

The Weekly Farbrenge


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 EDITOR - RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

ACQUIRING SEFORIM

BAYIS MALEH SEFORIM

Even as an eight-year-old child, the Rebbe Maharash would buy *seforim* with the coins he received as prizes for his tests and as a weekly allowance. In the month of Elul תר"ה (1845), Reb Noach Baruch Moicher *Seforim* visited the village of Lubavitch. He generally came for Shavuot and Chanuka, and this time, too, as always, he brought a list of the new *seforim* for the *Tzemach Tzedek* to choose from. Eager to buy some himself, the Rebbe Maharash asked his father for thirty rubles from the money that was being held for him.

"First become familiar with the *seforim* you already have," his father said, "then you can buy more."

At that point, Reb Chaim Dov the *meshares* joined them and notified the *Tzemach Tzedek* that they had set up the new *seforim* in the new bookcase that had just been brought by Yosef Dovid the carpenter. The *Tzemach Tzedek* already had five bookcases of *seforim*, two locked bookcases of *kisvei yad* (manuscripts) in his room, and another six bookcases in the entrance room.

Accompanying his father to see the new *seforim* in the newly-built bookcase and the additional *seforim* on the side, waiting to be bound, the Rebbe Maharash was bothered. He turned to his father and asked: "You just told me that one should first know the *seforim* that one has before buying more. Are you knowledgeable in all the *seforim* you have?"

The *Tzemach Tzedek* responded, "I am generally fluent in the *seforim* that I have. Here, take out a *sefer* and we'll see."

Without much thought, the Rebbe Maharash ran towards one of the bookshelves and took out the first *sefer* that he chanced upon. It was a *sefer* on *dikduk*, and the *Tzemach Tzedek* freely quoted passages from the introduction and then from the body of the *sefer*, word for word. The Rebbe Maharash chose another *sefer*, also on *dikduk*, then a *sefer* of Kabbala, and finally some scholar's account of his travels. The *Tzemach Tzedek* was able to cite them all verbatim. The Rebbe Maharash was truly amazed by his father's knowledge, especially in the area of *dikduk*.

Seeing this, the *Tzemach Tzedek* explained that although generally chassidim are not particular about following the exact rules of *dikduk* while *davening*, the words of *Shema* and *Kerias HaTorah* must be pronounced precisely. He then gave his son the amount he had requested and added another ten rubles as a gift, enabling him to satisfy his thirst for even more *seforim*.

(סי' התולדות מוהר"ש ע"י 14 בשילוב סה"ש תרצ"ו ע' 52)

CONSIDER

Should one purchase *seforim* if he hasn't yet mastered the ones that he already owns?

What is the benefit of having a 'home full of *seforim*'?

At the beginning of תשל"ג (1972) the Rebbe urged his listeners to make *seforim* more available, and encouraged them to open new libraries wherever possible, thus enabling Yidden to study Torah there and also to take *seforim* home. Two months later, on *Yud-Tes Kislev*, the Rebbe further encouraged everyone to have numerous *seforim* in their own home, to make the learning of Torah even more accessible. The Rebbe added that this would not replace the need for libraries, as not everyone would own every single *sefer*.

In particular, the Rebbe entrusted this mission to the womenfolk, who oversee the furnishings of the home, to make sure there are *seforim* on hand that direct the life of the home.

"Just as a pleasantly furnished home 'broadens the mind,' " the Rebbe advised, "so too *mitzvos* should be tastefully decorated. The *seforim* should be given a central location, so that whoever enters can immediately sense the pleasant tone of a home that houses holy *seforim*. This planning should be thought out carefully, and not merely to fulfill an

obligation. However, unlike the care commonly devoted to keeping furniture in its best condition, the family's *seforim* should be used so much until they are worn out, faded, and torn, to the point that they have to be replaced!"

(שיח"ק תשל"ג ח"א ע' 26, 119, 200)

Two years later, on Simchas Torah תשל"ה (1974), the Rebbe connected this *mitvza* to the concept of *Yavneh veChachomeha*, a central gathering of *tannaim* that had existed in *Yavneh*, and encouraged people to establish *yeshivos* wherever Yidden live. From then on, the *mitvza* was known as *Bayis Maleh Seforim - Yavneh veChachomeha*.

The Rebbe explained that both of these aspects were an extension of *mitvza* Torah, the earlier campaign to utilize every means possible to increase the study of Torah.

(מענה באגרות מלך ע' 90)

LEARNING FROM THE SEFORIM

In connection with the victory of the *seforim* on *Hei Teves*, תשמ"ז (1987), the Rebbe said that we must ask the *seforim* themselves how to celebrate their victory - and the *seforim* declare that we should use them until they wear out... This is contrary to the worldly perception according to which precious items should be put away in a safe place and left untouched.

On another occasion the Rebbe emphasized: The victory of the *seforim* has a purpose - that it should prompt people to increase their study of Torah. Even a child understands that his parents buy him a *sefer* in order that he should learn from it, not only to show it respect. Those who would like to celebrate in other ways should do so not during study time, but during the times of eating and sleeping.

(ת"מ תשמ"ח ח"ב ע' 172, ח"א ע' 558)

The Rebbe also said that the way to expedite the return of the other *seforim* of the Rebbeim still held in captivity is to buy additional *seforim*, something which is very easy in our times.

(סד"ש תשנ"ב ח"א ע' 226)

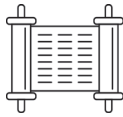

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CRYPTOCURRENCY

Does halacha recognize a peer-to-peer transfer of Bitcoin and other virtual currencies?

Paper currency is currently backed by its issuing government, and that is what gives it worth. Halacha recognizes it as having value at least like a loan document, or even as having inherent value (*gufo mamon*) like standard money.¹

Bitcoin, a virtual currency is unique in that it isn't regulated or backed by any central authority, rather its value is based on the agreement between the currency's community members, and the value fluctuates greatly. Bitcoins are found (in the form of letters and numbers) in a central "blockchain" and proof of ownership is in each individual's digital "wallet."

So far, Bitcoin hasn't been declared by the government as the legal tender of the country and isn't the generally accepted currency used for transactions. Therefore, it doesn't have the halachic status of currency, rather as a commodity. Thus, if you borrow Bitcoin from someone, you would need to return the **value** of the Bitcoin you borrowed, not actual Bitcoin, to avoid the transgression of *ribbis* known as *se'ah b'se'ah* ("measure for measure").²

Is trading Bitcoin considered gambling?

According to the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, one who gambles transgresses "*avak gezel*" (borderline theft) as the one who loses the gamble isn't receiving anything and only agreed to the arrangement based on a false hope (*asmachta*), and one who engages in gambling is invalid to testify. Rama holds that the issue with gambling is that he's engaged in something that has no purpose for the world's benefit (*eino osek b'yishuvo shel olam*).

Purchasing Bitcoin, albeit a gamble, is different. The transaction is done whole-heartedly (thus it isn't *gezel*) and it is commonly traded by millions of people (thus it benefits trade). Even if it has nothing substantial behind it, one cannot say that one who deals with it is dealing with something which has no purpose.³

How do you take ownership of a Bitcoin?

In order to acquire an item, paying for it isn't enough, and one must do something to affect a *kinyan*. Since Bitcoin isn't a physical item, the regular *kinyanim* won't work. One option might be a *kinyan situmta*, an action customarily done by merchants to consummate a deal, such as shaking hands. While there usually isn't any face-to-face contact between the buyer and seller, the Bitcoin moving out of the seller's ownership is the accepted mode of transfer and may affect a *kinyan*.⁴ Others question whether this works for a "*davar she'ein bo mamash*," a thing without substance.⁵ Some suggest *kinyan odisa*, which is an admission by the seller that he sold the Bitcoin, since all transactions are recorded irreversibly in the central blockchain.

Since cryptocurrency is still in its early stages, it's possible that it will undergo change and one must check out each cryptocurrency independently.

1. ראה ערוך השולחן חו"מ סי' ס"ח ט"ט.
2. ראה שו"ע יו"ד סי' קס"ב ס"א.
3. מדריך הלכתי לביטקוין ע' 3.
4. ע"פ אגרות משה אה"י סי' ק"ד ק"ה.
5. דעות שמועיל קנין מהרש"ם ח"ג סי' קנ"א ופת"ש חו"מ ר"י סק"א. מהרש"ל סי' ל"ו.

לע"נ מרת ציפא אסתר בת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה

Our Heroes



R. NACHMAN MARIASIN

R. Yisrael Nachman Mariasin (d. 5674) was a chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, Rebbe Maharash, and Rebbe Rashab. Born in Dubravna, he was kidnapped at age seven-and-a-half for Russian army service as a Cantonist, but was freed through the Chevras Techiyas Hameisim, established by the Tzemach Tzedek. The Tzemach Tzedek then sent R. Nachman to study under R. Hillel Paritcher, which he did for eighteen years, and he worked as a *melamed*. He had a very close relationship with the Rebbe Maharash, and in his later years lived in Lubavitch and served as the Rebbe Rashab's *gabbai* for *yechidus*.

R. Nachman was good-hearted but stern, and he was in charge of admitting chassidim to *yechidus*. A *lamdan* in both nigleh and Chassidus, the Rebbe Rashab refrained from asking him to do any household work, and would say, "Nachman is a fine *yungerman*." He was paid 5 rubles a week, and when guests gave him tips, he would put it in a *pushka* in the Rebbe's room.

He once observed how every year-and-a-half, the Rebbe Maharash would speak in his maamorim how the world itself is Elokus. The reason for this, he explained, was to purify the air.

(תורת שלום ע' 16 בשו"ג, ניצוצי אור - וויניגארטרן)

R. Nachman was a "*Pesachdiker*," meaning that he would visit the Rebbeim for Pesach every year, and he recorded many insights that he heard at the *sedorim*.

At the Rebbe Maharash's seder, the guests

sat with immense *derech erez* and read the Haggadah quietly until the Rebbe Maharash instructed them to read it aloud. He witnessed "Baal Shemske" practices by the Rebbe Maharash, who once asked all those present to step out, leaving him alone in the room for some time.

On another occasion, the Rebbe Maharash said, "On Pesach, one can jump on the wagon. What a simple person can accomplish through reading the words of the Hagaddah with simplicity, a *maskil* and *oved* cannot accomplish with the fifteen sections." When R. Nachman recounted this before the Rebbe Rashab, his eyes flowed with tears.

(סה"ש תש"ב ע' 87, סה"ש תרצ"ט ע' 364)

R. Nachman once shared a scolding he had gotten from the Rebbe Rashab:

A *bochur*, who was called for army draft, went into *yechidus* and presented the Rebbe with his two options of where to appear for the draft, enumerating the advantages and disadvantages of each. The Rebbe chose one and the *bochur* walked out.

Upon exiting, the *bochur* suddenly realized that he forgot to mention an important advantage in the other place, which he believed would cause the Rebbe to change his advice. R. Nachman refused to allow him back in, but offered to relay the message himself.

Upon hearing the message, the Rebbe became serious and said, "Why do you ask again? If I said it, then that's it, and there's no need to ask again!"

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 90)

A Moment with The Rebbe



AN EVENT WITHOUT RABBONIM?!

"A rov of a community who has not been treated with the proper respect might want to be humble and forgo his *kavod*," said the Rebbe at the Shabbos *Parshas Mishpatim* 5747 (1987) *farbrengen*.

"However, it is halachically forbidden to do so. It is not his personal respect that he must stand up for, rather the dignity of the *rabbonim*!"

When Tzivos Hashem Headquarters began preparing a fundraising event, they

received much encouragement from the Rebbe.

As the arrangements were underway, the organizers reported to the Rebbe and asked for a *bracha* for all their guests, "the honorees and the supporters."

In response, the Rebbe circled these last few words, and expressed wonder that there were no *rabbonim* invited to grace the event. "Is there not any rov or the like?!"