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## ***Words of Wisdom for Acquiring Wisdom***

Upon the passing of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidut (known as the *Alter Rebbe*), his son, **Rabbi Dov-Ber, the "Mitteler Rebbe"** assumed the mantle of leadership. He instituted many innovations which led to the wider dissemination of chasidic teachings. One of his requirements for newly married men, was that while they still lived in the home of their parents-in-law, they devote three hours daily to study Chasidut. With this system in place, the number of young men who were knowledgeable of Chasidut grew, and their influence also spread as they matured as teachers and mentors.

As time passed, the general Jewish public became more widely exposed to the new teachings, which took hold in many towns and villages throughout the region. In the town of Liepli, lived a chasid of the Alter Rebbe named Reb Yekutiel. He was a salt dealer and although he was widely admired for his piety, his knowledge of Torah and particularly of Chasidut was meager.

Once, one of the Mitteler Rebbe's young chasidim came to Liepli and remained there for a week, reviewing with the villagers one discourse of the Rebbe each day. The topics discussed in these brilliant discourses dealt with the most elevated and lofty concepts, matters normally inaccessible to the human intellect, except when illuminated by chasidic thought. The young teacher was very adept at explaining these subjects, so that his audience was spellbound by his words.

Poor Reb Yekutiel was among the throng of listeners, but to his utter dismay, he couldn't understand even one word. He couldn't reconcile himself to the thought that here was a man many years his junior who had so much knowledge in his grasp, while he, an elder chasid, understood nothing.

Many years later Reb Yekutiel described this incident and the terrible inner turmoil he experienced to friends. "Here was I, a forty-year old chasid, having gone to the Alter Rebbe for some fifteen years. One day, this young man, a mere babe, comes to the town and transmits the Rebbe's teachings with such burning fervor, and I couldn't understand a word he uttered.

"Every day I went to hear this young man, and every day I grew more and dispirited over my lack of understanding. I was missing out on so many profound spiritual insights, I couldn't bear the pain. Finally, I decided to ask the young teacher to sit with me privately and review the material. I kept him in my house for three weeks while I labored intensively to understand. I stopped working in my business and devoted all my time to studying, but even with all this effort, I failed to reach my goal. The teachings remained closed to me.

"When, after three weeks the young man left, I was totally devastated. I wept and fasted for many days, all the while reciting Psalms and begging G-d to open my

eyes to these precious teachings, but all to no avail. Finally, one day, I saddled my horse and rode off to Lubavitch to ask the Rebbe what to do."

It had been almost a year since Reb Yekutiel had been to Lubavitch and many changes had taken place. Now, sixty young scholars sat in the *Beit Midrash* study hall and learned the Rebbe's words, reviewing them constantly with one another. The Shabbat after Reb Yekutiel arrived, the Mittlerer Rebbe said two chasidic discourses, and although Reb Yekutiel understood a bit of the first, the second was completely unintelligible to him. To the young men surrounding him, however, it was all perfectly clear! He returned to his room and wept bitter tears.

When he was granted a private audience with the Rebbe, Reb Yekutiel recounted in great detail his entire trial: how the young teacher came to Liepli and how he struggled to understand his words, but failed in every attempt. The Rebbe replied, "There is nothing that can stand in the way of a person's will. Although a person's will is not his essence, nevertheless it contains the power to sway the soul in the desired direction."

The Rebbe explained that true desire is the key that opens the soul's faculties and powers, particularly the faculties of thought and understanding. "If you truly desire it," the Rebbe concluded, "you have the ability to broaden your understanding."

Those words had a deep impact on Reb Yekutiel. He decided right then that he would remain in Lubavitch as long as necessary to achieve his goal. He sent a message to his family, informing them of his decision, and set to work. For four months he struggled in his studies, often meditating on one thought for many hours, and he would review his topic of study many times. As the months went by, Reb Yekutiel felt a transformation taking place within himself. As he later told his friends, "I felt as if I had been created anew. Thank G-d, I succeeded in scouring the old pot. I had become a new, clean vessel."

Reb Yekutiel returned home with his mission accomplished. Many years later, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, said in reference to this story: "One can see the attitude that prevailed amongst the chasidim of yesteryear. When a chasid heard in his private meeting with the Rebbe, that his desire, his will, is a crucial tool for his personal transformation...he disregarded any discomforts or difficulties, and never flagged in his efforts until the desired end was achieved."

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*Source:* Reprinted from L'Chaim Weekly (#560), with permission

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi DovBer Shneuri** [of blessed memory: 9 Kislev 1773 - 9 Kislev 1827] was the eldest son and successor to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of the Chabad movement. The author of numerous deep, mystical texts, he is known in Lubavitch circles as "the Mittler (Middle) Rebbe."

*Connection:* Shabbat, 9<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish month of Kislev, is the date of the passing of **Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch**, and also the date of his birthday.