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TRUTH LIES BURIED

Each thinker has a tendency to adopt one idea or precept as the focal point of all his thoughts. Hillel and later Rabbi Akiva saw the entire Torah as a commentary on the passage: "And thou shalt love thy neighbor like thyself." Rabbi Ishmael, on the other hand, felt that all divine commandments are founded on the principle of keeping the Jew from idolatry.¹ For Reb Mendel Kotzker, apparently, Judaism was based on the verse: "Keep thee from a false matter" (Exodus 23:7).

The Torah teaches man not to perform certain deeds because they are transgressions. Later Rabbis introduced an elaborate system of preventative injunctions. There is one sin, however, for which a preventative measure was mentioned in the Torah itself, the sin of falsehood, as it says: "Keep thee far from a false matter." Is this a warning of how dangerous and grievous is the sin of uttering falsehood?

All over the world men toil day and night to gain wealth and prestige. In Kotzk they labored day and night to uproot falsehood and pretension. Here they were not concerned with reaching a higher awareness but first and foremost with purging falsehood.

"Truth shall spring out of the earth" (Psalms 85:12). The numerical value of 'eretz /earth/ is equal to that of Kotzk.² Truth blossoms in Kotzk. In Kotzk they wanted Truth to seize the heart. "And he speaks the truth in his heart." Truth shall rule the heart.³ But how can Truth be found in a world of Delusion? Truth lies buried. Therefore the Psalmist teaches us: "Truth shall spring out of the earth."

What is it, then, that should be sown for Truth to blossom forth? As soon as falsehood is interred, Truth blossoms forth.⁴

But who is willing to bury falsehood? Are not bias, faltery, cunning and deceit the order of the day? Are not all men liars? They live in complete and total self-delusion. The heart does not feel what the mind thinks. Man does not say what he means nor mean what he says. Even his greatest truth is a lie.

"For vain is the slave of man" (Psalms 60:12). Man's smoothness is a deception.⁵

What could be more absurd than to believe that there is actually truth in the world? "I've seen many colors hair," said the Kotzker, "blond, grey, white and black, but I've never seen any pure hair."⁶ For only one moment during the year did the High Priest in Jerusalem achieve absolute truth: when he entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple on Yom Kippur.⁷

Who is the man of truth? It is not he who identifies a truth when he knows it a priori to be true. Of such a man it is said: Though he is no liar, neither is he a man of truth.

Truth is an entirely different category. If a man perceives a certain event to be in total contradiction to the word of God but struggles nonetheless until he overcomes all obstacles to reach the essential truth -- he indeed is the man of truth. It is a long-standing question: "In what way were the spies sent by Moses guilty of sin? They merely reported what their eyes had seen! The answer: Their sin was not to have struggled to achieve the truth. They looked only on the surface. Truth transcends the human intellect.

Moses asked the spies: "...and what the land is that they

dwelt in, whether it is good or bad...whether it is fat or lean..." (Numbers 13: 19-20). That is, he pleaded with them to say the land was good even if it seemed bad, to say that it was fat even if it seemed lean. "To appreciate the Land of Israel, a cursory glance does not suffice. The Land of Israel is profound." They, however, did not obey and reported their first impressions.⁸

A Man of truth is a man who is truth. His truth is more than mere truthful utterances. To be and to live truthfully one must transcend the self, disregard self-regard and to lie prostrate on the ground. To be truth means to be holy.

Truth cannot be found in man; Truth is God. For man, Truth is a critical test which he must struggle over without ever reaching definite conclusions. The sense and the intellect say one thing while Truth dictates the exact opposite. The only alternative is to lay aside the self and to live in faith. Faith is a truer vision than sight.

Truth as defined here does not mean knowing what exists, but rather living that which one believes. Truth does not entail reflecting a fact against the mind; it implies a total identification with the deepest reality.

NOTES

1. See my Ancient Jewish Theology (in Hebrew), vol. I, p. 34.
2. Rabbi Zalman Shrentsker, Marom Herim, "Tsof Herim", p. 4.
3. Sish Sarfe Kodesh, III, p. 25. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah, p. 174.
4. Sish Sarfe Kodesh, IV, p. 102. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah, p. 18.
5. 'Ohel Torah, p. 244.
6. Heard from Rabbi Issac Meir of Ger.
7. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah, p. ~~137~~. Nifle'oth Hadashoth, p. 55.
Shem MiShmuel, "Mo'adim," p. 108.
8. 'Ohel Torah, p. 137. Nifle'oth Hadashoth, p. 55.

3

THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE WHILE THE CLOCK TICKS ON

What did the Kotzer Rebbe want of the Jews? He once said: "My soul was one of those who existed ^{before} the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. I am not of today. I have been born into the world to discriminate between the holy and the outward."¹

The dichotomy is drawn not between the sacred and the profane but between the sacred and the outward. The chief danger lies not with evil and transgression. An honest man will avoid them anyway. It is externality that ensnares even the honest man who flees from evil. While he delights in his own fine deeds and comely pious actions, a swamp of lies collects in his heart.

When the kernel rots away, of what use if the shell, the outer trappings, the surroundings?

Kotzk was a protest against the banalization of Judaism, against preconceived notions, small-minded

conceptions, against tired compromises and half-truths, against cheap piety and the complacency of commandments carried out by rote. The house is on fire while the clock ticks on. The tiny bit of truth left in the world is being reduced to smoke and ashes while Jews walk around, satisfied with having carried out their dead-beat commandments.

Other Zaddikim are pleased to see Jews abiding by the accepted injunctions. Kotzk argues: When the rug is pulled out from under your feet, what's the use of turning in the same spot?

The darkness in the world, the deceit of man reaches to the heart of heaven and all are silent. A severed branch arouses tears but when the tree falls, ~~no one~~ *no one* says a word.

When a peacock looks at her feathers she swells with pride but when she glances at her scrawny legs she

bursts into tears. The Kotzker did not try to placate the heart with consolation about the beauty in the world. It is as wrong to deceive oneself as it is to deceive others. What is the advantage of a fine apple if its core is ridden with worms?

Truth is a challenge, a bitter adversary who is always full of reproach and picks man to pieces. Truth must be a power that hates compromise, that will bend to no one and yield to no one.

Reb Mendel said: "I want Truth to bore through your brains like the gnat in Titus' brain that caused his downfall!"²

There are various approaches in the history of Mussar as to which human trait is the lowest and which is the greatest virtue. Some say that pride is the worst possible trait and the source of all evil-doing and see humility as the greatest virtue. Reb Mendel considered falsehood the

ugliest trait and truthfulness the ultimate ideal of man.

This approach had already been advanced by Reb Pinkhes Koretser a disciple and friend of the Baal Shem Tov.³ But the Kotzker followed this view through to its more radical conclusion. While the "Holy Jew" had begun teaching his disciples that truth is the Way, the essence of all things, in Kotzker the teaching of the Way became more uncompromising, radical, pointed. The aim was to elucidate truth and to detect falsehood that was everywhere.⁴

According to the midrash cited above, a dispute raged among the heavenly angels as to whether or not man should be created. Peace and Truth were opposed, Mercy and Righteousness were in favor. Two against two. What did God do? He took Truth and cast him into the ground and then He proceeded to create Adam.

The Kotzker queried: Why did God not throw Peace

aside and still have a majority vote against Truth? The answer: Truth's indictment could not be opposed by a majority vote of Righteousness and Mercy. But Reb Mendel was still not satisfied. He asked: Granted that Truth was cast into the earth in order for Adam to be created. But how could He rebut the argument put forth by Peace that man not be created because he would be involved in constant strife? How could He mediate the debate between the angel of Peace and the angels in the defense? Reb Mendel's answer was this: The debate raged between the angels as long as Truth was present, as long as the quarrel was for the sake of truth⁷ but "as soon as truth is cast aside, peace ensues ~~perforce~~." The dispute was mitigated as soon as God cast Truth into the ground. Then all the angels agreed that man be created.⁸

The Kotzker Rebbe never uttered the word "truth;" he always used the German varhayt instead. Once he caught himself saying emes and explained that in truth [varhayt] they should believe that he said it for a purpose.⁹

He abhorred the cliches uttered in prayer that were mockeries of the truth, as in the 18 benedictions:

" Because we wholeheartedly and truthfully trust in your kindness." How can one utter such falsehood? Following the hakafoth on Simhat Torah he heard chanting: "The Patriarch Abraham will rejoice with us...." The Kotzker grew very angry. The gall of these nincompoops to expect Abraham to rejoice with them!

(4)

NO SELF-DELUSION

Man has a strong inclination for self-delusion. Often he convinces himself that he is moving forward when, in fact, he has totally lost his way. Even when he falls, like an acorn from a tree, he considers it an occasion for rejoicing. He combines the pride of Haman with the poverty of Mordechai. Delusion is worse than a sickness--it poisons the mind and traps the heart in a net.

People are embarrassed to admit that man is nothing more than the emissary of Falsehood. The liar deludes himself so long with his lies until he accepts them as true. This is a difficult thing to disclose, but an ugly truth is still better than an attractive lie.

"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes."
(Proverbs 16, 2). Reb Bunem used this as the basis for a new prohibition: 'One must not delude oneself' and followed it through with a new definition of a Hasid. Who is a

Hasid? A Hasid is he who goes beyond the call of duty. The law enjoins us: "Ye shall not therefore defraud one another." (Leviticus 25, 17). So much for duty. But going over and above duty means not to deceive oneself either: ¹

Reb Yekhiel Meir of Gostinin left home to spend Shavuous in Kotzk. This angered his father-in-law, who asked him, on Reb Yekhiel's return:

---"On Shavuous, did the Jews of Kotzk receive a different Torah?"

---"Why of course," replied Reb Yekhiel.

---"How so?" asked the father-in-law.

---"How would you translate Loy tignov?"

---"Thou shalt not steal from any man."

---"In Kotzk," said REb Yekhiel, "Loy tignov is translated Thou Shalt not steal from thyself." ²

This ban on self-delusion became so pervasive, that the Kotzker began refuting and rebutting ideas that seemed to be blatantly self-evident. A flaw could be found in each argument put forward. In the multi-facetedness of the

thought Truth is revealed. Reb Mendel once said that each Hasid must engrave the image of the revelation at Sinai into his heart. At this point, one of the Hasidim gave a deep sigh: "And he who has a heart of stone and engraves the image into his heart, is thereby transformed into an idol." ³

Reb Mendel felt that a frequent source of falsehood was man's tendency to justify his actions. According to Biblical law (Leviticus 5:17), a guilt-offering brought for a sin committed unknowingly entails a more costly sacrifice than for a sin committed knowingly. The reason is that if a man knows and feels his wrong-doing, this in itself marks half of his repentance. But if a man is uncertain as to whether or not he has sinned, he thereby demonstrates the extent of his delusion. Therefore he needs a stronger punishment.

5

GOD LOVES NEWNESS

Pious Jews try so hard to keep the tradition that they even sanctify old customs. They look askance at any new path, even if it does not contradict the Sulhan 'Arukh. Granted that "Innovation is prohibited by the Torah" is an important precept. But the Kotzker Rebbe had a different approach.

"He chose new gods; then was war in the gates."

(Judges V,8)--God chose newness. And Reb Mendel added:
As soon as there is newness the battle is almost won.¹

The Kotzker doctrine held that Judaism must always be new. Prayer must be as fresh as new discovery and thought must be vibrant and lively. Consequently, the following cardinal rule was taught: One must not repeat or imitate. Just as shoes can not be measured on someone else's feet, so God cannot be worshipped with someone else's beliefs. Whatever one does that is not founded on one's own belief is a lie. Keep your mouth shut so as not to utter something you do not swear by. "A dog shall not move his tongue"

the Kotzker read kelev [dog] as "kalev"--let his heart not be as his tongue; he should not try to be too smart.²

"Truth is the seal of the Holy One, blessed by He"³ A seal must be made in such a way that no one can forge it. Truth is that which cannot be forged. The moment it is copied it ceases to be truth.⁴

The basic rule of the Kotzker Hasidim was--do not repeat or imitate. Say only that which you swear by.

It is false pride and self-deceit for a man to perform devotions which are too exalted for him. If a man utters a statement that is not based on absolute conviction, and a deep sigh not felt quite so deeply accompanies that utterance--it shall be considered an act of theft. Such thefts occur day in, day out. Man deludes himself from top to bottom and gets such a swelled head in the process

that he no longer deigns to speak to himself! In Kotzk, self-search was the order of the day.

Reb. Ben-Zion Ostrover once said: "The cardinal rule in Kotzk [as it was in Pshiskhe] was not to delude and not to imitate. You probably think this means not to delude or imitate someone else. No, it means not to delude or to imitate oneself." ⁵

How do we know that imitation is forbidden? asked Reb Isaac Meir. We deduce it from the creation of heaven and earth. Not one created being is identical to another. Likewise, from the Patriarchs. Abraham's special trait was modesty. He said "I am but dust and ashes (Genesis 18:27). Along came Isaac and saw the Phillistines copying this practice as it is said: "For all the wells...the Phillistines had stopped and filled them with dust." (Genesis 26:15). The dust and ashes had become trivialized, so he began cultivating another trait, "He dug another well." (Genesis 26:22).

When a man grows old and his strength abates, all that remains for him in worship is to imitate what others do or to imitate himself and repeat that which he was accustomed to do.⁶ Since Kotzk held that every form of imitation was false, therefore man must never allow himself to grow old. The problem is that men grow old in their youth. Kotzk argued that novelty is better than piety, the older the colder, the newer the truer. That which is holy comes unexpectedly.

"And you shall keep my statutes and my judgements, which if a man does, he shall live in them. (Leviticus 18-5). Divine commandments must be carried out with rigour and life. "He shall live in them!"⁷

There is another problem. That which took place between God and Israel has become a tale of bygone days for Jews, like a porridge turned putrid. But that which God

does is never out-dated unless man himself has rotted away. God's past is eternal present. Therefore each man must feel the immediacy of the first touch that marked the betrothal of God and Israel.

⑥

Novelty, Not Piety

Judaism has an inward and outward dimension. The outward dimension is that of the commandments, the inward domain that of the heart and mind. For a hundred generations Jews carried out the commandments ^{until} eventually, Judaism became comfortable. Putting on tefillin became as easy as eating a bagel. As for keeping the Sabbath--it kept itself.

But habit is a disease. Habit causes paralysis of the soul. Of what use are the commandments drained of life's blood? "He who prays today because he prayed yesterday is worse than the most pernicious criminal," said Reb Mendel.¹

The Baal Shem Tov's mission, according to Reb Mendel, was to correct the wrong for which the Prophet had chastised Israel: "Their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13). This teaching was then spread from Podolia (where he, the Besht lived, that is, in Mezhibizh) to Volhynia (Mezritsh where the Great Maggid lived) and from there to Galicia (Lizhensk, the home of Rebe Elimelekh) and from there to Poland. "It's well worth trying to

attract Lithuanian Jews," said Reb Mendel, "in order that this hasidic Way be introduced there too."²

Judaism turns sour and stale through habit and commandments learned by rote. "Each morning," said Reb Mendel, "when the Holy Jew of Pshiskhe thanked the Lord for not having created him a Gentile, he felt himself changing inside from a Gentile to a Jew. He was not a Jew once and for all. He became a Jew each day."³

The polar opposite of living truthfully is to emulate, imitate and reiterate. Truth is authenticity; imitation is falsehood.

That is why Reb Mendel was so critical of repetition and regurgitation. As soon as one repeats, one is imitating either someone else or oneself, and to imitate is to falsify. But Judaism requires a daily repetition of the same prayers, the performance of identical commandments every day! The solution is to live with newness, to do things as if for the first time with newly-kindled fire.

"And I will betroth thee unto me for ever" (Hosea 2:19). The love one feels at a betrothal and the joy one experiences during the engagement exist with me forever. "In ^aheven a past moment exists in the present."⁴

The Kotzker REbbe used a midrash to explain the passage: "For I give you good doctrine, forsake you not my Torah." (Proverbs 4:2) Lekah, doctrine, comes from the verb 'to take.' God says: I am giving you a good take, therefore do not forsake my Torah. "Don't loosen your hold after taking me for the first time. Just as it was the first time, so shall it be always."⁵

Why is it that revelation and prophecy have become things of the past? Reb Mendel said this was because revelation became habitual. People got used to it and they were no longer seized by amazement. The explosion of wonder and of new perceptions that had once characterized man's service of the Divine degenerated into commandments carried out by rote. At this point a new order had to arise.

From now on discovery would be predicated by silent struggle between each individual and God. Amazement could be achieved only through tribulation. Without constant striving even that which one possessed previously would be lost.⁶

In Kötzk, many externalities were waived in an attempt to reach the essence, the internal. They sought the kernel without the shell. For this reason, set forms were renounced. They hated ceremonies and superficial piety. They derided personal supplications and ornamental prayers.

R Of course the commandments were upheld. The Shulhan 'Arukh, the Code of Law ruled supreme in Kotsk just as anywhere else. The thousands of customs, however, which were not part of the 613 commandments, those customs generated by Ashkenazic piety that generations of Jews guarded so jealously as to invoke the age-old precept--"A custom takes precedent over a law"--these very customs were viewed in Kotsk as quakery. Sometimes they were discarded as so much junk.⁷

Instead of adding yet another negative injunction to an old law, one ought rather to add a dash of new zeal to an old commandment.

Of Isaac it is written: "Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them and filled them with earth...and Isaac dug again the wells of water..." (Genesis 26:15, 18). "For the Philistines, worship of God was no more than a routine, arid and superficial. For them, Abraham's Way was obvious and hackneyed. They could not grasp its radical innovations. Isaac, however, dug out the wells once more, deepened them and discovered new insights."¹⁸

Customs are misleading. They lead to an illusion of accomplishment. External piety is absolutely worthless. That which one is accustomed to do is automatic labor. The value lies not in the manual labor but in the head-and heart-ache that accompany the prolonged efforts to bury falsehood. A mitzvah coupled with hardship tastes like a shoe served up with honey.

A hasid of Chernobylⁿ once explained his Way to a Kotzker hasid. Chernobyler hasidim stay awake all Thursday night, on Sabbath eve they give as much charity as they can afford and on the Sabbath they recite the entire Psalms.

The Kotzker hasid replied: "We do things differently. We stay awake every night, we give charity whenever a pauper comes begging and we happen to have something on hand. As for reciting the Psalms--how can one blurt out all at once that which King David labored over for seventy years? It's sufficient to recite a few chapters or even a few verses with true devotion."⁹

When in combat with an enemy, it isn't the uniform that matters but the way one fires. True courage is determined by the way one risks one's life to overcome the foe.

As a result, many customs were sidetracked. Sometimes the Aramaic hymn "Yikum Purkan" was missed in the Sabbath prayers. Not only were the liturgical poems omitted altogether, but even the scheduled times for daily prayer went unheeded. The kotzker Rebbe would stay awake at night and eat his supper after midnight. "When do you recite the midnight

prayers for the Destruction of the Temple?" a misnagid once asked him.

"At the conclusion of my midnight meal, " the Kotzker replied, "I say 'May Jerusalem be rebuilt' as part of the Grace. This is my lament for the Destruction."¹⁰

This midnight ritual is performed while sitting on the floor. Chapters of Psalms, certain laments, and prayers for Rachel and Leah are recited tearfully. The Kotzker Rebbe hated ceremonies and had no patience for long, drawn-out affairs. His midnight lament, therefore, consisted of four words: "May Jerusalem be rebuilt."

There were Kotzker hasidim who went to great lengths in their disciplined sobriety. On Yom Kippur eve they would sit down to study the laws of Hoshen Mispat [the fourth part of the Shulhan 'Arukh] of all things, spend several hours

in this way and late at night remember, suddenly, that they must perform the service. Then they would wash their hands and say Ma'ariv--individually.

Judaism is overgrown with moss; the essence is buried and the weeds are blossoming. The quintessential kernel has all but been forgotten while the most obscure point of order has assumed gigantic proportions.

Hackneyed Judaism was a pill the Kotzker refused to swallow. He was simply nauseated by commandments performed by rote. (He felt a stench coming from commandments that were nothing more than rotting rags.) His hasidim detested automatic Judaism, mini-mitzvahs performed with a shrug, a Jewish life whose end result was mere ritual observance. They derided those Jews who flaunted their religiosity.

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Kotzk argued that what mattered was quality, that kernel of internal purity. Not deeds but the test. One must not perform a commandment because the heart so desires or habit so requires. This was dismissed as slavish ritual observance and a slavishly pious Jew is a thief--he robs himself. He thinks he is praying when in fact he is pulling the wool over his eyes.

That which is hard to perform is what matters. One must perform a divine commandment because it goes against the grain.

There are Jews for whom subservience to the strictest letter of the Law is the essence of Judaism. For Kotzker hasidism this fanatic observance for its own sake led to self-delusion. It cloaked the Lord in a decorative mantle. Surely externality was not the essence. A Jew could boast a large fur-rimmed Sabbath hat and still have a contaminated

heart. On a diet of pure ritual observance one can forget the Creator of the Universe. "Forgo your prayers, forgo your study, as long as you don't anger the Almighty."

So says a hasidic proverb. It's better to be good than fanatically observant. But even being good and observant is not sufficient. The Magid of Kozhenits said: "He who is only wise is a fool, he who is only good is a pig and he who is only observant is a thief."¹¹

The hasidim have their own interpretation of the verse Dor 'ikesh ufetaltol, "They are a perverse and crooked generation." (Deut. 32:5). "Ikesh means crooked and pet-altol means observant."¹²

With this interpretation in mind we can understand a cryptic reference of the Kotzker: "Observant is not straight (i.e. crooked) except for people who have exhausted their efforts. For us who stand at the threshold, observant is straight. Have a good Sabbath."¹³

Once he was asked: When someone is called 'observant' in a derogatory manner, what kind of flaw is implied? ~~The~~ KOTzker replied: "An observant Jew is he who transforms an insignificant remark into a cardinal principle and vice versa."¹⁴

In Kotzk it was believed that the chief task is to aim deep and reach as far in as possible. Thus, in sea~~r~~ching deep into the heart of the matter, one finds that an evening service performed on the night of Yom Kippur carries no more weight than an evening service on any night of the year.

The Mishna states: A rich man who brings a sacrifice worth much money and a poor man who brings a sacrifice worth little...each is equal if only his heart is directed to heaven. This passage which appears at the end of Zebahim Minhoth where the main thrust is the importance of quantity in the Temple sacrifice, wishes to remind us that

quality , intent, is no less important. Usually this passage is seen as a consolation for the poor man whose sacrifice is valued though he is only able to bring a modest gift. Along comes Reb Mendel and says the opposite: The phrase "if only his heart is directed to heaven" refers not to the modest giver but to the generous donor, to the wealthy man who brings a rich sacrifice. There can be no ^udo_ht that the poor man's motives are pure, that "his heart is directed to heaven." The purpose of this concluding passage is to warn the rich man who is convinced of the value of his sacrifice. What matters is that his intention be pure.¹⁶

NOTES

1. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 97.
2. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I p. 61.
3. "Emeth ve-Emunah p. 613
4. Midrash Mōsne on Exodus p. 135 b.

⑦

Inwardness

A man does not go through his life without rhyme or reason and similarly, he does not fulfill a divine commandment automatically, for no apparent reason.

When Reb Henekh of Alexander, later to be famous, visited Reb Mendel for the first time in Tomashov, the latter called him into his room and said:

"Come, I'll tell you what kind of a man is a hasid. A hasid always asks himself ---why?" Just as a Talmudic discussion is always interrupted by the question: what is the rationale for this?

Years later, Reb Henekh reported: At the time I did not understand his point. But once, when I lifted the cup to wash my hands before a meal, I recalled his holy words and I began to think: why am I doing this? What results from my action and ^{who benefits} from it? I pondered for about two hours until

I finally discovered what great kindness the Almighty showed towards us in commanding us to fulfill the mitzvah of washing the hands.¹

"YOU shall not do so to the Lord your God" (Deut. 12:4) The Lord must not be served in a "so-so" manner, out of habit or for appearances' sake.² One must gird one's loins before each act of divine service. "And he (Jacob) took from what he had with him" (Genesis 32:14)--he who takes whatever happens to fall into his hands without questioning its value, even when he thinks that he is thereby performing a mitzvah, nevertheless it is "a present for Esau." (ibid); the forces of evil take control over him.³

"...An inquiry shall be held" (Leviticus 19:20).
 One must investigate each action that one does, each idea that one thinks. One must understand the whys and the

wherefores, and not accept everything which agrees with foolish beliefs.

A hasid must delve not only into halacha but also into 'aModah, divine service. He must look for profundity. He must achieve novel insights not only into the revealed Torah but also into the most hidden tractates. New approaches and achievements are called for in one's inward life. A man must know how to climb higher and higher, how to bend down deep enough to lift a pearl from the depths.

┌ Mud is like radishes--it needs no ploughing or sowing; it grows of itself. So too the mire inside man. Body and health are guarded ever so zealously while the mind and heart go unnoticed. The inside ^{of} man is like an all-purpose pot--whatever plops in gets cooked. Man's thoughts and
└ desires are completely incompatible with the image of God.

Honesty doesn't grow on trees. Freshness and depth must be cultivated. The study of Torah is usually taken to mean the study of halacha. In Kotzk, on the other hand, it was recognized that the fear and love of God is also a study that calls for constant effort. The almighty demands of man that he be holy in his mind and thoughts, not only in his deeds.⁴

The Kotzker once said: A groom may pronounce the words 'You are hereby sanctified' a hundred times under the wedding canopy, but if he omits the words 'unto me' then his pronouncement is null and void and the entire wedding that was prepared is totally worthless. The "unto me" is crucial. All one's study, all the rungs of devotion reached and one's entire service of God are not worth a straw if they haven't penetrated the marrow of one's bones. "Sanctified unto me."

In Kotzk they upheld the principle of "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the Heart."

(1 Samuel 16:7) Look at the inside, look for inwardness.

Once a hasid came to Reb Henekh, the Kotzker's disciple, and cried his heart out before him. REb Henekh said:

"That's not the way. On Our Kheyder (elementary school) there was a little boy who burst out crying each time the teacher asked him something. To this the teacher would reply: 'My child, if you were to look in on the inside you would not cry.' "

The Kotzker interpreted the verse "In all toil there is profit but mere talk tends only to want" (Proverbs 14:23) as "Each new form that a hasid assumes in order to carry out something new in his divine service is an achievement. Merely talking hassidism tends only to want."⁶

There are Jews whose deeds are holy and Jews whose minds are holy.⁷ The world needs men preeminent in Torah

as well as men preeminent in avodah. They help each other.

The failings of one group, however, have immediate repercussions on the great men of the other.⁸

One must struggle as much to understand the account of the Exodus in the daily prayers as to understand a halachic dispute.⁹

The Kotzker considered R^eb Zushe of Anipole to be preeminent in his love and fear of God. What difference does it make in what area a man displays his genius?

R^eb Zushe was _____ 10

"And if any of them [swarming things] falls into any earthen vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean"
 (Leviticus 11"32). An earthen vessel can become defiled only by something in it not in and of itself. This is because

earth or clay has no intrinsic worth. Its worth is reckoned only when it has an inside which can contain something.

Metallic vessels, on the other hand, which have intrinsic worth can be _____

Man is an earthen vessel. The matter from which he is molded, clay, has no value. The only worth of such a vessel is that it can receive and contain something. The inside is what counts. In man, the thought is crucial, that it be pure. This is more important than bodily purity. When an earthen vessel becomes unclean, water cannot cleanse it. The only remedy is to break it (Leviticus 11:13) Likewise, the only remedy for man is a broken heart.¹¹

When God asked Adam whether he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam replied (according to the midrash): "I ate and shall continue to eat." The Kotzker was amazed that Adam should dare speak so insolently to God. The Kotzker resolved the problem thus: The Lord asked Adam with great

compassion: "Tell me Adam, what stage have you reached? Have you at least awakened a desire for good within yourself so that from now on you may rule over your passions?" Adam replied apologetically: "I have not improved, I have not even begun to weaken the power of evil desires within me. My passions still control me. I am capable of eating more."

There is a great lesson to be learned from this.

Adam knew where he stood.¹²

Notes

1. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I p.101. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p.31.
2. 'Ohel Torah p.179; 'Emeth ve' Emunah p.527.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh III, p. 3. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah 176.
4. 'Emeth ve-Emunah p. 267.
5. 'Ohel Torah p.243. For a contrasting interpretation of 'sanctified unto me' attributed to Reb Abraham Podlisker, see Tif'ereth 'Uzie'el on Song of Songs, p. 64.
6. 'Ohel Torah p.264
7. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 267.
8. Ibid., p.111.
9. Ibid., p.664
10. Ibid., p.372
11. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 46.
12. 'Ohel Torah p.5.

⑧ Either One Way Or the Other

⌈ Kotzk knew that man is Janus-faced: he tries to appease both God and other men. This is why he can be found dancing at both weddings. The forces of good and evil within him co-exist like two doves in a nest. It is a state of eternal bliss in which both sides are satisfied: one day of Sabbath holiness for every workaday six. The investment is kept for oneself while the interest is paid to God.

✓ For the Kotzker Rebe, compromise was a fraud; any partnership with the evil desire led to bankruptcy. There are no two properties; no separation can be made. "What do they want of me?" he said. "All week long its each man for himself. As soon as the holy Sabbath draws near, the Jew dons his black gaberdine, black belt and fur-rimmed hat and presto--he's bosom pals with the Shechina! I say no: 'His weekday deeds are as his deeds on the Sabbath.'¹ Just as one lives all week long so one must live on the Sabbath too."²

Following the great exaltation that Jews experienced at Mount Sinai, the Lord said to Moses: "Go and say to them:

Return you to your tents' " (Deut 5:27). "Let's just see how they'll behave once they get home" was Reb Bunem's paraphrase.³

"When a man dedicates his house to be holy..." (Leviticus 27:17) Reb Mendel read as "If a man's home is holy, he too is holy."⁴

The following interpretation is by Reb Mendel's disciple Reb Isaac Meir:

"Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries round about." (Psalms 97:3). "If one goes forward ardently and one burns up all baseness round about, then 'his lightnings lighten the world' (vs.4)--the Sabbath illuminates him. Moreover, if one approaches the matter with humility, saying: Who am I to be partners with the Sabbath? the Sabbath then accepts him with this very humility."

Another disciple, Reb Abraham of Porisov, took this thought one step further. "When the Sabbath approaches and a man takes stock of the entire week and sees that all is not as it should be, he need not be dismayed. He should say:

Whatever has passed, but from now on I shall devote myself to the service of God."⁵

In order to reach the truth one must be an appositionist to oneself. Truth lies buried; it must therefore be hunted, detected and uncovered from under the earth.

Kotzk did not believe in the golden mean. The middle path was for horses, not men. The Kotzker approach was: all or nothing, either one way or the other, either good health or good riddance. You cannot deal with the evil desire in kid gloves. To overcome him you must grab him by the throat.

To be a Jew one must wage war with a bitter enemy. "Now the other Jews...gathered themselves together and stood for their lives..." (Esther 9:16). Only when you summon all your efforts can the soul be protected.⁶ Only when a man gathers together all his scattered pieces and shouts to the Lord with a unified heart can he be saved.⁷

"God's Torah is complete" (Psalms 19:8)--the basket must be full.⁸ Kotzk was more concerned with the center point than the periphery, with man's completeness rather than his petty worries.

When no boundary exists between heart and mind, when all thoughts pour into one, then man is seized by one desire alone and nothing can stand in his way.

"Have you ever seen a wolf," the Kotzker once questioned a disciple.

"Yes."

"Were you very much afraid?"

"Yes I was."

"Do you recall whether you were conscious at the time of being afraid?"

"I only remember that I was tremendously frightened."

"This is precisely the way you must fear God: while fearing Him not even know that you're afraid."⁹

For the Kotzker, tolerable health was also malignant. He considered a world that was merely bearable spiritually to be a purgatory. He could accept no half-way measures.

Rashi commented that when Isaac and Rebecca prayed to God for children, the Lord was moved to compliance by his-- not her--supplication and Rebecca conceived. Reb Mendel was troubled by this. They both appealed for the same thing. What difference did it make on whose account the prayer was answered? The Kotzker concluded:

"They did not ask that she conceive. They both knew through divine inspiration that she would conceive two sons, one a saint, the other a sinner. Isaac asked that the saintly son be a true saint even if that meant conceiving an evil son who was thoroughly evil. R^{ab}becca, on the other hand, prayed: Lord of the Universe, may the evil son whom I am to bear be only moderately evil even if by consequence I shall bear a son who is only moderately righteous.

The Lord obliged Isaac.¹⁰ An out-and-out sinner is still better than a partial saint.

Notes

1. Sukah 45a.
2. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p.92; Siah Sarfe Kodesh III, 70.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh V p. 114.
4. 'Emeth mi-Kozk Tizmah p.70.
5. Siah Sarfe Kodesh III, p.70.
6. 'Emeth ve-Emunah p.23.
7. Ibid., p.256.
8. Ibid., p.130. Second edition
9. Ibid., p._____.
10. 'Ohel Torah p.21.

⑩ To Spite the Self

The correct path is not to live according to one's inclinations and theories, even if one is naturally inclined to do good, even if one's thoughts are proper. Of a man who leads a just life because to do so is effortless and painless Scripture says: "One who blesses himself in the heart saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart'...the Lord would not pardon him" (Deut 29:18-19). Ecclesiastes also addresses itself to such a man, saying "But know that for all of these things God will bring you into judgement" (Ecc. 11:9).¹

The good deeds man performs are not as important as the war he wages with and the victory he achieves over the evil desire. Man's divine service can be severely hampered if he lacks an evil desire.² "For serving the Lord can be meaningful only when there is an adversary to be overcome. In the absence of a passion for evil, man has great difficulty worshipping the Lord."³

Once, in fact, an elderly hasid complained to the Kotzker: "Rebe, what shall I do? I've lost the evil desire." The many obstacles in one's path and the bones in one's throat are precisely what make the service of God so significant.

"Only when falsehood is attractive and triviality--alluring is true devotion worthy of praise."⁴

The heart is a clock, but with broken hands. The phrase 'Honor but suspect him' applies to the self. The heart is unreliable. In Kotzk a man was considered sinful if his Jewishness stemmed from the heart, not from the mind. The Torah warns: "...not to follow after your own heart" (Numbers 15:39). "Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement" (Ecc. 11:9).

One of the ten miracles of the Temple was that though people stood pressed together, they had more than enough room to kneel. Reb Mendel said: "This is in fact the pattern of every man--he stands in confinement but capitulates with ease."⁶

Feelings are totally unreliable. Today you feel one way, tomorrow--another.⁷ Sentiment, therefore, plays no part in Kotzk. Even when something captured the heart, no one fell head over heels about it. Kotzk was Hassidism stripped of feeling. Feelings were cheap; they could easily be induced. Weeping was bribery;⁸ shedding tears--like throwing the conscience a bone.

Reb Mendel disapproved of visiting the graves of those departed. Once he arrived in Pshiskhe during the anniversary of the Rebe's death: The Kotzker turned to Reb Isaac Vorker who was also present and said:

"Isaac, I haven't come here for the yortsayt. I am not a cemetery Jew. I've only come to see you."⁹

"The commanded doer stands higher than he who is not commanded and does."¹⁰ Why? Because the commanded doer fulfils a commandment under constraint while the non-commanded doer fulfils a commandment out of personal preference. The commanded doer must overcome the self in order to do the deed, therefore his deed is of a higher order.

Reb Bunem also insisted that good deeds not be predicated by the goodness of one's heart but by the commandment of the Lord. He who fulfills a divine command out of goodness will never achieve a unification with the Almighty."

Once a Hasid complained to the Kotzker that he was so busy trying to earn a living that he had little time for study. Reb Mendel replied:

"Do not say: When I have leisure I will study; perhaps he will have no leisure."¹² Perhaps the heavens have decreed that you should study when you haven't the time, when the

going is rough." Then he illustrated his point with a story.

Once, at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service, Reb Levi-Yitskhok of Barditshev turned to his congregation and said:

"I know what each of you has prayed for."

"All right, let's hear!" someone called out.

Reb Levi Yitskhok replied: "During Kol Nidre you prayed: Since I need a thousand rubles a year to break even and the Lord, blessed be He, provides for me piecemeal, and since this forces me to be constantly on the move and I have no time for study and prayer, I therefore ask you Lord: Give me all thousand rubles at once so that I shall have enough time to devote to Torah study and to prayer.

"During the morning prayer on Yom Kippur you had second thoughts: It's no good. If I should earn a thousand rubles in one shot, I'll invest the entire sum in a new enterprise and will still be constantly on the move. Therefore I ask you, Lord: Give me 500 rubles every half year.

"During the concluding service you retracted once again: This is also no good. Even five hundred rubles at once will

involve me in new investments and I'll still be rushing around. Provide me, then, with 250 rubles each quarter."

In heaven, however, came the reply:

"Who needs your study and your prayer? It's your machinations that we need."

Reb Mendel concluded the story by saying: "The righteous ones, even though they can rely on the credit of their good deeds, request only unconditional gifts." Moses did not say: I shall enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfil those commandments confined to the land, but rather be requested an unconditional favor. Otherwise the heavens could have replied: 'Who need your good deeds?' "

It happened on the Sabbath of the weekly portion Kedoshim. A kotzker hasid hid behind the door to hear how the Rebe would interpret the reading. When they reached the phrase "And thou shalt love thy neighbor like thyself," he heard Reb Mendel say:

"And thou shalt love thy neighbor like thyself? What? Like thyself?"

A few minutes elapsed. Suddely Reb Mendel exclaimed:

"Like thyself!"

Both the question and the answer are a puzzle. REb Hirsh Tomashover offered an explanation.

The REbe asked: "How can the Torah demand: You shall love your neighbor like yourself? Is it then permitted to love oneself? Self love leads to falsehood...The answer: Like thyself--just as it is incumbent upon you not to love yourself so are you commanded to love others.

Notes

1. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I pp. 64, 648.
2. 'Ohel Torah p. 167; 'Emeth ve-Emunah p. 732.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, p.61.
4. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 339.
5. 'Ohel Torah pp. 138, 220; cf. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I P. 64.
6. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 867.
7. 'Ohel Torah p. 116.
8. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 192.
9. Siah Sarfe Kodesh p._____.
10. Talmud Kiddushin 31a.
11. Ramataim Zofim I, p. 194.
12. Mishna Aboth chap II, 4.
13. Ramataim Zofim II, p.38.
14. Rashi on Deut. 3:23.
15. Talmud Sotah 14a.
16. Siah Sarfe Kodesh II p. 88.

⑫

Heartache

There was a young man in the Kotzker's circle who had been a follower of Rizhin. Once he complained to Reb Mendel: "While I was in Rishin everything went well: my study and my prayer had meaning and my devotion was imbued with enthusiasm and joy. Now I no longer know where I stand. I am plagued with fears that my prayers are worthless and my study is spiritually flawed. Since I have come here I am a broken man and am fraught with suffering."

The Kotzker replied: "Who says that the Almighty desires your study and good deeds? Perhaps He prefers your suffering. Don't be a cobbler who earns his reward for a pair of shoes. 'We labor and receive our due.'¹ -- we are rewarded for our toil and our heartache."²

Heartache., anxiety over one's failings are good for the soul. In general, suffering has a purpose; it is heaven-sent..

A hasid from Zgerzh once complained to him of having no respite from his anguish. Any other hasidic Rebe would have blessed the Jew that he find relief. Not so the Rebe of Kotzk. If a Jew is in bad straits, it must somehow be motivated from heaven. '

"Do you actually believe--you've suffered once and that's it? Are you not aware of the precept 'You have not fulfilled your obligation at the Passover seder without

tasting the bitter herbs.³--the bitter herbs must be well digested." This is a new approach: do not flee from pain and suffering. A man suffers so that he be awakened to the source of his suffering and then ask forgiveness.

Without heartache one sinks into the mud. There is nothing more crooked than a straight ladder, nothing more complete than a broken heart. ✓

In Kotzk men learn how unpleasantly the days pass, they feel how easily the soul can be forfeited.

On Friday evening when the holy Sabbath draws near, a spark of repentance ignites in a man, a lament bursts from within him over the six weekdays that have passed in which he has neglected God and the study of His Torah. He cries out bitterly: "Woe is me!"⁵ My soul is lost."⁶

The Kotzker unveiled man's inferiority that lay hidden by his piety. Reb Mendel ripped off the mask and revealed the shame. No one denies that he is right, but who wants to listen? It is far better to hush up the matter, far healthier not to know the bitter truth.

A man who emerges himself in Judaism only to discover that he has not even scratched the surface of true devotion becomes seized with anguish and says to himself: If only I did not know all this, if only I had not emerged myself in Judaism. It is such a man whom Scripture alludes to: "Because you have made knowledge loathsome, I shall reject you from being a priest unto me" (Hosea 4:6)--I shall make you loathsome as well.⁷ And Ecclesiastes said: He who increases

knowledge, increases sorrow" (Ecc. 1:18). I say: "He shall suffer and he shall know."⁸

"But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 4:29). What does "from there" mean? It means "when you are in tribulation" (vs. 30).⁹

A Jew was once bemoaning his sorrows. A prominent Kotzker hasid said to him:

"In heaven the sins and good deeds of man are weighed. Suffering is added on to the good deeds. When it comes time for the weighing, I should like to add your present moans as well. You'll be able to put them to good use."¹⁰

.11

Success comes when a man is under stress and facts and concepts which he would otherwise be unable to assimilate are forced into him.¹²

A hasid came to the Kotzker and complained that he was living all alone in a village among Gentiles and had no one to talk to.

"What, you're all alone? Abraham was also all alone!

There is a heaven and a Talmud. Ecclesiastes said: "Also my wisdom remained with me" (Ecc 2:9). With such a gift from heaven you have the gall to be ungrateful! ¹³

Notes1. Talmud Berakhoth 28b.

1. Talmud Berakhoth 28b.
2. A Hasid from Rizhin.
3. Talmud Pesahim 115 b.
4. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 467.
5. Talmud Bēzah 16a.
6. 'Ohel Torah p.92; 'Emeth ve-'Emunah 430.
7. 'Ohel Torah p.231.
8. N^lfla'oth Hadashoth p. 92.
9. Ibid., p.63.
10. Y.L.Levin, Bēth Kozk p.25.
11. Talmud Berakhoth 6b.
12. Doresh Toy, 2nd edition p.50.
13. Hekhal Kozk p. 320.



To Disregard Self-Regard

The Kotzker once summarized all that he demanded of his disciple. "What do I ask of them? Three things: not to peer out, not to pry into and to disregard self-regard."¹ Indeed, the first two demands are hard nuts to crack, but the third is a virtual impossibility. It's easier said than done, for man always has himself in mind. Man is trapped in his self; he has prostituted his soul for the sake of honor, lust, wealth, for the bread of corruption.

There is a bad streak in each individual. Man is totally self-involved. A Jew fulfils a divine commandment ostensibly to serve the Lord but in fact he has only self-service in mind. Somehow the body can be taken care of, but the purification of the soul is an arduous task. The moment a Jew performs a mitzvah he brags about it to himself; he completes a page of Talmud and gleefully congratulates himself. But a mitzvah should call for sacrifice. Instead of reveling in it one should thank God for coming out alive. "Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently" (Deut 4:9). "Only implies a comparison: guard your body only a little, but watch over your soul ever so carefully."² What's in a sacrifice? Is it such a big deal to slaughter an ox? No, to bring a sacrifice means to bring the self as a sacrifice.

A long-standing problem. Both of Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, brought sacrifices before the Lord. Abel's offering

was welcomed while Cain's was not. The question is : why? Reb Mendel found the solution: Of Abel the Bible says "And Abel, he also brought..." (Genesis 4:4)--that is to say, and Able also brought his self as a sacrifice.³ Not only the hands and mouth must be holy, but also the mind. "Then Judah went up to him..." (Genesis 44:18) means: First he went up to himself.⁴

For the self is a hidden thief. He steals his way into each man and poisons him without the latter ever knowing. The hypocrite is oblivious to his pretense.

"A man performs a worthy task while treading in the mud of duplicity. He of course is oblivious to the ulterior motives at work, insensitive to the designs of his self-interest. All the while he is convinced that his motives are as pure as gold. Only later, once the task is completed does he discover the pretense."⁵

"A hypocrite," said Reb Mendel's son-in-law Reb Avrom Sokhatshover, "is worse than a blind man. A blind man sees nothing but a hypocrite sees everything backwards."

Even the ardent desire to be honest, to perform a mitzvah for the sake of heaven is often nullified by pretense, by a tendency to favor the self. That is why Reb Mendel says: "May all your dees be for the sake of heaven"--may the very desire to act for the sake of heaven also be for the sake of heaven.

Pretense distorts one's vision. Man sees the way he feels. After the Israelites left Egypt, they reached a place called Marah. "When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter" (Exodus 15:23) Who was bitter, the Israelites or the waters? The farmer, says Reb Mendel.

A young man came to Kotzk for the first time and the Rebe asked him: "Who brought you here?" Thinking the Kotzker meant his means of travel, the young man gave the name of his driver.

"No," said the Rebe. "What brought you here?"

The young man was silent. The Kotzker went on:

"Listen, 'Like arrows in the hand of a warrior' (Psalms 127:4)--the way you pull the string is the way they fly."⁷

But even when his motives are indeed pure, he can be ensnared a moment later. The self can trip him up anywhere, even in a sacred place.

The Talmud says: "If you are met by the evil spirit, drag it into the House of Study." The truth of the matter is that the evil spirit will be there whether you drag it in or not. But the evil spirit in the House of Study is different from the one found elsewhere. The former permeates everything. Man always falls into the net of pretense because he thinks that only in the net will he live as freely as a fish in water.

To fulfill a divine commandment in order to satisfy either oneself or others is idolatry. Is there any difference between worshipping an idol and worshipping the self? Hasidim always knew that self-involvement and self-love drives man away from God.

"...While I stood between the Lord and you..." (Deut. 5:5)--the I stands between God and you, said Reb Mikheil of Zlotshev.¹⁰

There must be no benefit incurred from serving the Lord for His sake alone. Even divine service for the sake of self improvement, for the sake of reaching a higher rung, Reb Mendel considered to be fraudulent. What, then is the relationship between life and good deed? Is it correct to say that a man does good to benefit his life or does man live in order to do good?

"See, I have set before you this day life and good" (Deut 30:15). "Man is blind and thinks that he should do good for ulterior motives, so that his life benefit thereof. But the Torah says that man lives in order to do good, not the reverse."¹¹

How can one rid the self of the pretenses that worm their way into all thoughts? Is there a way of becoming totally purified of pretense to the last degree?

In Kotzk, the way was through self questioning. One must always seek ultimate (the) purpose of one's creation on earth. Be aware of the dangers in forgetting the truth

for even a single instant. A man who wallows in his self forgets that he is merely the hatchet in the hands of the hewer. Enslaved to his self, he is incapable of concern with God; his existence is therefore uprooted.

You can choke on a small bone too. Therefore show no mercy to the evil desire. If you do not use force against him he will lead you by the nose. If you run into trouble with him, let the whip decide the case. Whoever is in power wins. (Gittin 60b). Courage is the deciding factor. That which involves struggle matters most. A man who places no demands upon himself is a nothing. Man must be stronger than iron.

Elimelekh of Litzhensk, a REbe of an earlier generation, had already established the principle: A Jew spends day and night in study and ecstatic devotion, "but if for one instant he has himself in mind then the fires of hell are insufficient [for him]."¹² The Kotzker's disciple Reb Isaac Meir articulated this same position with even greater emphasis.¹³ Reb Mendel said in Tomashov: "A man must prostrate himself when performing a mitzvah."¹⁴

God can do without Man's favors. He has no need of Jews offering a donation. The Lord wants the whole man. "For this reason, when the Temple stood and the High Court condemned a Jew to death, this Jew had cause for rejoicing. What could be better? He had both the privilege to be killed for God and was spared the feeling of pride for having died

for God's sake. A martyr, also, gives up his life, but a feeling of self-satisfaction creeps into him for performing the supreme sacrifice. He, however, who is condemned to death for a transgression, what can he take pride in?"¹⁵

Reb Bunem thought: Consider a man who wishes to become a hermit and go into seclusion in a forest far from habitation in order to serve the Almighty. It occurs to him though, that people will know about his seclusion. This is a very mean type of person.¹⁶

This explains why the mitzvah of forgetting is so valued. All other commandments are carried out consciously, thus there is always the possibility that they are not being fulfilled for the sake of heaven. Forgetting is a godsend--no one thinks about it, no one prepares for it.

Moses chose able men from all the people, each of whom was a man of truth who hated a bribe, and "made them heads over the people, & rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens" (Exodus 18:25) The question is: "If each of them had the same qualities, and M^uses appointed them to different positions, nevertheless, some more dignified and some less--did this not arouse jealousy among them? Reb Mendel replied: "Since each of them was a man of truth and meant his service truthfully, thus no one was bothered that the other person had a more honorable position."¹⁷

He who is truthful does not care if he is the one to accomplish a great service to God. What's crucial to him is that the mitzvah be done, irregardless of who does it.¹⁸

"And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies" [heresh] (Joshua 2:1) Rāshi interpreted the word heresh as follows: "He said to them...carry earthen pots with you so that people will think your craft is pottery." R_eb Isaac Meir elaborated: This was the difference. The spies that Moses had chosen thought highly of themselves. "Every one a leader among them" (Numbers 13:2). Each of them was a big shot, a leader in his tribe. Joshua's spies, on the other hand, lowered themselves, saw themselves as earthenware with no intrinsic value. This is why they were successful.¹⁹

"What do I ask of them? Three things: not to peer out, not to pry into and to disregard self-regard." R_eb Mendel may have heard this formulation, in a somewhat different form, from R_eb David of Leluv near Pietrokov who often traveled to Lublin to the "Seer."

Once, before Passover, Reb David Leluver was going on foot to Litzhensk. As usual he was very poor and he carried a gift for the R_eb^e on his back: two wooden novess for baking supervised Matzah. He knew the road well, but when he reached a forest near Litzhensk he lost his way and did not know how to get out of the woods. After wandering about quite a while he began to sob: What will become of me? Suddenly a man appeared.

"Why are you sobbing, my child?"

"I've been going on this road for so many years and this time I have lost my way completely."

"Come, I shall accompany you until we come out of the forest."

VERY soon REB David saw that they had reached the edge of the forest. Before taking leave the stranger said to him: "Now I shall tell you three things that will always be of use to you. Firstly, if you wish to join two pieces of wood, you must cut off the knots. Second, rather than prying into someone else (to discover his qualities and failings) it is far better not to peer out in the first place. Remember this for the rest of your life."

Years later, Reb David, now a famous Zaddik, said at his table: "For sure, it was Elijah."²⁰

Notes

1. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I p.68. See also II p.96 in the name of Reb Elimelekh.
2. Tahor Ra'avonim on the weekly portion Tezaveh. 'Ohel Torah p. 162; 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 507.
3. 'Ohel Torah p.8.
4. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 363. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p.20; 'Ohel Torah p. 43.
5. Sifte Zadik I, p. 64; 'Ohel Torah p.20.
6. Mishan 'Avoth II sec. 3.
7. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 908.
8. Talmud Sukkah 54 b.
9. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 95.
10. Ma'or Vashemesh on the weekly portion B'a (Lvov, 1859), 67, 2.
11. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 655. This explains the formulation
~~22~~ "life and good" rather than "life and death."
12. Siah Sarfe Kodesh II, p. 142.
13. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 15.
14. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 29.
15. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, p. 132; 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 783.

16. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, p. 54.
17. 'Ohel Torah p. 64.
18. Siah Sarfe Kodesh II pp 91-92.
19. Hekhal Kozk p. 519.
20. Saiah Sarfe Kodesh II, p. 96.

②

The Work Is Never Done

Reb Mendel refuted the notion that man can reach perfection. He refused to accept the idea that the purpose of man's labor is to achieve solace, to be at peace with the self and with the world. By the very nature of things, all this implies self-deception. The world is sinking in mud and the fool rejoices at a rainstorm.

Man's strength lies not in that which he has accomplished but in the knowledge of not having even begun to accomplish.

One does not argue a case before God in light of the good deeds accumulated in the past. The righteous build their case on that which they intend to do. The joy in a mitzvah lies not to the divine commandment already fulfilled but in the commandment one has not yet had the privilege to fulfill. "A mitzvah can never be fulfilled in its entirety. In fact the value of mitzvah is that it anticipates another one. One commandment draws another at its heels."¹

Judaism is an endless affair. "Seek and ye shall find" means: "Seek and you shall find out that you must search even deeper." A Jew is always on the road, in process, he can never reach the ultimate goal "because a Jew has never repaid his due,"² he is never finished. "The prayers begin with 'Adon 'Olam, a hymn to the Supreme Ruler. But why is 'Adon 'Olam said at the conclusion of prayer? Because when

all the prayers are said and done, there comes the realization that one hasn't prayed at all and that one must begin anew."³

"In the place where penitents stand, the consistently righteous cannot stand." This dictum has its problems. Can it be that a true saint is lower than a man who has committed sins and then repented? A disciple of the Kotzker had this answer: A true saint here means a ready-made saint. A saint who thinks he is in a state of completion cannot stand the same ground as a penitent, for the latter is tormented by a broken heart."⁴

Why, when referring to a Jewish scholar does one say: He has filled his belly with laws and commentaries? Wouldn't it make more sense to say he has filled his head with laws and commentaries?

"Every day a belly grows hungry again. Yesterday's meal can not sate him today. A learned man is he who grows hungry each day."⁵

It was Simhath Torah. Festive hasidim were sitting in the House of Study. Suddenly, the door to Reb Mendel's room opened. The Rebe came over to their table and asked:

"What is the source of the joy we feel in Simhath Torah, when we finish reading the Torah?"

Since none of the hasidim dared open his mouth, Reb Mendel continued:

"The source of our joy is in knowing that we finished the Torah and have not yet begun [Genesis is begun on the following morning.]. This knowledge causes great joy."⁶

"Do not believe in thyself." Jokhanan served as High Priest for eighty years and in the end he became a Sadducee."⁷ What does Sadducee [zeduki] mena? He became a zaddik, a saint, in his own eyes.⁸

Delusion is worse than illness, it is a contagious disease. A man is breathing his last and deceives himself into thinking that he's as strong as an ox. Reb Mendel felt that self-approval was a fatal sickness.

"A perverse man will be filled with the fruit of his ways" (Proverbs 14:14). When a man feels satiated with his achievements in Torah and prayer, it is a sure sign that his heart is full of perversity. An honest man is concerned about those qualities that he lacks. Those which he possesses are worthless to him. He wants to reach much higher.⁹

"Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalms 51:10). Is there such a thing as an unclean heart? Only he who deludes himself into thinking his heart is pure demonstrates that it is not.¹⁰

Most people live out their lives without a direction and are themselves unaware that they are floundering in a swamp.

Many follow the crowd or wherever their eyes lead; others stumble along like blind horses, thinking all the while that they are going forward. The prophet says: "Let the wicked forsake his way" (Isaiah 55:7). Reb Mendel exclaimed: The sinner has no way, he has a swamp. The meaning of the verse is this: Let the wicked discard the illusion that he has a way.¹¹

Purity is always a beginning, not an end. Man is always in transit. This should be a guiding principle: the little good that you have done shouldn't be worth a straw to you. There is no perfection. Everyone has faults.

"The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous" (Psalms 146:8).

A hasid asked the Kotzker:

"Why did King David include the righteous among the cripples?"

The Kotzker looked at him in amazement.

"Where else should they be? Can you imagine a worse cripple than he who considers himself a saint?"

It is generally agreed that Abraham proved his greatness when he was ready and willing to sacrifice his only son on the altar. Reb Mendel felt, on the other hand, that an even greater achievement was to obey the angel and not sacrifice Isaac. "It is true that sacrificing an only son

calls for great devotion. What could be more exalted? But it is precisely the greatness of this action that threatens to drag man down into a feeling of self-approval: How happy I am to have accomplished such a sacred task! That is why for Abraham, who was indeed capable of carrying out such a tremendous act, the greater sacrifice was to refrain from doing it because the angel so ~~xx~~ commanded him."¹²

NOTES

1. 'Ohel Torah p. 98; 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 442.
2. 'Ohel Torah p. 114.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh III p. 25.
4. Heshbah leTovah p. 73
5. _____ .
6. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 548.
7. Talmud Berakhoth 29a.
8. Glikzman Der Kotsker rebe p. 32.
9. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 87.
10. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 613.
11. Ibid., p. 889.
12. Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 86; 'Ohel Torah p. 19.

③ Self Interrogation

Reb Mendel once said to Reb Henekh of Alexander: a true hasid is he who examines his motives before each action, saying "Why am I doing this?"

When Joseph left his father's house, he wandered about in a field until he met an angel who asked him: "What seekest thou?" (Genesis 37:15). JOseph had to undergo a severe fall in leaving the home of the saintly Patriarch Jacob for the descent into the perversity of Egypt. The angel, anticipating this, advised JOseph to examine his every move with the question: What seekest thou? This is what kept him going. Each man who descends from the upper spheres to this world must do the same: ~~xxxx~~ inquire of himself constantly : what do you seek?¹

The Kotzker once advised a merchant: "Take my advice. Put aside an hour each day to ask yourself: What am I doing in this world? What am I wasting my time with? Study each day."²

One of the Kotzker's three demands can now be understood in this light. Do not peer out³--you sho7ld be more concerned with your own self.

This approach of instant self-interrogation allowed for no peace of mind. Yesterday's decisions are up for grabs today. Relance on habit is an animbl trait. Each act must be

predicated by a new rationale. Each minute is a new beginning.
Who can stand it?

Once a hasid returned from a visit in Tomashov, where the Kotzker then lived. Reb Henekki of Alexander asked him:

"What's doing in Tohashov?"

"He's a butcher," replied the hasid.

"Who's a butcher?"

"I don't mean him, I mean the hasidim."

"What do you mena?"

You too? All you do is cross examine. You must be one of them also."⁴

Later, on Reb Henekh's visit to Kotzk, he told the Rebbe of this exchange. Reb Mendel commented:

"Whoever has an affinity to Kotzk, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ involves himself in endless self-interrogation."

Butchers? Yes, in Kotzk they butcher their selves. Man's only source of solace is his ability to delude himself into believing that he's in fine shape. But in Kotzk, self-delusion is a form of suicide.

According to a Kotzker disciple, there was a sharp division between Moses and the Levite Korah on the issue of self-approval. Korah, himself a righteous man, was of the opinion that he who is truly a God-fearing soul may be conscious of his own righteousness. "All of the congregation are holy" (Numbers 15:3). And each of them should be

cognizant of this. If I am worth something, I ought to know about it. A tallith that is all blue--for blue is like red to the sky. Should a Jew who is completely blue, heavenly, have recourse to fringes that will remind him that he is refuse, the lowest of the low? Korah said no. Moses maintained that no man is made up exclusively of heavenly matter. "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).⁵

Most people think that the Sabbath is a time for merriment and celebration. Reb Mendel felt, however, that the Sabbath is a time for spiritual stocktaking. The Talmud interpreted the verse "and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:17) to mean that on Sabbath Eve man receives an additional soul and at the conclusion of the Sabbath, it is removed. This explains the phrasing vayvinafash [and he was refreshed], which really means vay 'avaah nefesh [woe is me, my soul is lost].⁶ But vayvinafash refers to the Sabbath itself, not to its conclusion. Why would a Jew be in pain during the Sabbath? The Kotzker explained that since the Sabbath is a day for introspection, a Jew takes stock of a week spent in the neglect of Torah and of God and a bitter cry erupts from within him: "Woe is me, my would is lost!"⁷

Elaborating on the verse in Isaiah "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed..." (54:4), the Kotzker said:

"Why are they not afraid? Because they are not ashamed. And why are they not ashamed...because they don't bother to delve into their souls."⁸

"In everything a prudent man acts with knowledge" (Proverbs 13:16)--You have to keep your wits about you. Always keep track of your own thoughts and be watchful of each feeling and inclination. Be ready at all times for a lawsuit with your self. "You shall appoint judges and officers" (Deut. 16:18)--within yourself and over yourself.⁹ The mind must weigh the consequences.

What is the difference between a lazy and an easy-going person? The latter acts with deliberation while the former is too lazy to think and acts without reflecting.¹⁰

A young man was praying with fervor. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart!" he exclaimed in ecstasy.

Later, Reb Mendel called him in.

"What ~~is~~ does it mean to love God? When someone loves the head of a fish and eats it with gusto, what is it that he loves---the fish? No, he loves himself...It's easy to delude yourself in thinking that you love God when in fact it's your self that you love."¹¹

NOTES

1. Sefath Zaddik on the weekly portion Vayyeshev; 'Emeth ye-'Emunah p. 301. cf. Tanhuma, ed. Buber, Vayyeshev, 13
2. Likutim Hadashim p. 7.

3. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 754.
4. Hekhal Kotsk p. 392.
5. Heshbah Letovah p. 30.
6. Talmud Bezah 16b.
7. 'Ohel Torah p. 92; 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 430. cf.
S.fer Ba'al Shem Tove, _____.
8. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, p. 69.
9. 'Ohel Torah p. 182; 'Emeth ve-Emunah p. 72.
10. Siah Sarfe Kodesh IV, p. 20.
11. M. Olrein, Seneh Bo'er beKotsk, p. 137.

④ Walk Humbly

Man should consider his self as a means to an end. The sacred act is important, not the actor. An honest man does not need recognition, a golden plaque or a chair in Paradise. Don't be a mitzvah grabber. It makes no difference who performs the commandment, you or someone else. What matters is that God's will be done.

The Mishna differentiates between Priests of the earlier and later generations.¹ The Priests of earlier times were more exalted men; they did not care who performed the sacred act, so long as it was done. In later times, each Priest insisted that he be the one to do the act, he and no one else.²

Usually the passage "Walk humbly with the Lord your God" (Micha 6:8) is taken to mean that when you fulfil a divine commandment, your act should be unknown to others. Reb Akiva Eiger once asked Reb Yekhezkel of Kuzmin (a disciple of the Seer), what was the literal meaning of the dictum "Who is a hasid? _____."

Reb Yekhezkel replied: "A hasid is he whose righteous deeds are unknown to anyone except himself and God."³

The Kotzker Rebbe as well as Reb Refoel Bershter (a disciple of Reb Pinkhes Koretzer) went one step further. They believed that "walk humbly" meant ~~that~~ not only that the next person should not see you performing a mitzvah, but you yourself should not see it nor feel a sense of accomplishment. You must remain anonymous to your self as well as to the world. Your devotion must be kept hidden from others as from yourself.⁴

In the instructions on building the tabernacle, the phrase "as the Lord had commanded Moses" is repeated several times (Exodus 40: 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). The Bible states that Moses built all these things himself. In that case, should not the phrase have read simply: "as the Lord had commanded him."?

But Moses carried out his orders with such humility, that it seemed as if the Lord had commanded another Moses, not him. According to a disciple of the Kotzker, the passage should be understood to mean "as the Lord had commanded a Moses."⁵

NOTES

1. Yoma, 81b.
2. Siah Sarfe Kodesh II pp. 91-92; 'Emeth ve-'Emunah p. 217.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh V p. 115.
4. Reb Henek of Alexander, Rinze 'Esh, Eliyahu Raba, 175.
5. Heshabah leTovah p. 20.

⑤ The Core

You must speak to God from the core of your heart,
but you must search and search to find that core.

"They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem and there was none to bury them" (Psalms 79:3). Jerusalem is the heart. "A Jew prays to the Almighty, the tears pouring out like water, and believes that he is reaching closer to God. Yet it is possible, that the source of his prayers and tears is 'roud about' his heart and were not wrenched from the heart itself.¹

Man is not born with an empty heart. He is born with passions and desires. The question is how to channel these desires. At the core there is a passion and it is good. The trouble is, the core is buried.

"Beloved are Israel, for unto them was given the desirable instrument."² Each man is born with a passion for Torah. The fool channels this passion into a desire for absurdities while the wise man deliberates as to what he should desire.³

"In all form of work there is profit, but the talk of the lips tends only to want" (Proverbs 14:23). Each effort made to find the truth is useful, if it comes from the heart. If the search is made with mere lip talk--'it tends only to want.'⁴

According to the Sages, the Almighty pleads with man: Open up to me just a little, at least as much as the eye of a neeldle and in return will burst open the gates for you.⁵ The Lord is willing to accept even a tiny bit of openness on condition that is is through and through, like the needle's eye.⁶ "It should be punctured to the very core."⁷

Notes

1. Nifla'oth Hadashoth 83; 'Ohel Torah 246.
2. Mishan 'Ayoth III sec. 14.
3. 'Ohel Torah p. 313.
4. Ibid., p. 275
5. Canticles Rabbah V, 3.
6. 'Emeth ve-'Emunah 557; Nifla'oth Hadashoth 95 in
REb Simha Bunem's name.
7. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, 68.

[PAGE MISSING]

Man should practice honesty humbly. The Holy Jew said: that Man is not a billy-goat with a bell around his throat to announce his approach to everyone. Piety on display is sickening. "Walk humbly with the Lord your God."

A man who works as a cobbler puts a boot on display in his window so that everyone knows his profession. But a hasid does not put his good deeds on display.⁶

Ceremonies were scorned. That which is spiritual is unseen and unheard. That which God wishes to see is not for man to observe.

"Hillel the Elder had eighty students...the greatest among them was Yonatan Ben Uziel...of him it was said: While he sat and studied the Torah, he did so with such fire that a bird flying overhead would be consumed in the flames!⁷ Teb Mendel asked: If the student was so exalted, what can one say of his teacher, Hillel? "The teacher's greatness was his ability to control and to hide the fire."⁸

The heart may be thundering but on the outside there should be peace and quiet. "In distress you called and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder" (Psalms 81:7). When did I answer you? When the thunder was in hiding.⁹ As long as the heart produces the ecstatic outburst, a man will make motions while praying. But as it reaches the mind, he becomes still.

Reb Note of Chelm once spent Yom Kippur in Lublin. In the course of the day he never once entered the House of Study, but sat outside like a stone. When Reb Bunem noticed that Reb Note had not prayed either on the eve of Yom Kippur or on the day itself, he was very much amazed and brought the matter up before the Holy Jew. The latter explained:

"He did not pray out of great fear for Rosh Hashana."¹⁰

How were Kotzker hasidim different from others? Other hasidim fulfil God's commands when everyone can see and transgress when no one is looking. Kotzker hasidim do just the opposite. There was a current saying about them: "It's easier to catch other hasidim at a transgression than to catch a Kotzker hasid fulfilling a mitzvah."

Kotzker hasidim did not wish to please others and certainly not the masses from whom they kept their distance. They deliberately tried to make a bad impression on others. They made it seem "as if they were tampering with Jewish custom so that others would accuse them and leave them alone. For this was their intention: to remain isolated, a small, segregated group with no meeting ground with others."¹²

There are some saintly men who hide behind strange practices, who camouflage their spiritual greatness in wild behavior. Through hiddenness they manage to reach even higher rungs. This is the meaning of the verse: "In all form of work there is profit, but the talk of the lips tends only to want" (Proverbs 14:23). By assuming a form, a mask, there

⑦ An Endless Affair

"A man shall always study Torah even if not for its sake alone, for through selfish study he will achieve selfless study."¹ The process whereby man rids himself of pretense and reaches the stage of disinterested study is an endless affair. It demands uninterrupted, lifelong effort. Yet the word "always" seems to imply rabbinical permission for a man always to study not for study's sake. Reb Mendel explained: "The more a man ~~studies~~ studies for its own sake, the more he realizes that all his previous study has not been disinterested."²

"One must repent not only for transgressions, but also for good deeds. One must closely examine each of the commandments one fulfills to see if it is pure, free of pretense and not done for the sake of reward, even if the reward is a portion in Paradise. Indeed, close examination reveals that even acts performed for the sake of Heaven call for repentance."³

Then cannot it be argued that even the purgation of pretense is not always done for the sake of heaven? Is not this desire for self-purification a form of egotism, a genteel form of lust? One man lusts for honor and another lusts for higher spiritual states, to become a saint and serve God for His sake alone. The quintessence becomes polluted, truth becomes distorted and the self is left idolatrous. How can one's personal purity be an end in itself? Kotzk demanded that 'the sake of heaven' be absolutely

free of pretense, for God's ~~xx~~ name and His name alone.⁴

Faith means the total disregard of self-regard. Since, as the Kotzker argued, the more one studies, the more all previous study seems to have arisen out of pretense, therefore one can never be certain that one is serving the Lord for His sake alone. Kierkegaard said towards the end of his life:

"I have always said that I do not possess faith." He wonders whether "anyone ever has the right to write that he has faith."⁵

Kotzk declared war against the most dangerous enemy of all--the self. It is easier to conquer the world than to conquer the self. It demands unflinching courage. "Send out men" (Numbers 13:2)--cast away humaneness,⁶ but in order to do so, one needs superhuman powers. Kotzk was not a well-trodden path. Risk your neck and submit to the most arduous tests. The battle with the self ends either in total defeat or victory. Great things are attained through greatest hazards.

Life is not pleasurable, it is downright dangerous. The knife is at one's throat. Man is always at the brink of the abyss. "You see," said the Kotzker, "I stand with one foot in the uppermost heaven and with the other in hell."⁷ A Rabbi who expounds his teaching while his own self-interest is implicated even to the slightest degree deserves a worse fate than Gehenna.⁸

Notes

1. Talmud Pesahim 50b.
2. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 611; 'Ohel Torah p. 285; Nifla'oth Hadashoth p. 94 in Reb Dovid's name.
3. 'Ohel Torah p. 34 "For God will bring every deed into judgement (Ecc. 12:13)--every deed means every commandment and good deed. cf. Koheleth Rabah x chap. XI, end and the attendant commentary Hidushe haRadal. [God in Search of Man p. 313.
4. 'Ohel Torah p. 309.
5. S. Kierkegard, The Instant, Journal 1843, R. Jolivet. Introduction to Kierkegaard. N.Y. p. 79.
6. Siah Sarfe Kodesh I, p. 74.
7. Ibid., III pp. 19-20.
8. See above, p. _____.

⑧ Not Yet Begun

Most people are yes-men. The world goes on and man adapts himself. Even a thinking man usually acquiesces. Man's nature is solidified, the Torah is sealed and all that is left to do is write a commentary or a commentary in a commentary.

As we have seen, Reb Mendel considered a ready-made man to be no man at all and by extension, apparently thought of a ready-made world as the end of the world. Thought means beginning; each thing is but a prelude. The day one completes the study of a sacred work should be seen as a day of mourning. A Jew should be the celebrant of beginnings. Even in human behavior one can begin with creation and then proceed from the self.

The profound truth is that nothing in this world has reached completion, even the Torah itself. Jews have two Torahs; the written and the oral. From the very earliest times there was a strict prohibition against recording the oral teachings. Along came Rabbi Judah the Prince, wrote down the oral tradition and compiled the Mishna. On what grounds? The usual explanation is that Rabbi Judah, seeing the persecutions Jews were undergoing, felt that the oral teaching was in danger of being forgotten. To justify his ~~unorthodox~~ actions he quoted the passage from Psalms: "It is a time for the Lord to act, for thy law has been broken" (119:126). To save the law from extinction, he violated the prohibition.

The Kotzker could not accept this. How could such a fundamental principle be violated on the basis of a passage in Psalms? The only possible explanation is this: "The truth is that to this day the entire oral teaching has ~~still~~ ^{yet} not been recorded."¹

The Torah is given once a year--on the Feast of weeks, but the receiving of the Torah happens all year round. When the Torah is given, all are equal but each man receives the Torah according to his understanding.²

"Only he who feels his self to be an arid desert, as if he has not yet absorbed a thing, can reach an understanding of Torah. A desert is a place that was never ploughed and never seeded. A desert is also a place where each man knows that unless he struggles to survive he will die of hunger. No one will be there to help him."³

Truthfulness, goodness for its own sake is an endless affair. The purer and deeper one becomes, the more one realizes how little purity one possessed until now.

"And the Lord appeared to him...as he sat at the door of his tent" (Genesis 18:1). Why is this detail mentioned? The Lord always appeared before Abraham, but Abraham was so humble a man that it always seemed to him as if he were still sitting at the door of his tent and not inside.⁴

The joy of Simhath Torah, said the Kötzker, stems from the knowledge of having completed the Torah and not yet begun ~~the knowledge of having completed t~~ it.⁵ "A false-

hearted man will be filled with the fruit of his ways" (Proverbs 14:14). "He who is sated and intent with his ways, studies and prays the whole day through and imagines himself to be a saint shows all the evidence of being false-hearted."⁶

The fulfillment of a sacred act should not arouse joy. As a result of one's present act, one will be able to perform another mitzvah in the future. This should be the cause for joy. One mitzvah gives birth to another. Conversely, if one transgresses unwittingly, do not worry about the transgression itself but rather be concerned about the previous intentional transgression. One sin drags another at its heels; an unwitting sin is the offspring of an intentional sin.

"When you carry out a mitzvah, do not jump for joy for it may not have been done for the sake of heaven. Only when a mitzvah happens unexpectedly should you rejoice, for only a mitzvah performed truthfully will give rise to another."⁷

"Thus did the people of Israel; they did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses." (Numbers 1:54). This passage amazed R^{ab} Mendel: "Could it be that the Israelites did everything exactly the way God commanded them? Where did they get such strength? No doubt, the source of their strength was that Moses commanded them..."⁸

1. 'Ohe! Torah p. 256; 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 588; of also p. 891.
2. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 472.
3. Ibid., p. 124.
4. Siah Sarfe Kodesh II p. 95.
5. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 548.
6. Likutin Hadashim p. 5.
7. 'Ohe! Torah p. 98; 'Emeth ve-Emanah p. 442.
8. 'Emeth ve-'Emanah p. 433.

④

PROBLEMS WITH GOD

Time and again Reb Mendel returned to the same question:

Is it conceivable that the world in its entirety, heaven and earth, ~~are~~^{is} a palace without an overlord? For man this was a tormenting question.

Whenever an exceptionally difficult problem was raised in the Talmud, all that was needed was for one side to interject "Lord of Abraham!" to force the opposition to change its course. Reb Mendel used a midrash to explain this:

(22) Abraham can be compared to a man who wandered from city to city and came upon "a burning palace." He thought *wondered* to himself: Can it be that such a brightly lit palace has no overlord? Then the lord of the palace peered out at him and said: I am the lord of this palace. Similarly, Abraham looked around at the great, beautiful world and thought: Can it be that such a beautiful world ^{is without a guide} has no overlord? Then the Lord of the universe peered out at him and said: I am ^{the guide,} the Lord of the world. ¹ *(the sovereign)* *in flames*²

The phrase "a burning palace" is ambiguous. It can mean both "a palace full of light" and "a palace in flames."²

According to the first interpretation, Abraham sees a world of endless wisdom and beauty and thinks: Is it possible for such grandeur to have been created accidentally, without a creator? According to the second ^{meaning} ~~interpretation~~, he sees

a world engulfed in the flames of evil and deceit and he thinks: Is it possible that there is no Lord who takes this misfortune to heart?

✓ Apparently, Reb Mendel accepted the latter meaning of the "burning palace," namely, that the world is ~~on fire~~ ^{in flames}. He also considered Abraham's question to be the central and most critical issue for anyone who wished to grasp the ~~essence~~ ^{nature} (presence) of the Almighty. For this reason, every difficult question is termed "Abraham's question."³

"Can it be that this palace has no ~~overlord~~ ^{master}?"

(22) Clearly, these vexing problems with God tormented Reb Mendel continually. He who never ingratiated himself to anyone and ^{spoke} the truth to anyone's face did not delude himself with facile solutions.

Once a Jew came to him to pour out his heart. The man's wife had died in childbirth, leaving him with seven little children and a suckling infant to support. The man himself was in rags.

"I cannot console you over such iniquity. Only the true Master of Mercy is capable thereof. Address your plea to Him..."⁴

(24) Problems arise in the course of studying the Torah. While other people are ~~not particularly~~ ^{only} bothered by these problems, for the Kotzker they were a source of great pain.

It happened in 1840, on the Sabbath of the weekly portion Toledoth, before his seclusion. Reb Mendel sat at the table in the House of Study, encircled by his Hasidim. He asked: "How is it that Isaac ^{had originally} wished to give the blessing to evil Esau?" He became so engrossed in the matter that he fainted. All the Hasidim were seized with fear. There was the Rebbe in a dead faint, with his head thrown back over the chair. Then one of the leading Hasidim, Reb Shmuel Shinover (author of Ramatayim Zofim), carried the Rebbe out in his arms and lay him down on his bed. Reb Mendel lay sick in bed for several weeks.⁵

(~~25~~) The Talmud recounts that R. Yose was walking on the highway when it came time to pray. He stepped into a ruin and prayed there. ^{After R. Yose left the ruin} Elijah the Prophet ~~then~~ [^] appeared and told him that praying in a ruin was forbidden (because of the danger involved). Reb Mendel asked: Why did Elijah not appear before R. Yose stepped into the ruin? Because this is how God is wont to rule the world. First he ~~permits~~ allows man to carry out his wishes, then He appears before him with reproach, saying: "What have you done?"⁶

Once, when he heard that someone had died, the Kotzker asked: "Lord of the Universe, would it have bothered you to let him live out his years?"⁷

Sometimes he was tormented by serious doubts. "Isaac-

Meir," he once said to his best disciple, "If only I could be certain that there is ~~no~~ punishment in the world to come, I would go out into the streets and dance for joy. If only I could be certain..."⁸

(~~26a~~) The man who has initial doubts about serving the Lord and eventually clarifies them stands above the man who insulates himself from all doubts. This idea is to be found in the work of one of the Kotzker's disciples, Reb Mordkhe Yoys~~e~~^{70set}f, who later left the master. Reb Mordkhe added the stipulation, ~~howe~~^r, that this principle applied only to certain souls.⁹

Perhaps all doubts can be mitigated by the thought alluded to in the Pentateuch: We live in a time when locks are suspended from all the gates and the heavens have turned to copper. (~~26~~) The heavens that God created had open gates but man's great sins caused the gates to lock and the heavens to become like one piece of copper that no hero on earth can penetrate. Copper is cold, indifferent; any attempt is doomed to failure.

Of all the terrible curses which threaten the people if they stray from the proper path, Reb Mendel considered "And the heavens above your head shall be copper" (Deut. 28:23) the most terrifying curse of all.¹⁰

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NOTES

1. Genesis Rabba 32a.
2. See my God in Search of Man, p. 113 note 7.
3. Rimze Esh, Eliyahu Zuta, p. 7.
4. Heard.
5. Wayalket Yosef, p. 3.
6. 'Ohel Torah, p. 271; Doresh Tov, p. 21.
7. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, part III, p. 7.
8. M. Alrein, Sneh Bo'er Ba'esh, p. 85.
9. "Indeed, whenever man has doubts concerning the service of God, or in other matters that call for clarification, if he finds a positive solution then he is greater than the man who has completely purged his doubts. This applies only to Israel, however, for they alone have steadfast ^{Trust} ~~confidence~~ in the Lord, that He shall proffer a positive solution; thus Israel may enter into doubts, but whosoever lacks this steadfast ^{Trust} ~~confidence~~ is forbidden to do so... And even in Israel there are souls who are permitted to doubt more than others, though both groups may be of the seed of Jacob..." Me haShiloah, I (on the weekly portion) Toledoth, 19, 2.
"The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings."
(Berakoth 5a). For man need toil, clarification and doubt." Ibid., II (on the weekly portion) Ba, 13, 4.
10. Alrein, p. 178.

⑤ ONE FOOT IN THE UPPERMOST HEAVENS, THE OTHER IN SHEOL

Doubts and dangers did not ~~arouse~~ any ^{evoked} ~~fear~~ ^{shock} in Kotzk.

A radical certainty of faith could only be achieved after experiencing radical uncertainty, ~~and~~ deep disbelief. The mind must be kept open. Each thought called for deliberation. The mind possessed no censor of rebellious thoughts.

Once a Hasid came to him with a problem:

"Rebbe, I have terrible thoughts."

"For instance?"

"I'm afraid even to utter them. I'm appalled to have such thoughts. Even Hell would not atone for them."

"Out with it."

"What a wretch I am. Sometimes I think that the world is lawless, God forbid."

"Why does it bother you?"

"Why does it bother me!" shouted the Hasid. "If there is no law and no judge, what purpose is there to the whole world?"

"If the world has no purpose, what concern is it of yours?"

"Rebbe, if the world has no purpose, of what use is the Torah?"

"Why should it bother you if the Torah has no purpose?"

"Woe is me, Rebbe. If the Torah has no purpose then

all of life is meaningless! That bothers me very much."

Reb Mendel replied: "Since you are so deeply concerned, you must be an honest man and an honest man is permitted such thoughts."¹

The Kotzker knew well that his path was a treacherous one. Once he said about himself: "I stand with one foot in the uppermost heaven and with the other foot in Sheol."²

~~(29)~~ "Do you think this is an easy matter? It's easier to jump into a lime kiln."³

(30) "I am ~~an~~ honest!" he cried. "I was created to be honest!" Once he said: "Even in heaven I have no true friend. The angels and seraphim oppose me. But I have no fear of them, for I am honest..."⁴

Why were the angels and seraphim opposed to him? Apparently, Reb Mendel felt that his accusations of heaven were too audacious. His thoughts were probably much sharper than his words. There was a view expressed in the Talmud (by Raba) that criticized Job on similar grounds: "With his lips he did not sin, but he did sin within his heart... Job sought to turn the dish upside down [i.e. to declare all God's works worthless]...dust should be put in the mouth of Job!"⁵

NOTES

1. Heard.
2. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, III p. 32. R. Ephraim of Sudlikov, at the end of his Degel Mahane Efrayim, reports the following from the Baal Shem Tov: "I swear to you that there is a man on earth who learns the Torah /directly/ from the mouth of an angel or the like...and he himself believes that God would reject him, perish the thought, for He could easily cast him into the lower depths, God forbid."
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh III pp. 19ff.
4. Hekhal Kotsk veShishim Giborim Saviv Lo, p. 320.
5. Baba Bathra 16a.

⑥ THE ELOQUENCE OF SILENCE

Job had many followers and the Rebbe of Kotzk was among them. But the Kotzker did not believe in repeating the words of others. To imitate was to falsify. Repeating someone else's complaints was like forging a receipt with a false signature.

What were the sources of pain for Job and Reb Mendel?

While Job was pained by injustice and by man's suffering, Reb Mendel grieved even more about the falsehood of the world.

Suffering was not his main concern. "Even the darkness is not too dark for Thee" (Psalms 139:12) --when the source of light is within ^{There} you, darkness is illuminated perforce. ¹

"Many are the sorrows of the wicked" (Psalms 32:10) -- the evildoer is in great pain; he is full of complaints and nothing is to his liking. "But he that trusts in the Lord, mercy encompasses him." Said Reb Mendel: "He sees everything around him as a great mercy. ² "But they that seek the Lord want not any good thing" (Psalms 34:11). Why? Because at each of God's deed they say: "This too is for the good." ³

Suffering can be explained but there is no ^{forbearance of} ~~accounting~~ ~~for~~ falsehood. What is the source of falsehood in the world?

(33) Generations of Jews have answered Job's terrifying question by saying: All of God's deeds are just though His Ways cannot always be comprehended. Therefore one must have faith.

The piyyut of Ros^h Hashanna states that justice is hidden, that is, we do not see it. Reb Mendel says that the only solution is to have faith that His deeds are truth.⁴ "The ordinances of the Lord are true, they are righteous altogether" (Psalms 19:10). In this~~x~~ world it may seem, at times, that God's ways are unjust, but ultimately, all of God's ways will be revealed as just.⁵

~~(24)~~ A Jew is called "Yehudi" after Judah about whom Leah had said: "This time will I praise the Lord." Rashi commented: "I have reason to praise for I have taken more than my share." Indeed, every Jew should know that all that the Almighty does with him is more than he deserves.⁶ According to this view, however, there are no grounds for complaint against God.

Reb Mendel did not measure devotion in terms of reward and punishment. "Even if a reversal were to occur in the divine order whereby I would be punished for observing a divine commandment and rewarded for transgression, even so I would not swerve from my path and would serve God as before." These werex the words of a Kotzker Hasid, Reb Avrom Porisover.⁷

~~(25)~~ The Kotzker was most troubled with the problem of why God buried the Truth before creating man. How could

He have done such a thing? Falsehood is ^{obscene!} ~~immoral~~ the whole world trembled when God proclaimed: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain" (Exodus 20:7). How, then, could He have cast Truth into the ground?

This was a terrifying question, all the more so that man was left to dance upon the grave of Truth. Why did man accept this dance of death which prevented Truth from being revived?

(36) There is yet another difference between Job and the Rebbe of Kotzk. Whereas Job thought out loud, Reb Mendel's thoughts remained hidden in the depths of his heart. He was a man of few words. Reb Mendel felt that by refuting, questioning, rejecting or criticizing the Creator, man could easily make a fool of himself. The same words that man thrust against the heavens fell back upon his head like a boomerang. Reb Mendel, in his wisdom and his awe of the Lord, knew full well how the most fiery accusations could come out sounding like gibberish.

One of the Kotzker's disciples once said: "To think a thought is easy ~~is~~ but to express it is no mean feat. That is why we pray: 'Open the mouths of those who put their trust in Thee.'" ⁸

(37) Kotzk taught the eloquence of silence.

Reb Mendel Vorker, another disciple of the Kotzker, sat

in silence for several hours surrounded by the Hasidim. Complete stillness. They sat in fear and in awe. One could hear a fly on the wall. After the concluding grace, one of the leading Hasidim exclaimed: "That was some gathering! He took me to task and pumped me with questions, but I held my own. I answered every single question he put to me..."⁹

The less spoken, the better. It is better to put off uttering a word or even a syllable as long as possible. Wayelekh haranah -- he went toward Haran (Genesis 28:10). Rashi commented: Whenever a lamed is called for to denote "to" a certain place, the Torah prefers a he at the end of the word. Reb Mendel asked: What's the difference, what advantage comes of using the letter he? It teaches us to restrain our speech and that ~~even~~ delaying the utterance of one syllable for even a second is also worthwhile.¹⁰

(28) A lock ought to hang over one's mouth. He who cannot keep a secret will never unveil any secrets. "Let your heart burst before uttering so much as a moan."

When a man has reason to scream, desires to scream but cannot scream -- he has achieved the greatest scream.¹¹ This was Reb Mendel's interpretation of the Talmudic passage: "If one enters [a house] to visit a sick person [on the Sabbath], he should say, 'It is the Sabbath, when one must not cry out, and recovery will soon come.'"¹²

In Kotzk one does not cry. Any child can cry. Even when in great pain, one does not cry. "Silence is the greatest cry of the world," said Reb Mendel.

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(40) "And she ~~x~~ opened it, and saw the child, and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him and said: 'This is one of the Hebrew children.'" (Exodus 2:6)

When Pharoah's daughter opened the casket, she ~~w~~ was amazed.

It does not say that she heard, but rather

~~X~~ She saw that the child was weeping. Then she said: This

must be a Hebrew child, because only a Jewish child is

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capable of such quiet weeping.

To fully understand Truth one must be Truth . To be Truth is more important than knowing Truth, First and foremost, being Truth requires disinterst. Job's mistake was to have cried out when he was in pain, but to have kept silent when all went well. ~~the~~ Real question ing should take both sides into account: Why are things so bad for me as well as: Why are things so good?

Mankind can be compared to chains that shackle the hands of God. Job's outcry today ought to be a call to free God of His chains.

(~~●~~) A teaching of the Baal Shem Tov: When the Romans tortured Rabbi Akiva with fiery rods the angels ~~appeared~~

appealed to the Almighty: "Is this the reward for the study of Torah?" And God replied: "Silence! Thus ~~it~~ has arisen in

or; he has risen

CE

Thought,

It really means: Thus he has arisen in Thought

in ~~My mind~~ What is the meaning of the answer? (There is a

spiritual

realm, ^{called} of ~~pure~~ ^{to} Thought ^{to} which ^{one} can only ^{rise} be reached through

martyrdom. The Almighty loved Rabbi Akiva deeply and wished

to uplift him into the ^{spiritual} realm of ~~pure~~ Thought. (Therefore,

he had to undergo self-sacrifice. Silence, thus it has

arisen in ~~My mind~~.) In the realm of Thought, there is an

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answer to every question.

Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that Reb Mendel himself was totally overcome by the darkness, that he could find no solace for the tragedy.

NOTES

1. Emeth veEmunah, p. 858.
2. Zekhuta deAvraham, p. 63.
3. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, II, p. 106.
4. 'Ohel Torah, p. 194.
5. Heard.
6. Wayalket Yosef, p. 14.
7. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, III, p. 19.
8. Heshbah Letovah, p. 6.
9. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, IV, p. 86.
10. Nifla'oth Hadashoth, p. 23.
11. 'Ohel Torah, p. 282.
12. Talmud Bavli, Shabbath 12a.
13. Heard.
14. Heard.
15. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, IV, p. 19.

⑦ THE COSSACK WANTS A NEW SONG

(~~44~~) As we said earlier, the Kotzker Rebbe suffered from the inability of overcoming his own depression. That he himself did not consider silence the ultimate response can be inferred from the following remarks ^{which he cherished} ~~attributed to him.~~

(~~44~~) Three ways are open to a man who is in grief.

7 He who ~~sax~~ stands on a normal rung -- weeps. He who stands higher is silent, but he who stands on the highest rung, uplifts his sorrow into song.

Of Aaron the Priest it is said: "And Aaron ^{was silent} ~~held his~~ ~~peace~~" (Leviticus 10:3). Two of his sons perished in a gruesome manner and he was silent. King David, on the other hand, went much further than merely holding his peace. "So that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent" (Psalms 30:13).¹

The fact that this utterance of Rabbi Shloyme Radomsker made a deep impression on the Kotzker indicates that the latter was in search of a higher response than silence. But did he achieve it?

(45) These were difficult times. Grief was no rare commodity. Each person carried his own pack of sorrows and knew that no final blessing would be made over them. When the heart is heavy the eyes overflow. But the Kotzker Hasidim

did not weep. "Let the righteous [~~"hasidim"~~] exult in glory; let them sing for joy upon their beds" (Psalms 149:5). Said Reb Bunem: Hasidim, "even when they are bed-ridden, manage to sing."²

Hasidic song meant exultation of the Lord. Hasidic song was like celebrating the wedding of God and Israel. One must make merry at a wedding; moreover, a gift is called for. But what kind of gift is suited for such a wedding? A song, for life is a song. The Almighty wants to hear a good song.

(46) Answers to the ultimate perplexity cannot be expressed in words. Response is facilitated in the form of song. Singing is not the mere repetition of notes nor even the expression of joy. Singing means uplifting all of existence to the level of perfection. Singing means uplifting oneself, higher than all words and all ideas, to the realm of pure thought. ^{has [R. Akiva] arisen in Thought} "Thus ~~it arose in R. Akiva's~~ thought." One cannot truly sing by repeating an old melody. "God loves newness," said Reb Mendel; each time one must~~s~~ sing anew, sing a new song.

(47a) Reb Henekh his disciple loved telling piquant stories. Those who did not know him well split their sides with laughter. Reb Yekhiel Meyer remarked, however, "Henekh is lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem and there they are laughing..."³

When Reb Henekh lay on his deathbed, his friend Reb Avrom Porisover came to visit him. Reb Henekh told him the following tale: When Russia occupied Poland [after 1792], not everyone understood the Russian language. Once a Cossack visited a Jewish homeowner and asked him: "Are you hozyen (the owner)?" As the Jew did not understand Russian, his wife explained to him: "The Cossack said: 'You are a Hazan; sing for me.'" So the Jew began singing "The Sons of the Temple." ^(*) The Cossack became angry and began to beat the Jew. His wife explained: "You see, he doesn't like that song. He wants a new one!"

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With these words Reb Henekh breathed his last.

Did Reb Henekh feel that his service of God had been worthless? That the Cossack, by which he meant the Lord, was angry and therefore beat him? Was this an admission of having failed to understand His language? Is it at all possible for a Jew to sing the song that the Cossack wishes to hear?

(48) The Kotzker taught his disciples that to have faith in God was no game, for the Lord could carry out His words "with destructive force." ⁵ Perhaps the Almighty conducts the world with anger because He dislikes our way of worshipping Him, with worn-out old tunes. Was Reb Mendel, then, in search of a new song, a new path, which he did not achieve?

NOTES

1. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, p. 92. See above, p. _____. (1000)
2. ~~X~~ Siah Sarfe Kodesh, II, p. 106; a slightly different version on p. 98.
3. Ibid., II, p. 106.
4. Hekhal Kotsk, p. 253.
5. See above, p. _____. (107)

8 PUNCTURED BARRELS

(50) The ^{Kotzker's} pain stemmed not from a personal disappointment, either in man or in himself, but from a deeper source. Suddenly he realized ^{came to the} that all of human endeavour was a Sisyphean task.

It seems that Reb Mendel struggled with the bitter perplexity of whether human existence ~~xxxx~~ had any purpose whatsoever. Was it not self-delusion to think that we ~~xxx~~ were accomplishing something in the world? Perhaps all our labours were completely worthless.

Once, in the presence of his four disciples Reb Isaac Meyer Varshever, Reb Eliezar Pultushker, Reb Henekh of Alexander and the Rabbi of Gostinin, he interpreted the following midrash:

"Wisdom is ^{too high for a} ~~as unattainable to~~ a fool ~~as corals~~"

(Proverbs 24:7). The Amoraim explained this passage with three parables. The first parable compared wisdom to a loaf of bread lying atop a high beam, which no man could reach. Until a wise man came by and got the bread by setting up several ladders, one on top of the other. A second Amora compared wisdom to fresh water at the bottom of a deep well, so deep that no man could reach down to it. Along came a wise man and tied one rope to another and by ^{fastening} ~~tying~~ these to a bucket was able to draw the water with ease. The third

parable is different. A king hired laborers and ordered them to ^{pour} ~~put~~ water into barrels and measure them. As soon as they began work they noticed that the barrels were full of holes. They thought: What point is there in pouring water into punctured barrels? But a wise man among them exclaimed: What do I care? I get paid anyway.

Reb Mendel explained the difference between these parables. (53) The first sage used a simple logic. ^{Seeing} ~~He saw~~ the bread lying on a beam he realized that he would not be the first to reach that high for someone else had already placed the loaf there. The second sage was wiser than the first because it was possible that no one had yet reached the fresh water. A means was yet to be found. At least there was a purpose involved. The third man was truly wise. His task was absurd. What reason could there be for pouring water into a barrel that was punctured on all sides? He therefore explained to the workers that their purpose was not to fill the barrels with water but the main goal was to fulfill the king's desire. The Kotzker concluded: Do you understand what I'm thinking?²

What, in fact, was he thinking? That our efforts are akin to pouring water into punctured barrels, that they have no purpose, that life is absurd and our deeds are in vain. Nonetheless we must do them because God so desires.

NOTES

1. See Shir haShirim [Canticles] Rabba, 85a; Leviticus Rabba, 89b with changes.
2. 'Ohe1 Torah, p. 108; Nifla'oth Hadashoth, p. 88, Emeth veEmunah, p. 656.

⑨ THE SOLUTION LIES IN THE PROBLEM

(54) Is this the last analysis, the ultimate conclusion that the turbulent Reb Mendel reached in his thoughts? Is there no choice but to have faith, no other alternative but to submit, to obey and accept everything with love?

For a thinker such as Reb Mendel who always demanded that one live audaciously and that one must always think twice, such a conclusion seems too docile and compromising. It looks like a patchwork solution to the terrifying abyss between man and God.

Reb Mendel was not misled by conceits nor was he appeased by false consultations. He knew that for all of man's ceaseless labours he could accomplish nothing. Of course the barrel was full of holes, for the whole ^{enterprise} ~~question~~ was ^{absurd} ~~baseless~~. Only one thing had meaning -- truth -- and to live truthfully meant not to delude the self, not to go around starry-eyed and fool oneself into believing that all the hardships had some ultimate meaning.

The essential point of the parable was that the laborers knew that they were hired by the king and that he would even remunerate them for their toil. The king was responsible for having ordered the work to be done, therefore he alone should be concerned about its purpose and ultimate effect.

God is truth. We carry out His orders, pour water into barrels, and believe ~~that we~~ this to be an accomplishment. Can it then be imagined that God who is truth is fooling us, telling us a lie? And even if a few individuals realize that their efforts are fruitless, the vast majority of people are still convinced that their toil has meaning. How can one then conclude that Truth speaks falsehood, that God is deluding the world?

(55) No. Truth is incapable of lying.¹ There can be no doubt about it: God will not delude the world. There is meaning, but it is hidden from us. Just as truth lies buried, so too does meaning.

There is truth. Though it lie hidden it is not destroyed. Jews have always believed in the ~~restoration of the soul, the~~ revival of the dead. The soul of Truth lives, not in this world however, and one day its embodiment too shall be resurrected.

Reb Mendel wished to cultivate within his Hasidim a fine sense for higher concepts. Even abstract notions ~~are~~ oftentimes assume forms that are too earthy and crude. More exalted conceptions should be understood in a wink. Neither by means of the senses nor with the aid of simple-minded parables could this be achieved. The heavens did not spoonfeed; all they offered was a taste, a mere intimation.

The focus of man's study was to learn how to detect that which the senses and the ~~simple~~ intellect had ~~overlooked~~ and missed. Reb Mendel interpreted "Now Jethro...heard" (Exodus 18:1) as "Jethro's ear detected." A disciple later explained this ^{interpretation} ~~passage~~ for over two hours. ²

(57) Reb Mendel wished man to be capable of ^{heavenly thinking} ~~other-~~ ~~wordly thoughts~~ while still in this world. "That they take for me an exalted-gift" (Exodus 25:2) he read as "That they take me for an exalted-one!" ³ The approach, the style and the way of conceiving God must be ^{absolutely} ~~different~~ from the way of conceiving wordly matters. "Heavens, perceive" -- "Perceive of ~~Me~~ heavenly," not in human or simple terms. ⁴

A God whose ways could be fathomed by any runt is not a God who would command my faith. So said Reb Mendel. He was not in search of mundane solutions to his ultimate perplexity. Thus, the only option was to live with that perplexity.

This may have been one of the motivating factors for his seclusion. He who lives with such perplexity must live alone.

(57a) This world is made up of punctured barrels; human truths are shot full of lies. True meaning in the deepest sense is hidden, for the Truth lies buried. How, then, can truthfulness flourish in human life, lying as

it does in the grave? But the grave is marked by a tombstone with an epitaph: The ultimate purpose is to carry out the King's desire.

He believed, apparently, that in order to bring the Messiah, ~~t~~ truth had first to be resurrected. The question is: can one possibly revive the very truth that God Himself had buried?

(58) The purpose of our labor~~x~~ is not to find its rationale, but rather, we labor to restore the purity of the world. What will man have accomplished by understanding the malice and injustice of the world? Can an explanation of this perplexity obviate the terrible agony the world is writhing in?

To truly understand, one must know not the whys and the wherefores but rather one must be certain that a "why" exists, that the problem itself has meaning. There can be no ultimate solution. [The secret of the En-Sof, of God as He is in Himself, accomodates to the narrow confines of the human mind to produce each and every solution reached by man's intellect.] ~~But~~ Perhaps it is God's will that man give Him no rest?

see facing page

When all is said and done, one must still struggle with the ~~x~~ perplexity. For is it not God's will that man be a partner in achieving the restoration of purity, in

finding the solution to the ultimate perplexity of the world?

The solution can never be satisfactory. Thus, there is only one option: to obey and to question. He who does not obey has no right to question.

The question of why and wherefore cannot be summarily dismissed; it must, ^{however} ~~however~~, be addressed directly to the King himself. If there exists no King at all, then there is no ~~*~~ rationale in asking the question and no hope of ever ^{achieving} ~~receiving~~ a reply.

To disobey means to distrust the King. Without trust, there can be no point in asking: Why? On the other hand, if there is no purpose in asking, who can stand it? It is easy to say: live in despair... But to truly live in despair is worse than death.

Do people really believe that the world is conducted in a literal, ^{shallow-minded} manner? Does not every intelligent being know that to think in literal terms is sheer foolishness? Reproaches against God? Does not the Almighty bring reproach upon Himself? Why pour salt on God's wounds?

And perhaps, at one point, the Kotzker thought: How can one reproach God? God Himself is the quintessential Job. In all their affliction He was afflicted ^{(Isaiah 63:9).} (He does not want imitators, human Jobs, but partners, silent warriors

who will stop dancing on the grave, who will disregard self-regard and who will ultimately revive the truth.

Reb Mendel departed from the world with the strongest outcry: silence.

NOTES

1. "We have found that the Lord, blessed be He, created everything in our world except for falsehood, which He did not create." Pesikta Rabbati, chapter 24.
2. Siah Sarfe Kodesh, II, p. 108.
3. Midrash Moshe, II, p. 86. [The Kotzker's reading is a play on terumah which he reads as maromimdik.]
4. 'Ohel Torah, p. 200.