

HAYYIM MEIR YEHIEL OF MOGIELNICA AND YISAKHAR OF WOLBORZ

Against Pious Thoughts

On a certain Purim when the rabbi of Mogielnica was reading the scroll of Esther, a young man stood near by and said to him when the reading was over: "I fear I did not listen closely enough and perhaps skipped over one word or another while I was silently reciting the scroll with you."

Later the rabbi said to his friends: "There's your super-pious man! All he cares about is doing exactly what is prescribed. But he whose soul is directed toward doing the will of God within the commandment, and clings wholly to God's will, may very possibly fail to do something of what is prescribed, but it does not trouble him. For it is written: 'In your love for her you will err constantly.' "

In the World of Confusion

They tell this story: To Rabbi Yisakhar of Wolborz there came a dead man whom he had once known when he was alive and prominent in his community, and begged the rabbi's help, saying that his wife had died some time ago and now he needed money to arrange for his marriage with another.

"Don't you know," the zaddik asked him, "that you are no longer among the living, that you are in *olam ha-tohu*, the world of confusion?"

When the man refused to believe him, he lifted the tails of the dead man's coat and showed him that he was dressed in his shroud.

Later Rabbi Yisakhar's son asked: "Well, if that is so—perhaps I too am in the world of confusion?"

"Once you know that there is such a thing as that world," answered his father, "you are not in it."

DAVID OF LELOV

The Name of God

Rabbi David of Lelov once heard a simple man who was praying say the name of God after every verse. The reason he did this was that there are two dots one above the other at the close of each verse. The man took each to be the tiny letter Yud or Yod, and since the name of God is sometimes abbreviated in the form of two Yuds, he thought that what he saw at the end of every verse was the name of God.

The zaddik instructed him: “Wherever you find two Jews [Yuds] side by side and on a par, there is the name of God. But whenever it looks to you as if one Jew [Yud] were standing above the other, then they are not Jews [Yuds] and it is not the name of God.”

Concerning Those Who Ply a Trade

Rabbi Yitzhak of Vorki told this story: “Once when I was traveling with Rabbi David Lelov, of blessed memory, we arrived in the little town of Elkish about an hour past midnight. Rabbi David did not want to wake anyone, so we went to Rabbi Berish, the baker. He was standing at his oven and doing his work. When we entered I saw his face cloud over because we had found him working.

“ ‘Oh,’ said Rabbi David, ‘if only God let me earn my bread by the work of my hands! The truth of the matter is that everyone in Israel has an inner urge he himself does not know of. What he wants is to work for his fellow men. Everyone who plies a trade, the cobbler, the tailor, or the baker, takes money in return for his work only that he may live and continue to work for his fellow men.’ While Rabbi David was speaking, I saw the baker’s face clear and grow brighter and brighter.”

The Mistake

Rabbi Yitzhak of Vorki told this story: “Once when I was on the road with my holy teacher Rabbi David of Lelov, and we stopped over in a town far from our home, a woman suddenly fell upon him in the street and began to beat him. She thought he was her husband who had abandoned her many years ago. After a few moments, she saw her error and burst into a flood of tears.

“ ‘Stop crying,’ Rabbi David said to her. ‘You were not striking me, but your husband.’ And he added in a low tone: ‘How often we strike someone because we take him for another!’ ”

With the Children

Whenever Rabbi David of Lelov came to a Jewish town he gathered all the children around him and gave each a little whistle. Then he packed them into the big wagon he used for traveling, and drove them all over town. The children whistled with might and main the entire time, and the entire time Rabbi David’s face was wreathed in smiles.

With Animals

Once Rabbi David went to Lublin with his disciple Rabbi Yitzhak, in order to spend the New Year with his teacher, the Seer, as he did year after year. On New Year’s Day, before the blowing of the ram’s horn, the Seer looked around and noticed that Rabbi David was not there. Yitzhak immediately ran to the inn to look for him. He found Rabbi David standing in front of the gate to the house, holding out his cap full of barley to the horses, which their driver in his hurry to get to the House of Prayer had left behind unfed.

When Rabbi David, having finished feeding the horses, came to the House of Prayer, the Seer said: “That was fine blowing of the ram’s horn Rabbi David treated us to!”

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One Friday afternoon Rabbi David was on a journey, when suddenly the horse stopped and refused to go on. The driver beat the horse, but the zaddik objected.

“Rabbi,” cried the driver, “the sun will soon be setting and the sabbath is almost here.”

“You are quite right,” answered Rabbi David, “but what you have to do is to make the animal understand you. Otherwise, it will some day summon you to court in Heaven, and that will not be to your honor.”

Concerning Joseph’s Brothers

The rabbi of Lelov said to his hasidim: “A man cannot be redeemed until he recognizes the flaws in his soul and tries to mend them. A nation cannot be redeemed until it recognizes the flaws in its soul and tries to mend them. Whoever permits no recognition of his flaws, be it man or nation, permits no redemption. We can be redeemed to the extent to which we recognize ourselves.

“When Jacob’s sons said to Joseph: ‘We are upright men,’ he answered: ‘That is it that I spoke unto you saying: Ye are spies.’ But later, when they confessed the truth with their lips and with their hearts and said to one another: ‘We are verily guilty concerning our brother,’ the first gleam of their redemption dawned. Overcome with compassion, Joseph turned aside and wept.”