

## **Tzvi HIRSCH AND YITZHAK EISIK OF ZHYDATCHOV**

### **Every Rabbi Is Good**

One Sabbath, Rabbi Zevi Hirsh interrupted his teachings at the third meal and said: “There are hasidim who travel to their rabbi and say that save for him there is no rabbi in all the world. That is idol worship. What then should they say? They should say: ‘Every rabbi is good for his people, but our rabbi is best for what concerns us.’ ”

### **Illuminated**

When Rabbi Moshe of Sambor, Rabbi Zevi Hirsh’s younger brother, was a youth, he went about in the villages and traded with the peasants. But when he came home and said the Afternoon Prayer he felt as if his whole body were lit by a great light.

He himself tells this story: “I once asked my brother and teacher: ‘Why is it: Sometimes when I have been traveling on business and come home and begin to pray, I feel illuminated, almost as though the Divine Presence had come to me?’

“And my brother answered me in his usual clear, direct way: ‘Why should you be surprised at that? When a traveler walks in the way of God, then whether he knows it or not all the holy sparks which cling to the herbs of the field and the trees of the forest rush forth and attach themselves to such a man, and this illuminates him with a great light.’ ”

### **Give and Take**

Rabbi Yitzhak Eisik said: “The motto of life is ‘Give and take.’ Everyone must be both a giver and a receiver. He who is not both is as a barren tree.”

## **YAAKOV YITZHAK OF PZHYSHA (THE YEHUDI) AND HIS FOLLOWERS**

### **The Road to Perfection**

Once the Yehudi was asked to examine thirteen-year-old Hanokh, later the rabbi of Alexander, in the Talmud. It took the boy an hour to think over the passage which had been assigned to him before he could expound it. When he had done, the zaddik cupped his hand around Hanokh's cheek and said: "When I was thirteen I plumbed passages more difficult than this in no time at all, and when I was eighteen, I had the reputation of being a great scholar in the Torah. But one day it dawned on me that man cannot attain to perfection by learning alone. I understood what is told of our father Abraham; that he explored the sun, the moon, and the stars, and did not find God, and how in this very not-finding the presence of God was revealed to him. For three months I mulled over this realization. Then I explored until I too reached the truth of not-finding."

### **The Smith**

When Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak was young and had board and lodging in the house of his father-in-law, his next-door neighbor was a smith. The smith got up very early in the morning and struck hammer on anvil until the sound roared like thunder in the ears of the sleeping youth. Yaakov Yitzhak woke up and thought: "If this man tears himself away from sleep so early for worldly work and worldly profit, shall I not be able to do the same for the service of the eternal God?"

The following morning he rose before the smith, who, as he entered his smithy, heard the young man reading in a low tone. This irritated him: "There he is at work already, and he doesn't need to! I certainly won't let a fellow like that get ahead of me!" On the following night he got up before the Yehudi. But the young rabbi took up the challenge and won the race. In later years he used to say: "Whatever I have attained I owe first and foremost to a smith."

## **Making Up**

Once when the Yehudi was seated at the table of the maggid of Koznitz on the second day of the Feast of Weeks, his host said to him: “It troubles me that on this second day of the festival, which is observed only in the countries outside Palestine, I have a greater sense of holiness and light than on the first, which is the only one kept in the Land of Israel. Can you, holy Jew, tell me, why it is that the day celebrated in exile seems holier to my heart than the single great day celebrated in our homeland?”

The Yehudi replied: “When a man has quarreled with his wife and they make up, their love is greater than before.”

“You have given me new life,” said the maggid, and kissed him on the forehead.

## **Elijah**

This story is told: The Yehudi used to put on a peasant’s smock and a cap with a visor such as peasants wear, and ride to market with his servant, who had also donned this kind of dress, to look for Elijah wandering through the world in the guise of a peasant.

On one such occasion he met a villager leading a mare by the rein. The Yehudi took his servant by the arm and cried: “There he is!” The stranger flashed his anger full in the Yehudi’s face. “Jew!” he cried. “If you know, why let your tongue wag!” And he vanished on the instant.

Some say that it was from this time on that people called the rabbi of Pzhysha just “Yehudi”, the “Jew,” and nothing else.

## **Silence and Speech**

A man had taken upon himself the discipline of silence and for three years had spoken no words save those of the Torah and of prayer. Finally the Yehudi sent for him. “Young man,” he said, “how is it that I do not see a single word of yours in the world of truth?”

“Rabbi,” said the other to justify himself, “why should I indulge in the vanity of speech? Is it not better just to learn and to pray?”

"If you do that," said the Yehudi, "not a word of your own reaches the world of truth. He who only learns and prays is murdering the word of his own soul. What do you mean by 'vanity of speech'? Whatever you have to say can be vanity or it can be truth. And now I am going to have a pipe and some tobacco brought for you to smoke tonight. Come to me after the Evening Prayer and I shall teach you how to talk."

They sat together the whole night. When morning came, the young man's apprenticeship was over.

### **Not What Goes in at the Mouth ...**

The Yehudi once told his disciple Rabbi Bunam to go on a journey. Bunam did not ask any questions but left the town with a number of other hasidim and just followed the highway. Toward noon they came to a village and stopped at an inn. The innkeeper was so pleased with his pious guests that he invited them to have dinner with him. Rabbi Bunam sat down in the main room, while the others went in and out and asked all sorts of questions concerning the meat which was to be served them: whether the animal was unblemished, what the butcher was like, and just how carefully the meat had been salted. At that a man dressed in rags spoke up. He had been sitting behind the stove and still had his staff in his hand. "O you hasidim," he said, "you make a big to-do about what you put into your mouths being clean, but you don't worry half as much about the purity of what comes out of your mouths!"

Rabbi Bunam was about to reply, but the wayfarer had already disappeared—for this is Elijah's habit. Then the rabbi understood why his teacher had sent him on this journey.

### **The Most Difficult**

The Yehudi once said: "It's no great trick to be a worker of miracles, a man who has reached a certain spiritual rung can shift Heaven and earth—but to be a Jew, that's difficult!"