

Yitzhak Meir of Ger

(Derived from Wikipedia) *(1799 – 10 March 1866), was the first Rebbe of the Ger Hasidic dynasty, Poland. He was also known as The Chiddushei HaRim (החידושי הרי"ם) for his Torah writings.*

He became known as a Talmudic gaon. At first, he was close to the rebbes of Kozhnitz, however after some years, he was drawn to Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Prshischa, whose close adherent he became. After the demise of Simcha Bunim, Alter became a disciple of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk.

In 1830 he was forced to change his name to Alter because of his support towards the Poles during the November Uprising.

Where Does God Live?

When Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was a little boy his mother once took him to see the maggid of Koznitz. There someone said to him: “Yitzhak Meir, I’ll give you a gulden if you tell me where God lives!” He replied: “And I’ll give you two gulden if you tell me where he doesn’t!”

In Praise of Grammar

The rabbi of Ger told this story: “As a child I did not want to study grammar, for I thought it was just a subject like many others. But later I devoted myself to it because I realized that the secrets of the Torah depend upon it.”

Like the Ox

A hasid complained to the rabbi of Ger: “I have worked and toiled and yet I have not the satisfaction of a master-craftsman who, after twenty years of effort, finds some result of his labors in his work: either it is better than it was at first, or he can do it more quickly. I see nothing at all. Just as I prayed twenty years ago, so I pray today.”

The zaddik answered: “It is taught in Elijah’s name: ‘Man should take the Torah upon himself, as the ox takes the yoke and the ass his burden.’ You see, the ox leaves his stall in the morning, goes to the field, plows, and is led home, and this happens day after day, and nothing changes with regard to the ox, but the ploughed field bears the harvest.”

About Eating

The rabbi of Ger once asked a hasid what he had learned from the lips of the rabbi of Kotzk. “I heard him say,” said the hasid, “that he was surprised that merely saying grace is not enough to make man God-fearing and good.”

“I think differently,” said the rabbi of Ger. “I am surprised that merely eating is not enough to make man God-fearing and good. For it is written: ‘The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master’s crib.’ (Isaiah 1:3)”

Who Is to Come?

On a certain Passover many people were gathered in the house of the rabbi of Ger. Suddenly he raised his voice and said to them: “You should know that I’m not just like any rabbi. I do not crave money and I am not out for honors. All I care about is turning the hearts of Jews to Heaven in the few years still allotted to me. And I beg anyone who has no longing in that direction to stop coming to me. Those who seek me out because they want to gain a livelihood or have children or be cured would do better to go to someone else. But he who feels that something is lacking in the service he gives God, and is troubled because sickness or worry about his livelihood or the desire for children are obstacles in the way of his service—I can help a man such as this both on the one score and the other.”

Hanoch of Alexander

(Derived from Wikipedia) *Chanokh Heynekh HaKohen Levin (1798 – 21 March 1870[2]) of Aleksander served as the rebbe of a community of thousands of Hasidim during the "interregnum" between the Chidushei HaRim of Ger and the Sfat Emet.*

Before God

In his youth when Rabbi Hanokh of Alexander was living in Pzhysha as Rabbi Bunam's disciple, it was his duty to act as congregational reader of the Morning Prayer in a house adjoining that of his teacher. Now he was in the habit of praying with vehement gestures and loud cries, quite differently from Rabbi Bunam, who spoke with his characteristic composure even when he conducted the services for the congregation. Once young Hanokh was praying when the rabbi entered the room, and he immediately lowered his voice and stopped gesturing. But hardly had he done this, when he reflected and said in his soul: "I am after all not concerned with the rabbi; I am standing before God!" And instantly he resumed his stormy manner of praying.

After the service Rabbi Bunam had him summoned. "Hanokh," he said to him, "today I took great pleasure in your praying."

Secret

Rabbi Bunam used to say: "A secret is something you say in such a way that everyone can hear it, and yet no one who is not supposed to know can know it."

But Rabbi Hanokh, his disciple, added: "The secrets of the Torah are so well hidden that they cannot be communicated at all. As it is written: 'The secret counsel of the Lord is with them that fear him. (Ps. 25:14)'

They can be grasped only through the fear of God, and save through the fear of God they cannot be grasped at all.”

The Threat

A prominent man threatened to thrust Rabbi Hanokh down from all the spiritual rungs he had attained at a single blow. He replied: “You could not thrust me down to a lowlier place than the one I am already in.”

A Vain Search

Rabbi Hanokh told this story: There was once a man who was very stupid. When he got up in the morning it was so hard for him to find his clothes that at night he almost hesitated to go to bed for thinking of the trouble he would have on waking. One evening he finally made a great effort, took paper and pencil and as he undressed noted down exactly where he put everything he had on. The next morning, very well pleased with himself, he took the slip of paper in hand and read: ‘cap’—there it was, he set it on his head; ‘pants’—there they lay, he got into them; and so it went until he was fully dressed.

“That’s all very well, but now where am I myself?” he asked in great consternation. “Where in the world am I?” He looked and looked, but it was a vain search; he could not find himself. “And that is how it is with us,” said the rabbi.

“Scaring Off”

Rabbi Hanokh told this story: A servant girl from Poland hired herself out to work in Germany. In that country they use the term “to scare off” in their cookery. By this they mean pouring cold water into a pot in which meat is boiling, to make it easier to take off the scum. Once when the lady of the house in which the girl was working had to go off to market while the dinner was cooking, she said to her: “Watch the soup and don’t forget ‘to scare off.’ ” The girl did not understand the term, but she was ashamed to admit it.

When the servant saw the scum rise to overflowing, she took a broom and threatened the pot on all sides, until it upset and the soup spilled all over the stove.

“Now if you try to scare off the Evil Urge when it rises up within you,” the rabbi added, “you will upset everything. You must learn to skim off the scum.”

The Real Exile

Rabbi Hanokh said: “The real exile of Israel in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it.”

To the Children of Men

When Rabbi Hanokh had said the verse in the psalms: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth hath He given to the children of men,” he paused and then went on to say: “ ‘The heavens are the heavens of the Lord’—you see they are already of a heavenly character. ‘But the earth hath He given to the children of men’—so that they might make of it something heavenly.”

The Fight

Rabbi Hanokh was asked why the hasidim did not begin to pray at the set time.

“While soldiers are going through their training,” he replied, “there is a certain set time for everything they have to do, and they must follow their schedule. But when they are in the thick of battle they forget what was prescribed and fight as the hour demands.

“The hasidim,” the rabbi concluded, “are fighters.”

On Growing Old

A fiddler once played Rabbi Hanokh a tune. He said: “Even melodies that grow old lose their savor. When we heard this one at Rabbi Bunam’s long ago, it made our hearts leap. Now it has lost its savor. And that is how it really is. We must be very well prepared and ready for old age. We pray: ‘Cast me not off in the time of old age! (Psalm 71:9)’ For then we lose our savor. But sometimes this is a good thing. For when I see that after all I have done I am nothing at all, I must start my work over again. And it is said of God: ‘Who reneweth the creation every day continually.’ ”