



# The Right to Write

The Piasezna Rebbe (1889-1943), who was killed in the Holocaust, continued to write in the Warsaw Ghetto. When asked why he did this, as they reasoned his work wouldn't survive the destruction of the Holocaust, he responded that he would continue to do his part and write. When it became apparent to the rebbe that the end of the ghetto with all its inhabitants was near, he buried his writings in a container. These writings were eventually found by a worker when a foundation for a new building was being laid in Warsaw. The worker gave the container to the Institute of Jewish History in Warsaw. This is the story of the sefer Aish Kodesh.

The Sefer Chassidim writes that if Hashem reveals something to a person and he doesn't write it down, it is as if he steals from Him. In the Haghos Bris Olam from the Chida to the Sefer Chassidim, he brings from the Lev Aryeh that in the time of the Beis Hamikdash when one brought a korban, it would atone for him. And when one writes in a sefer some chidush from that which he is learning, this writing is in place of a korban. An allusion to this is *זבח ומנחה*... לא חפצת... אז אמרת הנה באתי במגילת ספר כתוב עלי have come with the scroll of the book... (Tehillim 40:7-8).

The Mishna states, *וקנה לך חבר*, acquire a friend for yourself (Avos 1:6). Another interpretation is that one should make his pen his friend, as *קנה* is also a quill. Through the power of the pen, enormous amounts of Torah can be written.

The Gemara (Baba Basra 10b) says that fortunate is one who comes to the next world *בירו*, and his learning is in his hand. The simple meaning is that he remembers what he learned. The Maharsha (s.v. *שהירי*) interprets *תלמודו בירו* as referring to the original insights and explanations a Torah scholar commits to writing, as that is *תלמודו בירו* — Torah that was penned by his hand. So fortunate is the scholar who records his Torah thoughts, for his primary learning—and that which makes a great impression on him—occurs when he composes those works. For this reason Torah scholars are called *סופרים*, scribes.

Writing something down makes a far more powerful impression, which can help one remember it. This is referred to in *כתב זאת זכרון* (Shemos 17:14)—writing something down helps one to remember it (see Kav Hayashar, chapter 55).

The Kitzur Shela (עניני לימוד) in the name of the Mateh Moshe points out that the first letters of *בטעך*, guard them in your innards (Mishlei 22:18), spell *כתב*. Guard what you learn by writing it down.

Writing notes is significant as in this way one can have his Torah last even after he dies. In this manner we can

*grasp* *זכרון בספר* (Shemos 17:14), write a sefer so that it lives beyond you.

We only know the Maharsha, the Rosh, and many others because of their sefarim. How much would we be lacking if we didn't have their sefarim! Similarly, people today should think about how their Torah will be remembered after they pass away. Today we even have machines to record shiurim, which can also ensure that one's Torah not be lost after death. R' Avigdor Miller was conscious of this and thus recorded his shiurim on a tape recorder. Because of this we have a multitude of sefarim from him, as some of his sefarim were based on those recordings. Of course one's Torah can also live on in the people to whom he gives shiurim during his lifetime, particularly when they integrate the Torah that was taught. And many rabbanim have had students who wrote up their Torah after they died.

One may feel that he is unworthy of putting out a sefer. When R' Bachaye considered writing the sefer *Chovos Halevavos*, he felt that a man like himself was unworthy of authoring such a work. He thought his powers were too limited to systemize the material, the subject too difficult, his knowledge too limited, and his mind too weak to grasp the ideas. Furthermore, he didn't possess an elegant style in Arabic, in which the book would have to be written, as that was the language best understood by the majority of his contemporaries. So he decided to drop his plans. Then he began to suspect that he had taken the easy way out, that he had been lazy, looking for peace and quiet. He told himself that if everyone who intended to perform some good act or to teach what is right and virtuous kept silent and stood still until they felt perfectly qualified, not a word would have been spoken by any man since the time of the prophets, whom Hashem had chosen as his messengers and strengthened with His support. If everyone who wanted to perfect himself with all the best qualities—and was unable to attain them all—were then to forsake those qualities which he managed to attain, all men would be empty of virtue and deficient in what is admirable. He saw fit to force himself to assume the heavy burden of writing this sefer, to explain the subject with whatever language he could muster... (Chovos Halevavos, Hakdama)

Here are some other comments on this topic: Upon the publication of *Chofetz Chaim* on *lashon hara*, the author was asked whether he should have refrained from writing it because *שדידו שוגגין ואל ידיו מודיעין*, it is preferable that they be unintentional violators and not be deliberate ones (Baba Basra 60b). The Chofetz Chaim replied that if one reader were to change his behavior as a result of his work,

it would be worth all the time and effort he put into it. When one puts out a sefer, he should think the same—that is, even if the author himself is the only one who changes as a result of the sefer.

R' Aharon Leib Steinman once remarked that even if those learning from the sefer won't benefit, it is important for the author to publish, as then at least his own Torah thoughts are organized and worked on to the best of his ability. So keep writing sefarim as *עשות ספרים הרבה*, make many books (Koheles 12:12).

R' Eliezer Papo in his sefer *Pele Yoatz* (entry *asupa*) lauds those who are *נולקט*, a compiler of teachings. If not for them Torah would be forgotten by us, especially in our generation where there are so many *טרדות*, responsibilities, and time doesn't allow us to learn with such diligence like the *Rishonim*... In every generation we need people such as the Rambam, the Tur, the Beis Yosef and the like who were our eyes. Any Torah scholar on whom Hashem bestows knowledge and many sefarim should try to benefit the public in matters that are needed. As Chazal say, *הכל צריכין למרי חטיא*, all are needful for the one who has gathered many teachings (Brachos 64a). Those who gather teachings (in the various aspects of Torah, not just halacha) are doing the biggest kindness, as it is a kindness of the soul. Those who do this are bringing merit to the public...

How should a sefer be printed? R' Akiva Eiger requested that his Torah be printed on beautiful paper with black ink and attractive letters, since one is impressed, his mind at ease, and concentration is aroused from learning in a sefer with a nice appearance. The reverse, when the print is unclear, has the opposite effect on the reader (*שו"ת רבי* (והנני *Hakdama*, s.v. *עקיבא איגר*).

Concerning donating for a sefer to be published, let us cite the words of the *Pele Yoatz* (דפוס): "...the money given for the printing of a sefer lasts forever, and he has the *zechus* of benefiting the public. The merit of the public is dependent on him, and it goes before and after him. How good is his fortune? He acquires a good name, *divrei Torah*, and life in the World to Come. Also in this world he gets more and more money."

The ( *תל עין* (Pesicha, s.v. *עין* ) writes that it is a *mitzva* to be involved with the printing of sefarim, as it is fulfilling the *mitzva* of Torah learning to Jews. The main *mitzva* of public learning is dependent on the *chidushim* being printed. If one can't afford to print his *chidushim*, it is a *mitzva* upon the Jewish people to help him. Those who do this are included in the concept of *Yissaschar Zevulun* (where *Yissaschar* is supported by *Zevulun* and *Zevulun* gets reward for that learning).

## Rabbi Yehoshua Alt

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