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The Bas Ayin of Avritch זי"ע

Rav Avraham Dov Ber Auerbach of Avritch - Yahrtzeit י"ב כסלו

From a yahrtzeit seudah for the Bas Ayin
held in Kiryas Yoel (New York), in 5788.

Connecting to Tzaddikim of the Past

The primary purpose of a *yahrtzeit seudah* is *hiskashrus l'tzaddikim*, connecting to tzaddikim. *Sifrei Chassidus* explain that just as it is possible to form a *kesher* with tzaddikim during their life on this world, it's possible to do so after their death, for צדיקים במיתתן קרויין חיים - tzaddikim in death are still called alive.

In fact, connecting with tzaddikim after they have passed away has two advantages over connecting with them during their lifetime. One is that after they separate from their physical body, they are in a higher place than they were able to reach while living in this world. (This is explained by the Baal HaTanya in *Igeres Hakodesh* 27.)

The second advantage is that by learning the Torah of tzaddikim, and telling stories about them after they have passed away, we benefit the tzaddikim, by enabling them to continue affecting this world.

Learning the Tzaddik's Torah

The *Meor Einayim* said that when someone learns the Torah of a tzaddik, it is as if he davened by his *kever* and formed a spiritual bond, *nefesh to nefesh*, with the tzaddik. When we sit together and speak about the greatness of the tzaddik and his *avodah*, not only do we benefit, but the tzaddik benefits as well. When we bring them *nachas ruach* in that way, they feel and express their gratitude. This is especially so for a tzaddik like the Bas Ayin, who had no children.

When the Bas Ayin was a young man, he once heard a certain *adam gadol* speak negatively about his Rebbe, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He made a mighty protest against this insult to his Rebbe. The *adam gadol* warned him, "If you oppose me, it will prevent you from having children." The Bas Ayin decided that nevertheless, he would continue to protest. As a result of the curse, he never had children.

In his *sefer Avodas Avodah*, the Tosher Rebbe wrote about a family he knew in Eretz Yisrael. For years, they were unable to have children. The children who were eventually born were seriously ill. They faced one painful difficulty after another. One year, as the *yahrtzeit* of the Bas Ayin approached, they decided to make a lavish *seudah* in honor of the tzaddik. They held a *seudah* which was attended by many people, and after that, they were blessed with a healthy child.

The Power of Seudas Mitzvah

Rav Mordechai of Chernobyl was once walking in the marketplace, accompanied by some chassidim. Someone approached the Rebbe and asked if he would be the *sandek* at the upcoming *bris milah* of his son. The Rebbe asked him if he was planning to prepare a *seudah*. The man replied that he was not because he couldn't afford the expense.

"If so," said the Rebbe, "I can't accept the *kibbud*." He then explained, "The *yetzer hara* does everything in his power to stop Am Yisrael from celebrating mitzvos with a *seudah*. Unfortunately, he has somewhat succeeded in preventing people from making a *seudah* for a *siyum masechta*, as is represented by the letters of his name **סיום מסכתא אין לעשות**. How can I let him uproot the *seudah* of *bris milah*? No, if you won't prepare a *seudah*, I can't be the *sandek*."

The man asked the Rebbe, "But what can I do? I don't have the money to make a *seudah*."

The Rebbe asked him what he did for a living; the man said he was a *melamed*. The Rebbe told him, "Ask your employer to pay some of your salary ahead of time, and I will contribute as well. Together, you will have enough to make a *seudah*."

When the Bas Ayin told this story, he would add,

"The *malach* Michael, who defends Am Yisrael, met the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* tried to provoke him by pointing out how successful he was in getting Am Yisrael to do *aveiros*. The *malach* Michael replied, 'You may have succeeded in getting them to do *aveiros*, but have you ever seen them make a *seudah* to celebrate their transgressions? However, when a Jew does a mitzvah, look at the *seudah* he serves to rejoice in the mitzvah!'

"With that," said the Bas Ayin, "the *malach* Michael defeated the *yetzer hara*."

The Rosh Chodesh Seudah of the Bas Ayin

Every Rosh Chodesh, the Bas Ayin made a large *seudah*, which many residents of Tzfas would attend. Tzaddikim told of a certain Jew from Teveria who would attend this *seudah* no matter what. After he passed away, he argued to the *Beis Din shel Maalah* that since he always attended the *seudah*, he should be allowed to continue. The Heavenly Court agreed, and when he came to the *seudah*, the Rebbe had him stay afterwards so that he could perform a *tikkun* for the man's *neshamah*.

Hakaras Hatov to the Child

The Bas Ayin usually did not attend funerals or *seudos bris milah*. He would only attend the *seudah* which many make on *shlishi l'milah*, the third day after the *bris*.

There was, however, one time when he did participate in a *seudas bris milah*. A man from Uman named Rav Fishel Bernstein was told by the Rebbe of Savran to move to Eretz Yisrael in order to have children. He was quite old when his wife gave birth to a son, Binyamin Yehudah Leib (later the first Rosh Yeshivah of

Yeshivas Chayei Olam). The Bas Ayin came to the *seudah*. He rejoiced far more than usual, and even drank so much wine that he had to be carried home.

A bit later it was discovered that the *bris* had to be fixed. The procedure caused bleeding which they were unable to stop. They ran to the house of the Bas Ayin to ask him to daven for Hashem to have mercy on the child.

When they entered the house, the Bas Ayin was not in his room, but on the table, they saw the *sefer* of the Rif with the commentary of the Baal Hamaor, which had been left open. When the Bas Ayin returned and heard about the danger to the child, he said, "The Rif and the Baal Hamaor were just here, and I reconciled their opinions. The Rishonim have *hakaras hatov* to someone who reconciles their opinions. I give that *hakaras hatov* to the child, so that he will be saved."

They hurried back to the house of the child, and heard that at the very moment they were speaking with the Bas Ayin, the bleeding stopped.

The Power of Stories

In the end of *Maseches Yevamos*, Rashi writes that the idea of a *hilula* is to learn the Torah of the tzaddik. Throughout the generations, we have seen that tzaddikim considered stories of tzaddikim an integral part of their Torah. Rav Mendel of Rimanov said that in the future, they will read the stories of tzaddikim from the Torah.

The reason these stories are treated with such respect is because seeing the behavior of a tzaddik is more powerful than reviewing his teachings. Chazal say that seeing is greater than hearing – because what we see penetrates more deeply into our inner world.

In *Maseches Berachos* (31a), it says that when someone parts from a friend, he should only do so with words of halachah, for through that, he will remember him. The simple explanation is that each time the

person remembers the halachah, he will also remember his friend. However, the *Divrei Yoel (Mikeitz)* explained that the Gemara's intention is that when parting from a friend you should tell him a story, or relate a righteous act of tzaddikim. By doing so, *kedushah* will be inscribed on his heart, and he will remember you forever.

Burning a Million Zloty

Stories of tzaddikim (especially those that come from reliable sources) penetrate the heart more than words of *mussar*. I heard a beautiful story that illustrates this from R' Mordechai Pinter, whose father, R' Tzvi Hirsh, had the privilege of seeing the Divrei Yechezkel of Shinova and then, together with Rav Moshe Yitzchak of Pshevorsk, followed his son, Rav Simcha Yissachar Ber of Cheshinov.

Once, Rav Yissachar Ber told them that when his father was *niftar*, they burned millions of zlotys in Shinova. Initially, the *talmidim* were incredulous, because they knew that the community in Shinova was quite impoverished. The Rebbe went on to explain. "My father didn't want to become a Rebbe while his father, Rav Chaim of Sanz, was still alive. However, Rav Chaim urged him to accept the title. Unsure of what to do, my father traveled to Rav Tzvi Hirsch of Rimanov to ask his advice.

"Rav Tzvi Hirsch told him to open some kind of business. My father asked, 'What type of business is the Rebbe referring to?' He answered, 'A small business like mine. Start a small *kehillah*. However, don't follow the practice of your father, who gives away everything he has to others every day. You shouldn't give away more than a fifth.'

"When my father became a Rebbe, he wanted to follow the instructions of the Rimanover Rebbe. However, he also didn't want to leave money in his possession overnight. He came up with a solution. He gave away a fifth as *tzedakah*, and lent the rest of the money to poor people. He never asked the borrowers to pay him back.

"When my father left this world, they burned all of the IOU's that he had received from the borrowers over the years. That's what I meant when I said that they burned a million *zloty*."

Clearly, this is not only a story. It's a *dvar Torah* that teaches us how a wise man found a clever way to give *tzedakah* in the way that he wanted to, while respecting the instructions of his Rebbe.

The Protective Power of Hisbatlus

One of the most famous stories about the Bas Ayin took place during an earthquake in Tzfas that resulted in the death of thousands of Jews. The Bas Ayin told the people davening in his *beis medrash* to gather around him. The half of the shul where they stood remained untouched, even as the other half was destroyed. The untouched half of the shul still stands in Tzfas to this very day.

There is one detail of the story that is often left out. After everyone gathered around the Bas Ayin on one side of the *beis medrash*, the Rebbe prostrated himself on the floor of the shul and said that total *hisbatlus*, submission to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, can shield us from retribution.

Purifying Thoughts

The Rav of Tzfas, Rav Shmuel Heller, was a very close *talmid* of the Bas Ayin, and shared stories of his Rebbe. Aside from Rav Heller's wisdom and vast Torah knowledge, he was also well-versed in medicine and served as a doctor for both Jews and non-Jews. When he was in places where one is not allowed to learn Torah, he would read medical textbooks written in foreign languages.

Over time, he felt that the letters of the foreign alphabets were appearing to him during davening, and polluting his mind. He did everything he could to forget those letters, even fasting, but nothing helped. When he came to the Bas Ayin and presented his problem, the Bas Ayin took out his handkerchief, passed it over Rav Heller's forehead, and the letters were permanently erased.

Seudah Hamafsekes in His House

One year on Erev Yom Kippur, an Arab came to Rav Heller and asked him to come with him to see the sheikh of a nearby village, who needed some medical attention. When Rav Heller heard the

request, he was dismayed that he would have to spend this important day caring for the sheikh's minor ailment. For a moment, he considered refusing, but he soon realized that doing so would cause a *chillul Hashem*. He put on his coat and went along with the Arab.

When he arrived in the village, he examined the sheikh and prescribed a medicine. By the time he returned to Tzfas, it was very late. Should he eat the *seudah hamafsekes*, or go to the mikvah? There wasn't time to do both. Eventually, he decided to forgo the *seudah* and just go to the mikvah.

On his way, he met his Rebbe, the Bas Ayin. When the Bas Ayin heard that Rav Heller hadn't eaten, he insisted that he come to his house, and served him a meal.

Rav Heller, recalling that Erev Yom Kippur, would say, "I didn't immerse myself in a mikvah before that Yom Kippur, but the *kedushah* that I absorbed by eating the food the tzaddik gave me was so great that I cannot remember such an elevated Yom Kippur in my life."

Reviewing a Teshuvah

Rav Heller once wrote a long *teshuvah* addressing a question of monetary halachah. Because he wasn't sure that he had ruled correctly, he brought the *teshuvah* to the Bas Ayin after Minchah. Since it was a complex response that was six pages long, he assumed that the Bas Ayin would take it home, and give his opinion the next day after reviewing it in depth.

He was somewhat dismayed when the Bas Ayin, upon receiving the pages, glanced at them quickly and told Rav Heller, "Your decision is correct." The conversation continued, and it became clear that with that cursory glance, the Bas Ayin had understood every detail of the complex *teshuvah*. Now, Rav Heller was dismayed at how far he was from the Bas Ayin's level of understanding.

The Bas Ayin sensed his distress, and told him, "Believe me, going through *Shemoneh Esrei* just now was far more difficult for me than going through the *teshuvah* in a few moments."

When a terrible plague broke out in Tzfas, the Bas Ayin accepted the fate of leaving this world as a *kapparah* for the sins of Klal Yisrael so that the plague would end.

When he became ill, and knew that he was about to leave this world, he sent a messenger to summon Rav Shmuel Heller because he wanted to reveal secrets of Torah to him before the end of his life.

When Rav Heller's rebbetzin heard about this request, she opposed it with all her strength, because she feared that her husband would become infected by the contagious disease. Rav Heller didn't go, and was troubled for the rest of his life by the loss of those secrets that his Rebbe had wished to teach him.

Am Yisrael Determine the Course of the World

In his writings on *Parshas Yisro*, the Bas Ayin writes about Am Yisrael's power as the guiding force of Creation.

The *pasuk* says (Vayikra 22:31), וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם - *You will watch over my commandments and you will do them.*

In *Maseches Sanhedrin* (99b), the Gemara notes that without the vowels, the word אַתֶּם can also be read as *atem*.

This means that by receiving the Torah, Am Yisrael merited to be an *Am Kadosh*, a holy nation, and that all worlds both higher and lower will be conducted only by Yisrael. They will distribute *shefa* to all the worlds by their Torah and *maasim tovim* – meaning the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. For by doing *chesed*, they awaken the *middah* of *Chesed* for Knesses Yisrael, which then brings *shefa* to all creations. By breaking their negative *middos* and *taavos*, they break the *sitra achra* until it is destroyed...

This is the meaning of Chazal's statement (*Mishnah Makkos* 3:17), רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל - *Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to give merit*

to Yisrael, to give the power of Malchus into their hands so that they would be able to determine the course of all the worlds. Therefore, he gave them a multitude of Torah and mitzvoos... so that Malchus will be in their hands, and then ה' צלך - Hashem will be your shadow. As the Midrash explains: when a person laughs, his shadow laughs, and when a person cries, his shadow cries. So too, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will fulfill the wishes of his holy nation Am Yisrael.

May the *zechus* of the Bas Ayin protect Am Yisrael during these difficult times.

זכותו יגן עלינו ועל כל ישראל אמן.



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