

ZEVI HIRSH OF RYMANOV

The Loftiest Prayer

Rabbi Hirsh once complained to his teacher that whenever he prayed he saw fiery letters and words flash before his eyes. "These," said Rabbi Mendel, "are the mystical concentrations of our sacred master Rabbi Isaac Luria. So what cause have you to complain?"

"But I want to pray concentrating only on the meaning of the words," answered Rabbi Hirsh.

"What you have in mind," said Rabbi Mendel, "is a very high rung which only one man in a whole generation can reach: that of having learned all secret wisdom and then praying like a little child."

The Perfection of the Torah

A woman once came to Rabbi Hirsh, her eyes streaming with tears, and complained that she had been the victim of a miscarriage of justice in the rabbinical court. The zaddik summoned the judges and said: "Show me the source from which you derived your verdict, for it seems to me that there has been some error." Together they looked up the passage in the book *Choshen Mishpat (Breastplate of Judgment)* on which the verdict had been based, and discovered that there had indeed been a misinterpretation.

One of the judges asked the rabbi how he had known beforehand that there had been an error. He answered: "It is written: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.' Had the verdict been in accordance with the true law, the woman could never have wept as she did."

URI OF STRELISK

Where?

Rabbi Uri once said to the hasidim who had come together in Strelisk: "You journey to me, and where do I journey? I journey and journey continually to that place where I can cling to God."

Letters and Souls

Rabbi Uri said: “The myriads of letters in the Torah correspond to the myriads of souls in Israel. If one single letter is left out of the Torah, it becomes unfit for use; if one single soul is left out of the union of Israel, the Divine Presence will not rest upon it. Like the letters, so the souls must unite and form a union. But why is it forbidden for one letter in the Torah to touch its neighbor? Because every soul in Israel must have hours when it is alone with its Maker.”

The Growing Tree

Rabbi Uri taught: “Man is like a tree. If you stand in front of a tree and watch it incessantly to see how it grows and to see how much it has grown, you will see nothing at all. But tend to it at all times, prune the runners, and keep the vermin from it, and—all in good time—it will come into its growth. It is the same with man: all that is necessary is for him to overcome his obstacles, and he will thrive and grow. But it is not right to examine him every hour to see how much has been added to his growth.”

YEHUDAH ZEVI OF STRETYN AND HIS SON ABRAHAM OF STRETYN

Men Can Meet

In the course of a journey, Rabbi Yehudah Zevi of Stretyn learned that Rabbi Shimon of Yaroslav was traveling the same road from the opposite direction. He got out of his carriage and went to meet him. Now Rabbi Shimon had heard of Rabbi Yehudah Zevi’s coming, got out of his carriage, and went toward him. They greeted each other like brothers.

Then Rabbi Yehudah Zevi said: “Now I understand the meaning of the popular saying: ‘Men can meet, but mountains never.’ When one man considers himself just a human being, pure and simple, and the other does so too, they can meet. But if the one considers himself a lofty mountain, and the other thinks the same, then they cannot meet.”

A Pregnancy

Rabbi Yehudah Zevi said: “When a man grows aware of a new way in which to serve God, he should carry it around with him secretly and without uttering it for nine months, as though he were pregnant with it, and let others know of it only at the end of that time, as though it were a birth.”

Drugs

A learned but ungenerous man said to Rabbi Abraham of Stretyn: “They say that you give people mysterious drugs and that your drugs are effective. Give me one that I may attain the fear of God.”

“I don’t know any drug for the fear of God,” said Rabbi Abraham. “But if you like I can give you one for the love of God.”

“That’s even better!” cried the other. “Just you give it to me.”

“It is the love of one’s fellow men,” answered the zaddik.

MORDECAI OF LEKHOVITZ AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The Nature of Prayer

Rabbi Moshe of Kobryn related: “My teacher, Rabbi Mordecai of Lekhovitz, taught me how to pray. He instructed me as follows: ‘He who utters the word “Lord” and in doing so prepares to say “of the world,” is not speaking as he should. At the moment he is saying “Lord,” he must only think of offering himself up to the Lord, so that even if his soul should leave him with the “Lord,” and he were not able to add the word “world,” it would be enough for him that he had been able to say “Lord.” ’

“This is the essence of prayer.”

Miracles

The rabbi of Kobryn said: “We paid no attention to the miracles our teachers worked, and when sometimes a miracle did not come to pass, they gained in our eyes.”

Against Worrying

Rabbi Mordecai of Lekhovitz said: “We must not worry. Only one worry is permissible: a man should worry about nothing but worry.”

Once when Rabbi Mordecai was in the great town of Minsk expounding the Torah to a number of men hostile to his way, they laughed at him. “What you say does not explain the verse in the least!” they cried.

“Do you really think,” he replied, “that I was trying to explain the verse in the book? That doesn’t need explanation! I want to explain the verse that is within me.”

A Blessing

Once when Rabbi Mordecai attended the circumcision of the son of his friend Rabbi Asher of Stolyn, and they brought him the boy afterward that he might bless him, he said: “May you not fool God, may you not fool yourself, and may you not fool people.”

The Verse Within

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In His Father’s Footsteps

When Rabbi Noah, Rabbi Mordecai’s son, assumed leadership after his father’s death, his disciples noticed that there were a number of ways in which he conducted himself differently from his father. They asked him about this.

“I do just as my father did,” he replied. “He did not imitate, and I do not imitate.”

Against Hypocrisy

Rabbi Noah of Lekhovitz said: “He who works in the service of God deceitfully—what good does it do him? God cannot be fooled, and if you succeed in fooling the people, it will turn out wrong in the end. Whoever tries to fool others only fools himself, and keeps on being a fool.”

“I Believe”

Once when Rabbi Noah was in his room, he heard how one of his disciples began to recite the Principles of Faith in the House of Study next door, but stopping immediately after the words “I believe with perfect faith” whispered to himself: “I don’t understand that!” and then once more:

“I don’t understand that.” The zaddik left his room and went to the House of Study.

“What is it you do not understand?” he asked.

“I don’t understand what it’s all about,” said the man. “I say ‘I believe.’ If I really do believe, then how can I possibly sin? But if I do not really believe, why am I telling lies?”

“It means,” answered the rabbi, “that the words ‘I believe’ are a prayer, meaning ‘oh, that I may believe!’ ” Then the hasid was suffused with a glow from within. “That is right!” he cried. “That is right! Oh, that I may believe, Lord of the world, oh, that I may believe!”

Maimonides’ thirteen principles of faith are included in many siddurim and are recited at the conclusion of Friday and Festival services. This is known as Yigdal and embodies Judaism’s fundamental pillars of traditional belief...¹

Principle 1: I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be God’s name, is the Creator and Guide for all created beings. He alone made, makes, and will make all that is created.

Principle 2: I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be God’s name, is a Unity, and there is no union in any way like Him. He alone is our God, who was, who is, and who is to be.

Principle 3: I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be God’s name, has no body, is not affected by physical matter, and nothing whatsoever can compare to Him [or be compared with Him]...

¹ https://web.oru.edu/current_students/class_pages/grtheo/mmankins/drbyhmpg_files/GBIB766RabbLit/Chapter9Maimonides13Princ/index.html#

Light

“And God said: ‘Let there be light.’ ”

Rabbi Shelomo Hayyim of Kaidanov, a grandson of Rabbi Mordecai of Lekhovitz, read this verse thus: “And he said: ‘God, let there be light!’ ” When a man prays with true fervor, “God, let there be light,” then he shall see the light.”

A Jew

Before he died, Rabbi Shelomo Hayyim said to his sons: “You are not to think that your father was a zaddik, a ‘rebbe,’ a ‘good Jew.’ But all the same I haven’t been a hypocrite. I did try to be a Jew.”