

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

כ"ד אב תש"פ  
August 14, 2020

פרשת ראה  
7<sup>th</sup> year, edition 348

**EXCITING NEWS: The newly released *Sefer, Fascinating Insights*, is now available for purchase by sending an email to [yalt3285@gmail.com](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com) or at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/Bo8929ZCNM>.**

To join the thousands of recipients and receive these insights free on a weekly email, obtain previous articles, feedback, comments, suggestions (on how to spread the insights of this publication further, make it more appealing or anything else), to support or dedicate this publication which has been in six continents and over thirty-five countries, or if you know anyone who is interested in receiving these insights weekly, please contact the author, Rabbi Yehoshua Alt, at [yalt3285@gmail.com](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com). Thank you.

לעילוי נשמת שמואל אביגדורר בן יצחק מאיר

This newsletter can also be viewed at <https://www.dirshu.co.il/category/הורדות-עלוניים/fascinating-insights/> and <http://www.ladaat.info/showgil.aspx?par=20200425&gil=2725>.

Archives: <https://parshasheets.com/?s=Rabbi+Yehoshua+Alt>

To view these essays in German, please visit <https://judentum.online/>

Please feel free to print some copies of this publication and distribute it in your local Shul for the public, having a hand in spreading Torah.

## [The Incredible Life of the Chida](#)

We know of the many Sefarim of the Chida (1724–1806), such as *Shem HaGedolim* and *Maagal Tov*. What is the story behind this great man and his Sefarim?

The Chida<sup>1</sup> started writing Sefarim when he was 12. Not long after his marriage in 1742, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh visited Yerushalayim who set up his Knesses Yisrael Yeshiva, of which the Chida became a member of. In the works he wrote afterwards, the Chida often cites the teachings and customs of the Ohr Hachaim, whom he considered to be his teacher par excellence. He was also a student of the Rashash—R' Shalom Sharabi.

In 1753, at the age of 29, the Chida was appointed as an emissary to represent the communities of Eretz Yisrael since funds were badly needed as well as to keep alive interest in the Holy Land. The Chida traveled extensively, including to Egypt, Italy, Germany, Holland, England, France, Sicily, Rhodes, Turkey and Syria.<sup>2</sup> Since he loved Sefarim and learning, this trip was a great opportunity for the Chida. He spent all available time in

<sup>1</sup> The Chida's mother passed away when he was 8 years old, following an epidemic.

<sup>2</sup> The job of raising the necessary funds was much more complicated than we realize. The right candidate for the mission, ideally, combined the characteristics of statesmanship, physical strength and endurance, and Torah knowledge and understanding. They had to have the right stature and bearing to impress the Jewish communities they visited. They often had to be able to arbitrate matters of Jewish law for the locals and, ideally, they were multi-lingual so that they could communicate with both Jew and non-Jew along the way. Finally, they had to be willing to undertake the dangerous, time-consuming mission that would take them away from their families for so long. At that time, travel was far more time-consuming and much more dangerous than it is today, especially for Jews. One in ten emissaries sent abroad for these fundraising missions never made it back alive. Emissaries would often divorce their wives before leaving, so that if they died along the way and their deaths couldn't be verified, their wives would be able to legally remarry. If they returned safely from their journey, they would remarry their wives, who would sometimes wait as long as five years for their husbands to return from their mission.

the libraries of the cities he visited, studying ancient manuscripts and books.

During his five years as a Rav in Egypt—beginning in 1764—the Chida unearthed many Genizos (buried treasures of ancient manuscripts) and further added to his vast knowledge of books and authors. Later he returned to the Holy Land and devoted himself to the further study of the inner wisdom of the Torah and mysteries of Hashem's creation—Kabbala.

In 1772, he embarked on a similar trip to the one he took in 1753. Each trip lasted in excess of five years. Although he knew how wearisome such travels would be from his past experience, his love for his people and his desire to discover new treasures of Hebrew literature made him accept the urgent request. He writes that, during his sojourns, he often slept at night on a wooden bench, yet he also diligently studied 53 pages of Zohar every day. Again the Chida searched through dusty museums, libraries and private collections in search of centuries-old treasures of wisdom. He therefore became familiar with many thousands of manuscripts. He was thankful for the opportunity to visit Paris, not for its beautiful boulevards and curiosities, but for the five thousand manuscripts he discovered in the Louvre and other collections. On his journeys, when he visited numerous libraries, he would spend nights copying rare texts by hand. Out of these visits grew his remarkably compact and informative classic of bibliographies of great Jewish scholars who preceded him, together with their works, entitled *Shem HaGedolim*.

His second trip was completed in Livorno (Leghorn), Italy, where he remained for the rest of his life. When he reached the port city of Livorno, he was placed in quarantine for 40 days (as was standard practice in that city for any foreigner from the east). While in quarantine he compiled his work *Shem HaGedolim*.

The Chida was a radiant, majestic, impressive, yet remarkably modest personality. This is shown in the detailed diary of his trips, called *Maagal Tov*. He attributes all the honor he received to the fact that he represented the Holy Land. When he visited King Louis XVI of France in the beautiful castle of Versailles (before the Chida had a chance to introduce himself), the king was greatly impressed that he asked what country's ambassador this visitor was. The king, one of the most powerful rulers in Europe, had never seen a more stately and impressive looking ambassador! This and many other events we learn from the Chida's diary (*Maagal Tov*). In it, the author records his observations and experiences in the course of his travels, which also gives insight into the political, economic, and religious life of those days.

In 1778 when the Chida settled in the quiet and prosperous Jewish community of Livorno he began writing his major works. Livorno was then a center of Hebrew printing. He found there all the necessary

facilities for publishing his works, and generous people who loved Sefarim that helped him do it. A certain physician, Michael Pereira de Leon, a descendant of one of the oldest Jewish families in Italy, enabled the Chida to devote all his time to his writings, taking care of all his financial needs. Approximately 60 Sefarim of the Chida have been published although he wrote many more. His works include the Birkei Yosef on the Shulchan Aruch and the historical *Shem HaGedolim*. In 1779, he married his second wife, Rachel. His first wife, also Rachel, had died in 1773. On May 17, 1960, 154 years after his death, the Chida's body was reinterred by being brought to Eretz Yisrael for burial.

\*\*\*\*\*

### A Willful Desire

At times we may misdiagnose what we should be doing. We may desire to go learn when Hashem wants us to be helping a spouse or child. We may have an appointment somewhere and are aiming to be on time but that may not be what Hashem is looking for. It may be to drive calmly and not get upset at anyone even though you are in a rush.

It was Erev Yom Kippur and someone noticed that the Brisker Rav took a two-hour walk. Upon inquiry, the Brisker Rav explained that this is what he needed at that time. He continued that although he could have learned those two hours and know more Torah, that wouldn't be what Hashem wanted. This is in accordance with בטל רצונך מפני רצונו nullify your will before His will.<sup>3</sup>

This is what we are warned about in פן תעלה לך השמר לך פן תעלה we should be careful that our elevations in spirituality should be in accordance with what Hashem wants.

\*\*\*\*\*

### A Golden Opportunity

When we are successful, we may feel it is an outcome of our own efforts as it says... כחי ועצמי ידי, my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth.<sup>5</sup>

The Tur tells us the money we possess is actually a deposit.<sup>6</sup> We need to do the will of the one who deposited it by us, which is to distribute it to the poor.<sup>7</sup> Turanusrufus once asked R' Akiva if Hashem loves the poor, why doesn't He sustain them. R' Akiva answered that Hashem makes people needy so that through giving them charity we may be saved from the judgement of Gehinom.<sup>8</sup> In this way we can comprehend כי יהיה as the poor person is there because of you, meaning in

<sup>3</sup> Avos 2:4.

<sup>4</sup> Devarim 12:13,14.

<sup>5</sup> Devarim 8:17. See Devarim 8:12-14, 11:15,16 with Rashi, 32:15. There is a saying: "A real friend will tell you your faults and follies in times of prosperity and assist you with his hand and heart in times of adversity."

<sup>6</sup> All that we have is from Hashem as it says ולי הכסף ולי הזהב, the silver and gold are Hashem's (Chagai 2:8). In Lashon Hakodesh, there is no term "to have." For example, we say יש לי כסף: there is money and it is in my possession (and not that I own money), as ownership means that the object is there for that person.

<sup>7</sup> Tur, Yoreh Deah, 247. See Ohr Hachaim, Shemos 22:24. See also Chovos Halevavos, Shaar Habitachon, 4. It has been said money is like fire. It can destroy and annihilate or illuminate and warm, depending on how it is used.

<sup>8</sup> Baba Basra 10a. The Rambam (Hilchos Matnas Aniyim 10:2) writes one won't become poor from giving charity and no evil or damage will come about because of it (See also Pnei Meir, Shemos Ki Sisa 30:13, Rashi).

order for you to sustain him and fulfill the Mitzva of Tzedaka, charity.<sup>9</sup>

Some may feel that giving money to charity will diminish the amount they have. The Imrei Shefer gives us an alternative interpretation of ימעט לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט:<sup>10</sup> A wealthy person's wealth will not be increased by not giving charity nor will a poor person become poorer by giving charity.

It is preferable to give the money before the poor person even asks.<sup>11</sup> An allusion to this is found in the *Trop* on בך אביון (which means if there shall be a destitute person among you) which is a קדמא ואזלא—we should precede and give the poor person before he asks.<sup>13</sup>

We should be sensitive to the feelings of the poor as the Rambam<sup>14</sup> writes we should give Tzedaka with a cheery countenance and happiness in addition to feeling his pain. There was a beggar that was collecting in Yeshiva Torah Ohr. One of the boys in the Yeshiva went to give him some money. When the man said that today was his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, the boy told his friends—"let's make him a birthday party in Center One (a Charedi mall)." They bought party hats and balloons and told the beggar they would take him out to eat and that he could order anything he wanted. About twenty boys came to the party. They put in extra effort to make this beggar feel good since obviously no one else was celebrating his birthday. They even gave him the pictures they took at the party which he clearly cherished. This was this man's last birthday on this world, as he died later that year.

What about those who don't give because of those who are deceivers and not worthy of charity? The Sanzer Rebbe once told a wealthy person the difference between me and you is that I give Tzedaka to 1,000 people on the possibility one is authentic whereas you won't give to 1,000 people just in case one is a fraud.<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the *Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives On Unique Topics*. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

<sup>9</sup> Ohr Hachaim, Devarim 15:7. Years ago, there was a Syrian who resided in America and wanted to send mail to Syria. At the post office he was told, he needs more money (stamps) to send the package since it was heavy. The uncultured Syrian was confused as he said if more stamps are added, that would just make it heavier. It was explained to him that with these stamps it gets it through to Syria. The same applies to charity. People say they are low on money and can't give. It is just the opposite, as when one is low on money that is surely when he should give. This same idea is brought out from the following metaphor. There was a wagon that didn't drive well. As a result, it was decided amongst the people there to unload unnecessary items. One of them said that since the wheels are the heaviest, they should be taken off. Needless to say what a fool he was, as the wheels are what gets them to their destination. The same applies to charity, that if one is going through a tough time financially, he shouldn't give less charity as that is like removing the wheels. Rather he should take off the unnecessary expenses just as he would remove the unnecessary items from the wagon.

<sup>10</sup> Shemos 30:15. The simple meaning is that the wealthy shouldn't increase and the destitute not decrease from half a Shekel.

<sup>11</sup> See Kesubos 67b.

<sup>12</sup> Devarim 15:7.

<sup>13</sup> See Shekalim 5:4.

<sup>14</sup> Rambam, Hilchos Matnas Aniyim, 10:4.

<sup>15</sup> The Gemara says we must be grateful to the frauds among the poor who pretend to be paupers in order to solicit charity as if not for them we would be punished for being lax in giving charity to all who request it (Yerushalmi Pe'ah 8:8. See Kesubos 68a.).