



בס"ד

From the desk of **Yerachmiel Tilles** <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

Story #1418 (5785-20) 12 *SHVAT* 5785 (Feb. 10, 2025)

Discover! the "*TillesTells Stories for Saturday Night*"

[WhatsApp group](#) – 1 Video, 1 Audio, 1 Printable

HOW TO "ELEVATE THE HEAVENS"

Rabbi Menachem–Mendel, the Kotzker Rebbe, craved chasidim who were interested not only in themselves and their families, but with "elevating the heavens." During his first years in Kotzk he was interested in attracting Talmudic scholars to whom scholarship alone was not enough. He wanted them to be chasidim who would strive for a life of meaning and fulfillment through the practice of Jewish ethical teachings and delving into the innermost layers of the Jewish scholarly tradition.¹

The former students of the Talmudic academies who after marriage left wife and kin to stay with him for long periods of time in Kotzk were especially to his liking. Many of them who joined him were the students of Rabbi Yitzchak-Meir Rothenberg,² whose influence drew them to "the holy flame" that flickered in Kotzk.

The Kotzker, however, rarely dealt personally with these promising young men. He usually left them under the tutelage of his trusted disciple Rabbi Mordechai-Yosef Leiner, the future rabbi of Izbitz.

Only from time to time would he himself walk into the precincts of the *beit hamidrash* (study hall). He would glance into the open volumes and into the faces of the students, engage somebody in an advanced exchange of opinions. After, he would utter a few pointed remarks, and then disappear.

These utterances of his were later the subject of conversation; chasidim used to ponder and deliberate over them for years, until they understood what their saintly rabbi meant by them.

Rabbi Abraham Borenstein (d. 1910), author of books on Talmudic law, a son-in-law of the Kotzker, and later the Rav and Rebbe of Sochatchov, once said that only forty years after a certain event did he understand a startling saying of his father-in-law.

This took place at a time when Rabbi Abraham had fallen seriously ill and there was little hope for recovery. During the long duration of his illness, the Kotzker never came to visit him. When Rabbi Abraham's father inquired into the strange treatment accorded his son and mentioned that his son used to spend twenty hours a day in study, Rabbi Menachem Mendel replied: "And this you consider study?"

A few days later, Rabbi Abraham recovered but father and son could neither understand nor forget the Kotzker's response. However, forty years later, the

¹ See *Appendix* at end for similarities and differences with the *Chabad* approach.

² The future first Rebbe of Gur, known as "the Chidushei HaRim"

Sochatchover gained comprehension of this remark while studying the Jerusalem Talmud with his students.

According to the Zohar, every person enters this world for the sake of fulfilling some duty he had neglected in a previous incarnation; he does not die until he has completed the mission assigned him. Observation of an individual is enough to reveal which of the 613 commandments it is his duty to fulfill.

The Jerusalem Talmud (*Kdushim* 1:7) tells of Rabbi Tarphon's serious illness. When his colleagues prayed to G-d on his behalf and mentioned how meticulously he kept the commandment "Honor your mother," his mother interrupted and said, "He did not even fulfill half of his duties towards his mother."

Just as the prayer for Rabbi Tarphon should not have stressed his devotion to his mother, so should there have been no mention of the Sochatchover's devotion to study, for neither of them could die until he had fulfilled his obligation.

~~~~~

*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the book "*Menachem Mendel of Kotzk*" by Dr. Joseph Fox (Bash Publications).

*Why this week?* The weekly Torah reading, *Yitro*, features **the Ten Commandments**, of which the fourth is "*Honor your father and mother.*"  
[This story is also good for next week, for Sh'vat 22 is the *yahrzeit* of the Kotsker.]

*Editor's request:* For those Lubavitchers who were expecting/hoping for a **Rebbetzin Chaya-Mushka** story (her *yahrzeit* is the same date as the Kotsker's), I will be posting a very interesting video one for my [What'sApp group](#) on Saturday night. For those not already a subscriber, please join (preferably before Shabbos) and [check it out](#). You can always easily unsubscribe afterwards. Another nice one is available in my archives on the ASCENT website.

*Biographic note:*

**Rabbi Menachem-Mendel of Kotzk** [5547 - 22 Shevat 5619 (1787 - Feb. 1859)], was not from a chasidic family, yet he became a disciple of the "Seer" of Lublin, the "Holy Jew" of Pshischah, and ultimately of Rebbe Simcha-Bunim of Peshischah. "The Kotsker" was known for his practice and insistence upon a zealous and unrelenting search for truth, his active opposition to self-centeredness, his emphasis on properly motivated Torah study, and for his sharp, pithy aphorisms. The last two decades of his life he spent isolated in his room. After his passing, the majority of his followers turned to his disciple R. Yitzchak Meir, first of the Gur dynasty, to be their rebbe. [Based on an appendix entry in "A Treasury of Chassidic Tales" (Artscroll).]

*Appendix—A comparison of similarities & differences between Kotzk and Chabad:*

We are "day workers [Eruvin 65a]." Day means light. Our work is to illuminate, to enlighten the world with the light of the Torah. Besides the necessity of maintaining our own selves properly, with G-d's help - being what we ought to be - our whole *avoda* is to be privileged to develop pupils who are firmly based people, devoted with heart and mind to the inner *kavana*, the intention or purpose of our existence. Our pupils must know that it is not sufficient to study the Revealed Torah and to cherish the Sacred by observing mitzvot; there must also be *avoda sheb'leiv*, the service of the heart, *davening*.

From "*HaYom Yom*": Compiled and arranged by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, in 5703 (1943) from the talks and letters of the sixth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory. [Chabad.org]