaking about this limit only as it applies to charity given to beggars. A person may donate more to support those who are studying Torah. That is the opinion of the **Shita Mekubetzes** (**Kesuvos** 49a). He reasons that this is an investment, since the one donationg receives half the reward of the one learning, as we find with Yissachar and Zevulun.

Rabeinu Yitzchak Elchonon (author of the **Eitz P'ri**) rules that one need not specify that he is supporting him under this condition, for the actual support of Torah is what brings him the reward.

The Chiddah adds that he person receiving charity does not lose half his reward for learning. Instead, G-d takes the reward from a seperate storehouse that is designated for this purpose.

Chapter Eight

Rebbe Meir was of exceptionally noble character. The purity of his heart enabled him to rejoice truly in every friend's good fortune. His generosity became apparent as he carried himself to the limits of his abilities when helping his fellow Jew. When he could not be of direct assistance, Rebbe Meir prayed for that person's success.

He took upon his shoulders the burdens of fellow Jews, and helped carry that load along the confusing and sometimes treacherous paths that present themselves to us in life. He suffered when his friends suffered, and appealed to G-d on their behalf to relieve their distress.

Although Rebbe Meir did not have many personal occasions to rejoice, he shared in others' happiness as if it were his own. Whenever a **bochur** (student) in the yeshiva became engaged, he ran to tell Rebbe Meir, so that he too could share in this **simcha**, (joyous occasion). In addition to a hearty mazel tov, they received a blessing that came from the innermost reaches of Rebbe Meir'sheart. This occurred whenever someone in the yeshiva had occasion to rejoice.

Rebbe Meir made a special trip to Eretz Yisroel, enduring all the hardships of travel, (because he was disabled and needed a wheelchair wherever he went), so that he could participate in the wedding of his Rosh Hayeshiva's son. His presence at the wedding gave much pleasure to the bride and groom, and his efforts to make them happy went beyond normal expectations.

How great and pure was Rebbe Meir's happiness to enable him to feel that way at a time when those surrounding him were more fortunate than he, in health and family status!

When those around him became ill, he would pray for their speedy recovery, and constantly inquired about their state of health.

It is written in the **sefer, Yesod V'shoresh Ha'avodah**, "In this blessing (Birchas Rafaenu) one should pray on behalf of the ill, whether it be one from his household, or an ill person in his city, G-d forbid, even if he is not asked to do so. In this way, he fulfills the commandment, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (Levit. 19:19). He should first pray for the city's ill, and then for his household's as it is written in the Gemara, (**Baba Kama** 92a), "One who

prays for his friend, and he needs the same; he will be answered first." If they are healed, he must think of praise and thanks when closing this blessing; and he should think of the mitzvah to "love thy neighbor..."

Rebbe Meir was grateful to those who helped him, even if only in the smallest way, and thanked them all with equal sincerity! Occasionally, when Rebbe Meir needed the assistance of others, (to climb stairs, as in the Lakewood yeshiva where there is no elevator, or when going to the mikvah), he did not take their help for granted, but thanked them with his full heart. He did not wish to offend anyone, so he never let it be known if they were handling his wheelchair too roughly, (see Chapter One).

He remembered others' acts of kindness toward him, and sought many ways to show his appreciation. Many found that even after decades had passed, Rebbe Meir had not forgotten their deeds and immediately seized upon an opportunity to repay them.

Rebbe Meir trained himself to function from a wheelchair, so that he would not be a burden to others. He did not allow them to help, unless it was absolutely necessary, (i.e. climbing stairs, mikvah, etc.). Ne never asked anyone for help, and accepted it only when they insisted. He prayed to the L-rd to provide him with all his needs.

In fact, Rebbe Meir rarely needed assistance from anyone. He shopped and cooked by himself for both weekdays and Shabbos. He commuted to the synagogue as well as to his store, without help. When traveling alone by taxi, he would instruct the driver how to get him in and out of the taxi with his wheelchair. In this manner, Rebbe

Meir was able to travel without needing a companion to assist him.

Once, during a fierce winter storm, Rebbe Meir was to attend a family gathering at his brother's home. Snow was falling heavily, and travel conditions had greatly deteriorated. Very few vehicles were on the road during this storm. Rebbe Meir was the only member of the family to show up.

He never became angry, and was never bitter toward anyone or anything; not once was he heard to sigh! Rebbe Meir accepted all that happened as Divine judgment. Such was Rebbe Meir's spiritual acheivement!

It is written in the **sefer Tomer Devorah**,(פ"א ד.), "All Jewish souls are united as one body, every Jew has part of his fellow Jew in himself. This is the reason why it is greater when a group of Jews perform a mitzvah than when an individual does, as they are one body... and that is why 'All Jews are bondsman for each other,' since each one contains a part of the other. When one Jew commits a sin, it effects that part of his fellow Jew. It is because of that part that every Jew is responsible for his friend's actions. Therefore we are all relatives, and we must find joy in seeing our neighbors succeed, and we must help them toward that end. One must respect others as he respects himself, for they are one and the same." He continues, "For this reason, we have been commanded to 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' (Levit. 19:18). One must protect his friend's name as he would his own; he should not speak negatively of him, nor should he let others defame him. We must follow the ways of the Holy One Blessed be He; for just as He does not want his nation's name defiled, he similiarly does not wish to see them

suffer since He is close to them, so we must feel about our brethren."

The Talmud Yerushalmi, (נדרים פ"ט לב. ד.), discusses the topic of Jewish oneness. The Sma'g quotes this Yerushalmi in his explanation of the mitzvos (מצות עשה ט'). The Yerushalmi states, "It is written, "You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge against the children of your people" (Levit. 19:18). How is this mitzvah performed? If, while he was choppping meat the knife slipped and cut his hand, would he then cut the other hand? The commentary P'nai Moshe, (ibid), explains, "If one cut his hand accidentally, would he cut the hand that held the knife as revenge? Similarly, one Jew must not strike another in revenge." The **Korban Aida**, (ibid.), comments, "Since all Jews are one body, it is logical that he may not strike his brother in revenge, for he is actually harming himself." (ס. שמירת הלשון שער התבונה פרק ו).

The **sefer Yesod V'shoresh Ha'avodah**, (שער הגדול פרק כ'), discusses the mitzvos, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and, "Thou shalt judge thy neighbor with fairness" (Levit. 30:15). He writes, "Both commandments are stated in the portion of the Torah that begins, 'Thou shalt be a holy nation,' for when these mitzvos are performed diligently, one will certainly acheive such spiritual greatness that he may be called holy. The diligence required is to love one's friend with his entire physical and spiritual being, under any circumstances. That is, just as a person is happy when G-d shines upon him with kindness, so must he rejoice in the good fortune of his neighbor. Also, one must share in his friend's sorrows as if they were his own, G-d forbid.

"In practice, he must treat his friend's wishes as his own, and he must not do anything that might infringe

upon those wishes. This is the intention of our Creator, may His name be blessed and glorified, in His commanding us to 'Love thy neighbor as thyself." (In his last testimony he writes (ס. מ"ה) that this mitzvah also applies to small favors such as helping one's friend change some currency, and similar little acts of kindness; one shoud never be hesitant when requested by his fellow man even for smaller acts of assistance.

He continues, "The commandment to judge our neighbors fairly requires that we interpret our neighbors' actions as well intended, even when this is not the logical assumption.

"These two mitzvos can be observed at any time. The mitzvah 'Love thy neighbor,' can be fulfilled both physically and mentally. Physically, one can actually do a favor for his friend, and mentally, one can rejoice upon hearing of or seeing his neighbor's good fortune. If he does this with a full heart he fulfills the mitzvah of 'Love thy neighbor...' The opposite holds true as well, G-d forbid. We see then, that one can fulfill this mitzvah at any time, even when he is in the bathhouse or in any unclean place. Similarly, one can 'Judge thy neighbor' by merely thinking about him, which can be done in an unclean place, as opposed to other mitzvos which requires clean places befitting their holiness. These mitzvos can be performed on Shabbos and Yom Tov as well."

We now understand the importance of being closely associated with our fellow Jews, and how much we must love them. Those who were fortunate enough to be close to Rebbe Meir, effected the mitzvah of aiding scholars by allowing him to fulfill the mitzvos of "Love thy neighbor," and "Judge thy neighbor".

Chapter Nine

Rebbe Meir sought to protect Klal Yisroel, (the Jewish nation) by accumulating mitzvos on their behalf.

The Chazon Ish writes,(אגרות חזון איש ח"א ריי"א), "One must strengthen himself in Torah study in order to atone for all Jews as well as for himself. This is more desirable than fasting and the like. It is self-understood that one should study in order to fulfill. That is, he should learn in order to observe the prohibitive commandments that man commonly treads upon, especially those governing the actions between man and his fellow. One must be particularly careful not to offend his neighbor, even lightheartedly, and even if he will feel hurt for only one second. There is a prohibition against this, as it is written in the Chapter Hazahav.

He constantly prayed for the Redemption and included all Jews, wherever they might be, in his thoughts, when reciting the blessing of "Sound the great Shofar," (the tenth blessing in the **Shemoneh Esrei**). He thought even of those not in danger, although he focused his attention on those who were in lands that threatened their physical and spiritual well-being, where people are sent to deserted places to live in suffering. In these places, Jews are not permitted to practice their religion. Rebbe Meir was emotionally moved every time he discussed their plight.

When reciting this blessing, he prayed also for the return of the ten tribes, and for the fulfillment of the prophecy, "And they shall know that I am G-d, their G-d who caused them to be led into captivity among the nations: but I have gathered them unto their land, and

have left none of them there any more" (Ezekiel 39:28). Rashi says, "...that I will not leave even one of them in exile."

He recognized the fact that any sin eventually contributed to the downfall of the Jewish people, G-d forbid. It is said in the holy books that one must take account of his sins when tragedy or disaster befalls the world. He must look hard in order to find this connection, for one does not readily see a direct relationship between his actions and world events. It is a fact, though, that he is considered an indirect cause of damage incured by others, and he will be brought to judgment for it. It is written in the **sefer Nefesh Hachaim**, "and if, G-d forbid, disaster strikes one person or a whole nation; he is the cause, may the Merciful and Blessed spare us."

This is not to be considered saintliness, for it is a rule of conduct that has been formulated in the Talmud. As it is written (**Kedushin** 40b), "The Rabbis learned that one must imagine that his deeds have been placed on a scale, that is balanced by an equal number of sins and merits. If he does one mitzvah, happy is he for he has tipped the scale in his favor. If he commits one sin, woe be unto him for he has brought guilt upon himself. As it is written, "...but one sinner shall destroy much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18). For a single sin, much good is taken from him. Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon said, "Since the world is judged by its majority, (which is affected by even one person), and an individual is judged according to the majority of his deeds, whether good or evil; if he does one mitzvah, happy is he for he has vindicated himself and the world, if he commits one sin, woe to him for he has brought guilt upon himself and the world. As it is written,

"...but one sinner shall destroy much good." (Ecclesiastes Chap. 9). For his single sin, much good is taken from the world as well as from himself."

Similarly, the Rambam (Maimonides), rules, one must see the world and himself as being half innocent and half guilty. If he commits one sin, he has weighed the scale in favor of all, and brings upon them redemption and protection. As it is written, "The righteous are the pillars of the world," that is, one's righteous acts uphold the world and protect it. (The Rambam has ruled according to both opinions in the aforementioned Talmud).

Elsewhere in the Talmud (**Baba Basra** 78b) it is written, "What is meant by the passage, 'Therefore the rulers (in context translated "those who speak in parables") say, "let us go to Cheshbon"? (Num. 21:27) The rulers over their evil inclination say 'Let us come and compute the world's account, the loss entailed by the performance of a mitzvah, against the gain that one secures through it, and the gain that one acquires through a transgression against the loss that it entails..." (**Cheshbon** is also a Hebrew word meaning "account"). The **Iyun Yaakov** explains that taking the "world's account" means one must imagine that he bears responsibility for the entire world, for better or for worse, G-d forbid.

It is especially important during the Ten Days of Penitence that one realize the awesome responsibility placed upon him, for with one act he can have the world inscribed for a rich and blessed year in spiritual and physical acheivement; or vice versa, he can bring destruction to the world, G-d forbid. Therefore, a person must awaken himself through penitence; he must depart

from his evil ways and his improper thoughts. One must increase the amount of charity he gives, the amount of Torah he studies, and the amount of mitzvos he performs in general. (As the Rambam writes in the Laws of Penitence). These are the words of the **Eved Hamelech**, Proverbs 6:25).

We conclude that the way to help our fellow Jews most effectively is through increased efforts in Torah study and the performance of mitzvos.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato wrote that during his lifetime a heavenly decree calling for the destruction of certain communities was issued because of their laxity in Torah study while pursuing worldly pleasures instead. (They had no other sins, such as desecration of the Sabbath, or partaking of non-kosher foods, or other transgressions which would incur death.) He was shown the terrible fate awaiting these Jews, and was inspired to immerse his entire being in Torah study, so that the decree might be nullified. He arranged with a group of men to learn continuously from dawn to dusk in the following manner: Immediatedly after the morning service, one man would remain to learn for a designated period of time, after which the second person would arrive to take his place. The second continued until the third arrived, and so on. In this manner, Torah emanated from the Beis Medrash without interruption. During this "period", each person could not be disturbed under any circumstances, as though he were saying the **Shemoneh Esrei**. This was done on behalf of all Jews every day. The Ramchal (Rabbi Luzzato) supports this idea with a **Zohar** which states, (פ. ויצא ד. קנאה), "All the while that this sound (of Torah) does not stop, G-d is able to rule; therefore the Torah shall never

cease."It is also written there, "While the scholars are studying, evil spirits cannot harm them. Therefore, the proper way to nullify decrees is to have all Jews channel their strength into Torah study." (This **Zohar** will be brought in its entirety further on).

Rabbi Luzzato ends his letter with a request for all Jewish communities to adopt this program. He writes, "We know that G-d has chosen this as a way to prevent all evil decrees, especially so that it should be a fortress against this terrible and cursed decree which now threatens them, G-d help us. Let not the Jewish leaders cast this behind them, for if I had the strength, I would personally arrange such a group in every community. Instead, let each wise man heed my advice and he shall be rewarded in Heaven for doing so since there is nothing more beneficial to Klal Yisroel. Each person may institute this program in his community, for it is not difficult, and, we have been succesful. In addition, we have organized many other such groups for chumash, halacha, etc."

How great is the strength of one person's study of Torah!

Indeed this was done in the great yeshivos during times of danger. They arranged to have ten **bochurim** studying Torah around the clock, until the danger had passed.

Let us quote the **Zohar** memorized in part by the Ramchal. "Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Chizkiya were sitting under the trees of S'dei Ono. Rabbi Chiya fell asleep. The prophet Eliyahu appeared to him and said, 'I have come to warn you that Jerusalem and all the scholarly cities are close to destruction, and that Satan has already received

permission for this. He will be allowed to take the lives of the world's leaders as well. I have come to forewarn you, that you may inform the scholars; perhaps they can prevent the destruction of Jerusalem. While there is Torah in the city it shall stand, for the Torah is a tree of life which shelters it. That tree shall not desert her (Jerusalem) while people are studying Torah. If Torah ceases on earth, the tree of life will depart. Therefore, when the scholars are studying Torah, the evil spirits cannot harm them, for it is written, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, (Bereshis 27:22)." "The voice of Jacob" — is Torah; that is, while there is the sound of Torah study, its voice rules and succeeds. Therefore, do not cease to study.' When Rabbi Chiya awakened and told the scholars of his city about this, Rabbi Yayse replied, 'We are all aware of it and it is the truth. It is written, "If G-d does not watch over the city, the watchman sits idly". G-d's watching over the city is dependent upon those who study Torah, so it is in their hands to uphold the city. It is not the physically strong who will prevent the city's destruction. That which is written, "If G-d does not watch over the city," means: If they do not study Torah the L-rd removes his protection and "...the guardians sit idly" — even if they are the strongest men in the world, they will be powerless to save the city."

It is mentioned in the Talmud Yerushalmi on Tractate **Ta'anis**, that the men of Betar were strong enough to uproot a tree with their bare hands while riding a horse. Only while Rebbe Elazar Hamodaie was praying for the city's peace were the Romans unable to conquer it. When Ben Kuzibah killed Rebbe Elazar, the Romans instantly gained entrance into the city where they proceeded to

slaughter its inhabitants. A voice from heaven cried out, "You have murdered Rebbe Elazar, the strength of the Jewish people and their right hand; therefore, let the arms of this man dry up and let his right hand go limp." The **Korban Aida** (ibid.) explains, "Rebbe Elazar, the strength of the Jewish people" — for he upheld them through his prayers. "Their right hand" — With the light of his Torah study **they** saw light.

Behold the greatness of one Jew! With his prayer and Torah study he can prevent a holocaust!

Similarly, it is written in Tractate **Makkos** (10a), "Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said, 'What is the meaning of the verse, 'Our feet were standing in your gates, O, Jerusalem'? We were able to stand up against our enemies because we were studying Torah" ("in your gates O Jerusalem" is read as a seperate sentence. "Gates" is homiletically referred to the "Gates of Learning").

In the **Zohar** it is written. "Thy right hand, O L-rd,' — this refers to the Torah. It is because of this , '...thy right hand, O L-rd, crushes the enemy.' (For right-hand as reference to Torah Deut. 33:2) There is nothing in this world that can break the power of the nations except for Jews studying Torah,' for thy right hand shall overpower and break their source of strength."

Chapter Ten

Rebbe Meir evaluated himself constantly. When he learned some new **halacha**, (law), or **mussar**, (ethics), he would relate it to himself and then fulfill that new **halacha**. He found something to learn in everyone, and we may say accurately that he was a true **mevakesh** (searcher). Rebbe Meir prayed for spiritual uplift as we

pray for bread.

He removed himself from the "easy life", and tried constantly to keep himself busy. He never napped during the day and he learned constantly without interruption.

He though constantly of G-d's omnipresence, as it is written, "The L-rd is near to me constantly".

He mourned the destruction of the Temple, and recited the **Tikun Chatzos**, (midnight lament), with tears.

Rebbe Meir observed each **halacha** with its many nuances. As we know, there are many facets of a law which are not actually written out in the **Shulchan Aruch**. Rav Yisroel of Salant, would say, "Although there are two volumes to **Choshen Mishpat** (laws dealing with the interaction of men, i.e. torts), my **Choshen Mishpat** comprises many more volumes." He was referring to the many differentiations and individual cases not mentioned specifically in the **Shulchan Aruch**.

Rebbe Meir said, "Just as there is a tithe of one-tenth of a man's earnings, so he must devote one-tenth of his life to Torah study. He must spend seven consecutive years studying the Torah on a full time basis. That is, when he reaches the age of sixty-three he must sanctify his last seven years to Torah study. As it is written, 'His years are seventy,' (Psalms 90:10), and 'if not now, when?' If the L-rd grants him more than this amount, certainly he must devote those years to Torah."

During his stay in the Lakewood yeshiva, he became part of an elite group whose participants accepted upon themselves very high standards of **avodas Hashem**, (service to G-d). The authour was fortunate enough to be one of the group's founders and avid supporters. Rebbe Meir fulfilled all that he resolved to do!

Among the resolutions adopted by this group were:
1) To fine oneself more for wasting time than for other sins;
2) To write down one's new insights on Torah daily;
3) To learn before retiring at night so that one would sleep with Torah thoughts on his mind;
4) To be thinking about Torah constantly;
5) To remind oneself regularly of the **chazal** "He who does not learn must die;
6) To study Torah in a special manner. That is, to learn Torah on Friday afternoon, Motzei Shabbos, and during the afternoon breaks, (when most people are not usually learning);
7) To fulfill the mitzvos of learning Torah, "when you are on a journey, when you lie down and when you rise up," (Deuteronomy 6:7);
8) Every tenth day (from Yom Kippur) shall be treated with special sanctity;
9) To say the prayer **Aleinu** with care, that is, not to recite it hurriedly in one's haste to return home from the synagogue;
10) To review the forty-eight ways through which Torah is acquired (and to memorize them), to work at a different one each week and to keep a record of new insights relating to this.

Chapter Eleven

In the previous chapter, we discussed the resolutions adopted by an elite group of **bochurim** in the Lakewood yeshiva. One of these resolutions was to say the prayer of **Aleinu** with the utmost care. The objective here was for each member to concentrate particularly on the meaning

of this prayer since it comes at the end of the services when people are most likely to be hurrying on their way and they do not give it the attention it warrants. This prayer has special importance, as we will discuss in the next chapter. The Rama'h writes, "After the **Shemoneh Esrei**, the prayer of **Aleinu Leshabeach** is recited in a standing position, and one must be careful to say it attentively."

It is written in **Sefer Chasidim**, "A person should seek to fulfill those mitzvos which have been ignored by the general populace. Just as the reward for **meis mitzvah** (tending to a body which has no one to care for it) is much greater than for one who merely aids others in the burial of a corpse, so the reward for upholding those 'forgotten' mitzvos is accordingly greater."

We can use this idea from **Sefer Chasidim** to reason that the reward for studying Torah when most people are not, is very large indeed. (See resolution six in chapter ten).

Similarly, just as the principle mitzvah of charity is to prevent one's fellow Jew from becoming impoverished, so must one take steps to prevent a commandment in the Torah from becoming a "**meis mitzvah**", G-d forbid.

Also, one must realize his duty to boost his friend's **yiras shomayim** when he is having a difficult time, so that he does not weaken and succumb to his **Yetzer Hora**, G-d forbid.

There are many more ways to uphold mitzvos which have been ignored by others. I have only mentioned a few here.

Regarding the resolution to study on Motzei Shabbos, during breaks, etc., when others are not involved in Torah

study ——— aside from the reason cited by the **Sefer Chasidim**, (and certainly in our times the mitzvah of learning Torah in general is occasionally found to be a "**meis mitzvah**"), there is the additional fact that one upholds the world's existence as we find mentioned in the **sefer, Nefesh Hachaim** (written by Rav Chaim of Volozin). It is written there, "...and it is undoubtedly true, that were the world void of our physical and mental involvement in Torah for even one moment, G-d forbid, at that moment both the 'upper' and 'lower' worlds would be destroyed and all would return to a state of void and nothingness." The world's existence is proof to us that someone is studying Torah at any given moment. Even when just one person is learning while the entire world remains idle; it is in that person's merit that the universe continues to exist. As the **Ruach Chaim** (written by the same author) on Ethics of the Fathers states, "...in addition, the entire world's existence is worthwhile for his sake alone."

A commentary on the aforementioned **Sefer Chasidim** writes, "...and I have heard of one Rabbi who would study Torah for a major part of Purim night. He said, 'On this night, everyone is eating, drinking, and involved in the festivities of the day, with no one left to study Torah. I shall learn, and my Torah will be recognized berofe G-d."

In our time, there was a Rosh Hayeshiva who had a "**mishmar** , (lit. — a patrol or watch; commonly used to denote a fixed period of learning usually an entire night) on Motzei Shabbos and Motzei Yom Kippur. He said, "Because of the fast, many people are weak and unable to learn, therefore I must study Torah."

For this reason, a **Mashgiach** in the previous generation arranged to learn with his disciples for the entire day Erev Pesach.

Chapter Twelve

I will quote a few **seforim** which discuss the significance of the prayer, "**Aleinu Leshabeach.**"

This anciant prayer was written by Joshua during his conquest of Jericho. The Chiddah quotes Rav Hai Gaon who held that Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai placed this prayer after the **Shemoneh Esrei**; he does not dispute that Joshua was its author. The men of the Great Assembly included this prayer in the Musaf services for Rosh Hashana.

The Chiddah writes more on this in his **sefer, Machzik Bracha**. He states, "I have found a handwritten document from Rabbenu Hai Gaon in which he says, 'Joshua formulated the prayer **Aleinu** after conquering Eretz Yisroel. After the destruction of the temple, Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted that this prayer be said every day! The Talmud in tractate Eruvin, states: 'It has been established that Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai decreed that the praises of the Perfect One be said at the conclusion of our prayers. One must recite this prayer attentively, and should be wrapped in his talis, for there is no higher praise to our creator than this prayer. The Gaon continues at length, discussing the origins of this prayer. I have been unable to locate the Talmud in Eruvin that was quoted by the Gaon."

It is written in the **sefer Sha'ar Hechatzer** that Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted that this prayer be said each day because of one's obligation to believe in G-d.

Where do we find this (belief in G-d) in **Aleinu**? We find it in the verse, 'You shall know this day, and reflect in your heart, that it is the L-rd who is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth beneath; there is none else,"

Rav Hai Gaon continues, "We have been taught to recite these praises to G-d; and we must bow with reverence, fear, zeal, and with our heads covered; for all the heavenly bodies and the L-rd stand in His palace and answer, 'Happy is the nation that is so situated; happy is the nation whose G-d is the L-rd; happy is he whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the paths (Heb. Messilos).' What is meant by 'in whose heart are the paths? "Paths" is another expression for praises of G-d, as it is written: "Extol (Heb. Solu, of the same root as Mesilos) he who rides on the Aravoth by his Name Jah, and sing praises in His presence."

We find in the **sefer, Seder Hayom**, "It contains many deep meanings and its power is great, ...Joshua wrote this when he captured Jericho. He recited this prayer seven times, forwards and backwards, and the seven walls of Jericho fell. It will help prevent imminent dangers when it is recited forwards and backwards."

(It should be pointed out here, that when reciting the prayer backwards, one must be very careful how one divides up the words and the clauses, in order that G-d forbid, one should not utter the very reverse of what one wishes to say. For instance, in the Benediction over the New Moon many have the custom to say the verse "may terror and dread fall upon them, by the might of Your Arm, may they become still as a stone" (Song of Red Sea) forwards and backwards. One should pause a bit after the words "as-a-stone may-they-become-still" and then

continue "Your-Arm" etc., so as not to utter something that could be vaguely constructed as blasphemous.)

In the **Sha'ar Hakavonos**, the Ar'i describes the immense power that **Aleinu Leshabeach** possesses. He further explains that this **tefillah**, (prayer), is said after the servies because it protects the fruits of our prayers in that it humbles and breaks the evil spirits that try to hold back the wealth of blessings sent to us by G-d in answer to our prayers.

I will now quote the Ya'avetz on this topic. "These words are said in the fourth blessing of the Musaf services for Rosh Hashana [known as 'Malchiyoth' or 'kingship' — a blessing devoted to extolling G-d as king of the world] because it abounds with praises and glorifications of G-d. One must say this prayer with total concentration, aloud, and while standing. A hint to this is that the numerical value of the word **Aleinu**, is numerically equivalent to the word **"Ume'umed"** — "and standing" [6+50+10+30+70 = 166; 4+40+6+70+40+6 = 166].

Take note, that after the 'worlds' have received their nourishment and descend to provide their 'family' with the sustenance they long for, we fear that the spirits will attempt to take hold of those blessings. That is why we say this prayer, because it contains denigrating references which negate the power of these spirits. That is, by saying **Aleinu**, we encircle ourselves with a Divine light that shields us from the damage inflicted by the **chitzonim**. This light blinds them so that they cannot draw nourishment from our holiness. At first, we announce our praises of the Holy One Blessed be He to all; which in turn brings the protective light around us. Through our praises of G-d and the disparagement of these spirits, they are humbled..."

It is written in the **sefer, Yesod V'shoresh Ha'avodah** that one who cannot pray with the Ar'i z'l's meditations, may simply recite **Aleinu Leshabeach** with deep affection for G-d. In this manner, he too can magnify the praises of G-d so that His Name be glorified throughout the universe; and the spirits will be broken and humbled.

The **Yesod V'shoresh Ha'avodah** continues, "When saying the words, 'And all mankind will call upon you, and all the wicked of the earth will be turned to thee,' he must hope for the arrival of that holy day when all people, from the desert nomad to kings and queens, will recognize our G-d as the true Master of the universe and that, 'It is the L-rd our G-d who is in the heavens above and on the earth beneath; there is none else.' 'May they bow and prostrate themselves before Thee... and give honor to Your glorious Name."

The Ar'i z'l adds, "Particularly, the passage, 'and the L-rd shall be One and His Name One' should be said with great joy.

Mourners, if they take longer to complete **Aleinu**, than the rest of the congregation, may pause between the words **Ein Od** and **Al Kein** to recite the **Kaddish** with the congregation, as they are two seperate thoughts.

A student at the Chazon Ish's yeshiva, who was in mourning for his father, requested to pray at a minyan other than the yeshiva's. There were several **chiyuvim** (mourners having preference over others to lead the services), in the yeshiva, and this **bochur** was unable to lead the services, nor was he able to recite the **Kaddish** alone but could only do so together with others. He felt that he would be better helping his father's soul by

praying at a minyan where he would be able to lead the services. The Chazon Ish did not allow this, saying, "A properly said **Shemoneh Esrei** is the greatest help you can provide your father's soul. Only in yeshiva is it possible to pray with such concentration."

It has been written many times that a child's spiritual acheivement in Torah and Mussar is intrinsic in helping his parents' souls gain closeness to G-d. That person also fulfills the commandment, "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother (Exodus 20:12)", as explained in the **Zohar** "One is obligated to honor his father, as it is written, "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12), this being with food and drink. Although this is only possible when they are alive, one is dutybound to treat them with more respect after their passing. If this son strays to the path of evil, certainly he shames his father. If he follows the proper path, he brings praises to his father in this world (where others will praise his name) and in the world above (where G-d will praise him). The L-rd will be kind to him (the father) and surely seat him in His palace."

The Sha'ar Hechatzeir writes, "This prayer must be said with intense concentration, while standing; and with a covered head, for there is no prayer which is greater praise than this. These are the words of our Gaonim which may be found in the work, **Ma'or V'shemesh**.

"Let this be an open admonishment to those who know of days past when they hastily said **Aleinu**, as though they were walking on hot coals; half of it in shul and the other half outside; swallowing the words without regard for their meaning.

"This is obviously the trickery of Satan, for it is his

technique to 'take' the best portion. He knows that this prayer is among the holiest, for its praises rise above all others in their magnificence. He has set his trap here to sway the hearts of those who say this prayer in great haste, and bless the moment they finish.

"We are all brothers, so heed my advide, accept this admonishment, and recite **Aleinu** as carefully as one counting gems. Dwell upon, concentrate, and understand the meaning of these words that inspire the mind, create new ideas, and stir man to serve G-d with a strong will. May G-d deem us worthy of fulfilling his commandments with a pure heart, Amen." These are the words of the Sha'ar Hechatzeir.

Chapter Thirteen

I have previously mentioned that Rebbe Meir was part of an elite group of **bochurim** who took upon themselves a higher level of service to G-d. One of the resolutions was to fulfill the mitzvah of learning Torah while traveling. The mitzvah of learning "when you are on a journey," is seperate from the constant duty to learn Torah, as the Sh'lah writes, "The traveler is obligated to study Torah in the manner described by the Mishna, 'A traveler who interrupts his studies to admire the splendor of G-d's creation saying, "See how beautiful this tree is!" deserves to die.' It is written in the Talmud 'Two scholars who walk together and fail to speak Torah incur death.'

Therefore one's thought must not stray from Torah, even while he is in transit. It is best to commit several portions of his studies to memory so that he will not encounter difficulty in fulfilling this mitzvah."

The **Zohar Chadash** to Ruth writes, Rabbi Chiya began his discourse and said: "The way of the righteous is like a glowing light, shining ever more brightly as the day develops." If someone is going on a journey, he should always have someone next to him with whom he can converse in words of Torah. This is what the verse refers to when it speaks of the "way of the righteous", because they continually meditate in Torah as they walk along, and Torah is compared to light, as it is written "and the Torah is a light". What does the verse refer to with the words "as the day develops" (lit. "till the day be established")? Till the Shechinah (the Divine Presence) associates Itself with him, and does not depart from him, as it has been taught "in every place where My name is mentioned (lit. "where I cause my name to be mentioned") here I will come to you and bless you."

He continues, "Fortunate are the **bna'i Yisroel** who are devoted to G-d's laws, whether at home or away; when retiring or awakening; as they have been commanded, 'When you lie down and when you rise up.' The Jewish people shall adorn their souls with the radiant holiness of Torah and G-d will be one with them, as it is written, (Deut. 4:4), 'And ye that did cleave unto the L-rd your G-d, are alive, every one of you, this day.' Those who cling to G-d never suffer; therefore, one must not be without Torah for even one minute."

We see from these words that, at the very least, one must refrain from idle chatter and from reading profane materials while traveling; certainly he must beware of reading that which is forbidden, for its severity is doubled then.

It is written in **Aliyos Eliyahu** that the Vilna Gaon

implored those standing before him to memorize at least one tractate which they could review while traveling, or whenever they found themselves without light.

In the essay "**Darka shel Torah**, it is written, "It is extremely important for every **ben-Torah** to have one Gemara memorized, or at least several chapters of Mishna, because one often finds himself without a **sefer**, particularly when he is traveling."

The mitzvah of Torah study not only applies to one who is in the **Bais Medrash** (study hall), and the mitzvah to study while travelling applies not only to those with a strong power of concentration. Everyone is included, and it may be fulfilled simply by reviewing by rote, that which one has already learned.

The Chofetz Chaim has alerted us to this in his work, **Shem Olam**. He writes, "One who is accustomed to in-depth study and finds himself in a situation where this is impossible, must turn to something easier, such as **Ein Yaakov**."

Currently, there is a plethora of pocket-sized **seforim** available to the **ben-Torah**, enabling him to learn Torah at all times.

Rebbe Meir carried a **sefer** with him wherever he went.

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, zt'l, the Mashgiach of Mir suggested that before his departure, a person should outline that which he will study on his trip. Without such a plan, he may become preoccupied with his journey.

There was a certain person who used to prepare something from each of the three areas of Torah, which are: Chumash, Medrash, and Talmud, whenever he went

on a journey. Thus, he was able to engage anyone in Torah discussion, regardless of their learning capacity.

Despite the **Sh'lah** and **Zohar** quoted above, one may still find times when it is impossible to learn. He must not be lax, however, and should seize upon the opportunities to learn as they arise, for each word of Torah is regarded as a separate mitzvah.

Let us conclude by quoting from the essay "**Darka shel Torah**" cited above, "Do not regard five minutes of your time as worthless, for in that time one can read one thousand words. Since each word is a separate mitzvah, as the Gaon of Vilna writes, one can obtain an additional thousand mitzvos!" (I will explain the method for computing this in the next chapter).

Chapter Fourteen

It is written in the **P'ninei Yam**, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue'. This may be taken in its literal sense, for it has been written in the sacred works that each word of Torah learned is regarded as another mitzvah performed. Conversely, each word of forbidden speech is considered as a separate sin. Whether a person is judged for life or death is determined by the majority of these two amounts. Uncontrolled, the majority of a person's words are sinful, for in fifteen minutes a person can speak three thousand words of **lashon hara** (slanderous speech). The Chofetz Chaim tested himself and found that he could speak two hundred words per minute. (One rebbe had his students read the first Mishnah in Peah, which contains exactly fifty words. They found it could be read four times in one minute.

According to these calculations, one who studies Torah for thirty seconds acquires one hundred mitzvos, in fifteen seconds he performs fifty. How precious a few seconds can be!!

In summary, if one is unable to learn for the entire length of his journey, he must utilize even seconds of free time to study Torah. After a period of months, these free moments of Torah study will accumulate to millions of mitzvos! Similarly, if wasted, these seconds of **bitul Torah** will be added to his sins.

I will now give three examples to show how the ideas we have just discussed were employed.

A) A chassidic Rebbe kept a **Tehillim** (book of Psalms) nearby when holding audience with the public. He read from it between the exit of one person and the next one's arrival.

B) One Rosh Yeshiva sat with an open Gemara while receiving visitors. Several of his closer students asked how it was possible to learn where there were many people waiting to see him. He replied, "If there should be a lapse between visitors, I will be ready to take advantage of it."

C) There was a barber who learned between haircuts. Often, a customer would enter the shop just as he washed his hands to sit down and learn. Nevertheless, he never got disheartened and said "Since I am interrupted so often, why should I trouble myself to learn for such a negligible amount of time?"

Chapter Fifteen

The elite group discussed in chapter ten also resolved "to review and memorize the forty-eight ways through which Torah is acquired, to work at a different one each

week, and to keep a record of new insights relating to this. The group's intention was that each memeber should develop a detailed, working knowledge of the forty-eight types of acquisition described by the Mishna.

Rav Aron Kotler zt'l said, "Both physical property and Torah have legal requirements for ownership. Just as that which apparently belongs to someone does not, without legal transaction, so too that which one seemingly learns is not his if he does not use the "prescribed" forty-eight ways. The more of these ways he employs, the stronger, his ownership.

Rebbe Meir integrated these forty-eight traits into his Torah study. This is surely a reason for his success, as he was accomplished in all areas of Torah.

These are the forty-eight ways (Ethics of the Fathers, 6:6):

1) Audible study
2) Distinct pronunciation
3) Understanding of the heart
4) Discernment of the heart
5) Awe
6) Reverence
7) Meekness
8) Cheerfulness
9) Ministering to the sages
10) Attaching oneself to colleagues
11) Discussion with pupils
12) Sedateness
13) Knowledge of the Scripture and of the Mishna
14) Moderation in business
15) Moderation in intercourse with the world
16) Moderation in pleasure

17) Moderation in sleep
18) Moderation in conversation
19) Moderation in laughter
20) Patience
21) A good heart
22) Faith in the wise
23) Resignation under affliction
24) Recognising one's place
25) Rejoicing in one's portion
26) Putting a fence to one's words
27) Claiming no merit for oneself
28) Being loved
29) Loving the All-present
30) Loving mankind
31) Loving just courses
32) Loving rectitude and reproof
33) Keeping oneself far from honour
34) Not boasting of one's learning
35) Not delighting in giving decisions
36) Bearing the yoke with one's fellow
37) Judging him favorably
38) Leading him to truth
39) Leading him to peace
40) Being composed in one's study
41) Asking
42) Answering
43) Hearing and adding thereto
44) Learning with the object of teaching
45) Learning with the object of practising
46) Making one's master wiser
47) Fixing attention upon his discourse
48) Reporting a thing in the name of the one who said it.

During Sefiras Haomer (the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuos) a person should take one trait to work at each day. For example, on the first day he should improve himself through diligent Torah study. The second day, he should devote to the following Proverb, (Proverbs 2:2), "Incline thine ear to wisdom," as well as, "...and thou wilt give ear to His commandments.(Exodus 15:26)." (Rashi explains, "Consider all the details carefully"). He should also consider the passage, (Deut. 32:46), "Set your heart unto all the words wherewith I testify against you this day..." As the Sifri explains (ibid.) "A person must have his eyes, his heart, and his ears directed toward the Torah."

On the third day he should work on audible recitation, etc.

On Erev Shavous, (day 49) he should review the Mishna in its entirety, and with G-d's help, acquire the Torah anew on Shavuos.

Chapter Sixteen

At the age of sixty-four, Rebbe Meir closed his thriving business and entered the Lakewood yeshiva. Despite his age and physical condition, Rebbe Meir quickly merged into the mainstream of the yeshiva. His good nature and strong desire to learn lifted all barriers between the other talmidim and himself. They viewed him as an integral part of the yeshiva, and many sought with envy to be his chavrusa (learning partner).

The yeshiva greatly benefitted from Rebbe Meir's presence. His total absorption in Torah study served as a guiding force for all those around him. Upon meeting

Rebbe Meir, one could not help but ask, "What have I accomplished? Why haven't I served G-d with all that He has given me?!"

Besides his general influence, Rebbe Meir personally helped strengthen the moral character of many weaker **bochurim**. To this day, his memory is a source of strength for them.

His last years in Lakewod yeshiva were truly rewarding for him. He "learned and taught" Torah at the same time, giving his life purpose and meaning. As we have already said, Rebbe Meir felt he was in Gan Eden when learning in yeshiva.

Rebbe Meir was a lesson to all, in yet another dimension. While many disabled persons tend to be burdensom, he assisted others in many more ways than most healthy people do. His selfless endeavors began in Mount Vernon where he guided Jewish children away from the pitfalls of secularism and into a happy and fruitful life as **b'nai Torah**. He continued this work in New York, where he spoke in many yeshivos and synagogues. His acts of kindness were innumerable, and he completed his life as a pillar of the largest yeshiva in the United States!

Even when he was assisted, Rebbe Meir gave more than he received. Those who helped him were rewarded in heaven for the mitzvah of "serving the scholarly".

Chapter Seventeen

"One who deserts Torah study, even if he is elderly and has mastered all of its intricacies, has committed a grave sin, as it is written, 'Lest they (the words of Torah)

be removed from your heart all the days of your life; and thou shalt make them known to your children and your children's children." (סמ"ג ל"ח י"ג).

Why did the S'mag emphasize one who is elderly? "All the days of your life" includes youth as well. The answer is that the elderly are more likely to become lax in Torah study because they have spent many years learning and have acquired much knowledge. The S'mag writes that they must not be content with what they have studied, because they too are commanded 'Lest they be removed..."

"He who does not gather shall be gathered," (Ethics of the Fathers 1:13). Rabbeinu Yonah comments, "THe wise person who does not add wisdom, saying, 'I have learned the entire Torah and I have seen and come to know its ways. Why strain myself in these final years, for what new insights can I have?' May G-d gather this man from among the living, for his life no longer has purpose."

He continues, "He who does not learn deserves death," (ibid). "One who has not learned at all is likened to an ox. Man was created to study Torah, and he has not justified his creation. Therefore, he must die."

The Gaon Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer writes in his **sefer, Evven Ha'azel**, of a blind man that approached him during his rabbinic leadership in Slotzk. The man showed Rav Issar Zalman a line from one of two **seforim** he had written and said, "This is the last piece of original Torah I shall ever write." He explained that he had recently lost his eyesight and had sought medical attention. The doctor examining him said, "It is a miracle that you could see until now. Your eyes are so weak that you should have gone blind ten years ago!" I realized that while I was engrossed in Talmudic discourse the L-rd

allowed my eyes to function. However, I began to think, 'Why must I toil at learning when I am so old and weak? I have learned the Mishnayos many times and can recite it from memory. This is much easier for me.' When I made that decision" said this blind man, "I lost my vision. I am aware now that this is a Divine retribution for deserting the Torah."

A famous **gadol** who had just published an important work was warned by the Chofetz Chaim to beware of the **yetzer hara's** trickery. Since he was now an "accomplished" person, his thought captured in print for all posterity, he might not continue to exert himself in learning. Therefore he must gird himself to continue learning with the same devotion as before.

This strengthening of oneself was evident in Rebbe Meir's entrance into the Lakewood yeshiva. Although he was sixty-four, he fought his **yetzer hara** and reached newer and higher levels of saintliness.

Chapter Eighteen

Rebbe Meir said all prayers all with utmost care, and arrived long before services began to allow extra time for this. His every word, from the **Birchos Hashachar, Korbonos, Pesukei D'zimrah,** up to and including the **Shemoneh Esrei** were said with the exacting care of one who counts money.

The **Shulchan Aruch** writes, "One must recite the **Pesukei D'zimrah** conscientiously." The Chofetz Chaim comments on this, "One must not skip or slur any words. They must be said as carefully a one would count his change." The Rasha'z comments , "One must recite...

conscientiously' so that he may reflect upon their meaning,".

It is written in the **sefer Avodas Hakodesh**, "The **Zohar** tells us that one's prayers must awaken him to serve G-d with all his heart." Also, "One must inject Awe, Love, Humility, and Joy into his prayers; expecially, **Hashem Melech** (G-d is King). Every letter of every word alludes to many concepts in the Torah that are unfathomable to our weak minds, may He conceal our shame. Therefore, at the very least, we must pronunce all the words clearly, and think about their literal meaning."

The Ma'atei Moshe explains why **Pesukei D'zimrah** are called so. He says, "The heavens are occupied by many spirits. Some are pure and benevolent; others are detestable and wicked. Some are good while others are evil. Some want peace and others, war; some give life and others take it. These spirits hover about, filling the vast space between earth and the Heavenly palace. It is to this that Psalm 91 refers, 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High abides under the protection of the Almighty.. Indeed he will save you from the snare of the fowler, and from the destructive pestilence... He will shield you with his wings... You shall not be afraid of the terror of the night... nor of the pestilence that stalks the darkness... For He will give his angels charge over you..."

"One's prayers must pass through this treacherous place. If he has merit, no harm will befall them. If he is undeserving, they will be attacked and destroyed by the evil spirits.

"Dovid Hamelech arranged these **zemiros** as a means of opening a path through this impregnable cloud, as it is written, 'Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud,

that our prayer should not pass through, (Lamentations, 3:44).' When the marauding spirits hear man's praises, they depart and allow our prayers to pass.

"The morning psalms are called Zemiros (Pseukei D'Zimra) because they prune our 'tree' of prayer. "Pruning is referred to as **zemer**, as it is written, 'For he shall cut off the twigs with pruning hooks.' (**bemazmeros**). King David's psalms are called songs (**zemiros**), as it is written,'Thy statutes have been my songs' (Psalms 119:54). These **Pesukei D'zimrah**, songs, act as pruning hooks which cut off the evil spirits from our prayers.

"Therefore, we must not pause in the midst of **Pesukei D'zimrah** to speak, lest we break our concentration and enable the spirits to return.

"Using this idea, we may also interpret the Talmud (Sotah 44b) in a new light. 'One who speaks between **Yishtabach** and **Yotzer Ohr** has sinned and may return from the battlefront.' [lit. referring to battles waged against physical enemies. If someone felt that his sins would accuse him on high, he was allowed to turn back.] This means that one who breaks his concentration while praying, allows the spirits to regain their power. Therefore, his prayers are defeated at the battlefront."

It is written in the **sefer Chaye Adam**, "The men of the Great Assembly declared that we preface the **Shemoneh Esrei** with hymns and praises to the Holy One Blessed be He. These praises are called **Pesukei D'zimrah**. They must be said serenely and melodiously.

The **sefer Olas Tamid** writes "One must physically and mentally attune himself with these praises which extol, crown and glorify G-d. He must command himself to treat all the words with individual importance, and he

should know at least their literal meaning. The more one understands of these prayers, the more he shall develop joy, love and fear of G-d within himself."

The Mahar'il wrote, "If there is no minyan (quorum) and the congregants wish to recite the **Kaddish** and **Borchu**; they may pause before reciting "Yishtabach" (the benediction that concludes the "Pesukei D'Zimrah) for up to thirty minutes in waiting for a tenth man to arrive." The Mahar'am Mintz explains, "It has been ruled that one who pauses for not more than the time required to complete the prayer still fulfills his obligations. It appears that the Mahar'il estimated this to be thirty minutes for **Pesukei D'zimrah**."

The Darkei Moshe quotes this Mahar'il and rules accordingly. The Magen Avraham and Levushei S'rad also write that a half-hour is generally not enough time to say **Pesukei D'zimrah**.

The Eliyahu Rabbah, Rasha'z **Aruch Hashulchan**, and **Mishna Brura** all write similarly.

Although the Rama rules that this amount is measured on an individual basis, we cannot deny that at one time most people required thirty minutes to say the weekday version of **Pesukei D'zimrah**.

The **sefer Nivreshes** (1898) describes the practices of several **Vasikim** synagogues in Jerusalem. (The **Vasikim** were a group of righteous Jews who took upon themselves (among other things) to commence **Shemoneh Esrei** at sunrise, as it is written, "He who says **Shemoneh Esrei** at sunrise is protected (from bodily harm) the entire day."

He writes that many synagogues started **Pesukei D'zimrah** thirty-six and fifty-one minutes before sunrise

on weekdays and Shabbosim respectively. (Fifty-one minutes is the earliest one may don the Talis. They refrained from singing during the **Kaddish** and **Keil Adon** to allow for the Psalms added to **Pesukei D'zimrah** on Shabbos). In the synagogue of Rav Zerach Braverman, weekday services commenced fifty-one minutes before sunrise, and on Shabbos, seventy-two. (On Shabbos, they donned the Talis between **Yishatabach** and **Yotzer Ohr**).

The Mashgiach in Mir, Rav Yehezkiel Levenstein zt'l often said that the twenty minutes allowed in yeshiva was insufficient.

The Mateh Moshe quotes the **sefer Ohr Zarua** as follows, "During the cold months, those who aren't dressed warmly should return home and pray. If they remain in the unheated synagogue, they are likely to rush through services, neglectfully omitting several high praises of the L-rd." He also relates that one great rabbi, who, in his sincere desire to learn Torah, prodded the chazan to finish services quickly, was brought to judgment on this in the Heavenly court. The **Ohr Zarua** continues, "One ordinary person received a great portion in Heaven because he recited his prayers slowly." He concludes, "Therefore, let each person take what I have said to heart and recite all prayers in a pleasant voice and with devoted thought, so that he too merit Gan Eden."

The Rabbis learned, "In the blessing of bread, we use the form **hamotzi** (lechem min ho'oretz)." Rav Nehemiah said, "We use the past tense, **motzi**." Rabba replied, "**Motzi** is the universally accepted form."

Tosefos (ibid.) rules that we use the form **hamotzi**

despite Rav Nehemiah's dissention. They write, "In the Yerushalmi the form **hamotzi** is used so as not to join the **mems**". (**Haolam**, M*otzi*).

We can understand from Tosefos' decision the importance of separating each word from the next in our prayers, particularly when their letters are similar. We use the form of **hamotzi** to prevent us from pronouncing the two words as one.

Chapter Nineteen

The thirteen rules of conduct enumerated by Rav Yisroel Salanter were a guiding light for Rebbe Meir. These are the rules:

1) HONESTY — Don't speak that which your heart cannot testify is true.

2) ZEALOUSNESS — Do not waste even one second of your life. Do not procrastinate.

3) RESOLVE — Procced with resolution and determination upon your chosen course of action.

4) RESPECT — Honor all people, even those with whom you disagree.

5) SERENITY — Calmness of body and soul; perform all tasks with serenity, so as not to become confused.

6) EASE — The words of the wise are spoken with ease; make all efforts to speak that way.

7) CLEANLINESS — Keep your body clean and pure, and dress neatly.

8) PATIENCE — Accept all personal misfortunes with grace.

9) ORDERLINESS — Do everything with a plan.

10) HUIMILITY — Recognize your faults; disregard the shortcomings of others.

11) RIGHTEOUSNESS — In accordance with its literal meaning and traditional interpretation it means "do not insists on your strict rights".

12) FRUGALITY Avoid any unnecessary and wasteful expenditures.

13) SILENCE — Weigh your words before speaking.

He who follows these rules will, understandably, become a complete person.

Chapter Twenty

Rebbe Meir longed to settle in Eretz Yisroel. He made two trips to Eretz Yisroel, only six months apart, despite his seriously handicapped condition. During his second visit, Rebbe Meir was emotionally overcome by the land's sanctity and beauty. He was amazed that he had been able to wait half a year before returning to the Promised Land.

Rebbe Meir bough one way tickets only. When he was told that a round-trip ticket was cheaper, he replied, "I have not yet arrived in Eretz Yisroel, how can I think of leaving it?!" He added that he expected Moshiach to come while he was there; then he would not have to return to America. (He hoped for the redemption each day.)

Chapter Twenty-One

In recent times, several dwellings have been constructed for young married scholars to live in cost-free. They were financed largely through generous donations from wealthy Jewish businessmen, such as Rav Menachem Neiten (Batei Neiten) and Rav Mendel Rand (Batei Rand). Rav Yosef Shalom (born in Iraq, moved to

Calcutta, India) underwrote the costs of building Yeshivas Porat Yosef and several apartment complexes in the Old City, for its **talmidim**.

Rav Shalom had particular affection for the yeshiva students, and he established a mutual fund from which they and the faculty received dividends. These monies paid for their living expenses, (aside from rent, which was free), and enabled them to learn all their lives with complete peace of mind and freedom from financial burden.

In a letter dated 17 Sivan, 5671, Rav Shalom asked the yeshiva's administration to support the continuance of this fund. The following was written in that letter:

"To my close friends and brothers, the Rabbanim who manage and care for this holy place: You are aware of the tireless efforts I have made to establish this great institution, which the L-rd has merited me to build, in this holy place so near to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, where scholars can fulfill the commandment, 'Thou shalt toil in them day and night'. I ask that the members of this yeshiva continue to receive yearly stipends according to the conditions set forth in my will so that Torah will come forth from Zion and the word of G-d from Jerusalem, as it is written, 'My eyes and heart will be cast towards that place, always' (Kings 9:3)."

In the introduction to his commentary on **Toras Cohanim**, the Chofetz Chaim praises the actions of those who support Torah and publicized their great deeds so that others might be encouraged to do the same. These are his words,

"In his final days, Rav Yaakov Brudie performed many great mitzvos which everyone should be made

aware of. He spent forty thousand rubles to acquire a twenty-five unit complex and **Bais Medrash** for the exclusive use of **talmidei chachomim** (scholars). Several **gabboim** were appointed to assign apartments to those meeting the requirements. It is now called Ohel Yaakov."

In our times too, there are many wealthy people capable of undertaking this great mitzvah, despite increased construction costs. It is the duty of every responsible Jew to locate them and to encourage those people to finance projects such as those mentioned above. Who can tell the reward of those who participate in this holy task!

During the Succos holiday of 5734, while Rebbe Meir was in Jerusalem, several **kolleleit** (young marrieds learning in yeshiva) came to see him. (He was to be found in the Succah, sitting in his wheelchair). They requested that he try to interest several potential donors in this mitzvah. Rebbe Meir assured them that he would help in any way that was possible, and was very moved by the chance to be a part of this great mitzvah.

In an open letter, dated 16 Elul, 5734, this group wrote: "It has come to our attention that there is a pressing need for adequate housing among **b'nai Torah**. Therefore, we have agreed to help establish Kiryat Chofetz Chaim in Jerusalem. This development will contain housing, a synagogue, mikveh, talmud torah, yeshiva, kollel and a girls' school. It will function as a living Torah community in the total sense. We pray that G-d deem us worthy of completing this important assignment, and through it His name shall be glorified in all worlds."

Several community members suggested to Rav Tzemach Shlomowitz, (one of the first students of the

Sabba of Kelm), that a Gemilas Chesed fund be started. (This fund provided interest-free loans to those in need). He advised them to designate this fund for the sole use of **b'nai Torah** in order to double the reward for each loan made; Firstly, one is rewarded for having performed a **chesed** (kindness); and secondly, he fulfills the mitzvah of Torah study by enabling scholars to find loans quickly and return to their studies. If, as we see from Rav Tzemach's words, the "small" favor of providing loans becomes greater when those who study Torah are the beneficiaries, how much more so is this true for one who provides their shelter? In addition to the mitzvos of supporting Torah, kindness, and dowering of the bride, one is also creditted with the many additional years he enables **talmidei chachomim** to learn, free from the troubles of securing loans, finding grants, etc.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"A poor man, a rich man, and a wicked man come before the heavenly court. The poor man is asked, 'Why did you not study Torah?' If he answers that he was poor and spent many days in search of food, they reply, 'You could not have been more destitute that Hillel.' It is said of Hillel that he earned only one **tropik** each day. Half of that paid his entrance fee for the **Bais Medrash**, and half provided for his family's needs. One day, he was not able to find work, and hence could not pay the entrance fee. He climbed to the roof where he sat by an open skylight to hear the words of Shemaya and Avtalion. This happened during the dead of winter and snow was falling that Friday afternoon. The following morning, Shemaya asked Avtalion, 'Is it cloudy today, for the Bais Medrash is

darker than usual?' They looked upward and saw a human form pressed against the skylight. Hastily, they went up to the roof and found Hillel buried in three cubits of snow. They brought him inside, bathed him and placed him near the fire. They said of Hillel, 'This man is worthy that the Sabbath be desecrated on his behalf.'

They ask the wealthy man, 'Why did you not study Torah?' If he answers, 'I was wealthy and spent much time managing my vast holdings,' they reply, 'You could not have been wealthier than Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom.' It has been said that Rabbi Elazar inherited 1,000 cities and an equal number of merchant vessels. Each day he placed a barrel of wheat upon his shoulders and went from city to city to learn Torah. One day, he was confronted by his servants, who would not let him pass. He said to them, 'Please allow me through, that I may contiue my Torah study.' They replied, 'We swear on your life that we will not permit your passage.' Rabbi Elazar took a large sum of money and handed it over to them. He never saw them again, and was able to learn Torah day and night.

The wicked one is asked, 'Why did you not study Torah?' If he answers, 'I was very handsome and my **yetzer hara** detained me' they reply, 'You could not have been more handsome than Josef...'

One concludes that Hillel brings judgment upon the poor, Rabbi Elazer upon the rich, and Joseph upon the wicked (i.e. those who are led astray by temptation)" (Yoma 55b).

Those who came into contact with Rebbe Meir felt a compelling need to improve their Torah study and **yiras shomayim**. Rebbe Meir developed his **yetzer** into a G-d fearing and G-d loving one, and, with it learned Torah,

and performed mitzvos with joy even under the most woeful conditions. How can we not be ashamed of ourselves? We who are more fortunate than Rebbe Meir —— yet have not been able to conquer our emotions in the slightest ways. Let Rebbe Meir be a lesson to all, that we may think of him and find inner strength to persevere in even the most trying of G-d's tests!

Also, in stressful times, when one is most likely to be depressed, let him be reminded that Rebbe Meir lived happily despite his much harsher circumstances. Let him be reminded that Rebbe Meir was satisfied to learn and do mitzvos!

What excuse can there be for not helping others, etc.? They are voided from within themselves when we are reminded of Rebbe Meir!

We must never stand still. We must not settle into a comfortable niche that we might carve for ourselves on the ladder to spiritual attainment! Rebbe Meir has shown us that we must advance constantly, at any age!

Rebbe Meir has shown us the power of mind over matter. The strength of one's own desire can overpower all physical and emotional setbacks that stand in the path to ultimate spiritual wholeness!

Rebbe Meir —— who demanded the maximum of himself, and served G-d with unceasing fervor —— will bring judgment upon each of us for not having lived up to our potential!

In closing, we must know too that no possible situation in this world justifies depression and loss of hope, G-d forbid.

Rebbe Meir had physical deformities and was severly handicapped. He existed from day to day. He began to

learn at a late age. Despite these setbacks, Rebbe Meir reached high levels of Divine service, and was a true **gadol**.

May Rabbi Meir's noble example inspire all the readers of this book to follow in his path.

נדפס בדפוס האחים גרויס

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