

# Chacham, Mah Hu Omer?

## Customs of the giants of previous generations, as shared by the elder Posek of our generation

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### Nature Is a Miracle and Human Nature Is to Marvel at Innovations

This conversation took place when things were still normal, when the world was what we considered routine. Residents of Eretz Yisrael did not fear that all would stop in its tracks in a number of days, that all countries would close their borders and that they would be on lockdown at home. However, in the home of the Rav, the feeling was that something big was about to occur. The telephone conversations came from far-off Asia from *kashrus mashgichim* and community Rabbanim asking various questions about how to conduct themselves while fleeing from the spreading virus. The Rav offered clear and explanatory answers. No one imagined that very soon after, this virus would strike Eretz Yisrael — and the rest of the world. May Hashem watch over us and have mercy on *Klal Yisrael*.

### There is No Nature in the World

"We can understand what Rabi Chanina ben Dosa said (*Taanis* 25a), 'He Who told the oil to burn will tell the vinegar to burn.' It was so clear to him that there is no nature in the world, and that everything is from Hashem, to the point that he did not see a difference between oil, which inherently was put in this world to burn, and vinegar, which does not burn by nature. It is all from Above, and with Hashem, there is no difference between the two.

"Similarly the *Noam Elimelech* (*Hosafos Likutei Shoshanah*) explained the *pasuk* in *Parashas Beshalach*, 'U'Vnei Yisrael *halchu bayabashah b'soch hayam*, (*Shemos* 14:29). The meaning is that when *Bnei Yisrael* traversed the sea, they merited to reach the clear understanding that even when one goes on dry land, which we perceive as natural, that is as much of a miracle as 'in the sea,' literally.

"For *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, there is no difference between the splitting of the sea and the regular routine of nature. And thus we can understand the words of *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 118a), 'The sustenance of a person is as difficult as *Krias Yam Suf*.' Many have sought to explain why it is that the sustenance of a person is so difficult.

"But on the contrary, it seems that *Chazal* specified *parnassah* because it seems to everyone to be nature — the way of the world is that people work and they earn a livelihood, it's cause and effect, totally by nature. Therefore, *Chazal* said that *parnassah* is equal to *Krias Yam Suf*. Just like splitting the sea is such an obvious miracle and it is clear to all that it is from Him, so, too, *parnassah* is from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who allocates a person's livelihood. For *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, there is no more difficulty in splitting the sea than in providing sustenance, and *parnassah* is no more difficult than *Krias Yam Suf*. There is no difference between nature and miracle for Him."

When the *Raavad* said these words,



In conversation with *Hamodia's* Rabbi Tuvia Freund

we could not fathom that by the time this would be written, with the world under lockdown and economies in meltdown, it would be very clear how *parnassah* can be compared to the splitting of the sea.

### Hishtadlus Is Not the Reason for The Result

If so, how much *hishtadlus* does a person have to make for *parnassah*, and for other matters? Each person can say that he lives with *emunah* and *bitachon* and therefore he does not have to do anything.

"I heard from Harav Elchanan Wasserman, *Hy"d*, when he was with us in London [more about that visit to his parents' home further along], and was asked: What is the obligation of our *bitachon*? Doesn't a person need to make a *hishtadlus*? As it says 'Ubeirachticha bechol asher taaseh,' meaning that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sends His blessings only after a person takes action. If so, what is the measure of *hishtadlus* that we are obligated to do? When should we make this *hishtadlus* in order to get the blessing of Hashem? And when should we refrain from *hishtadlus* and just trust in Hashem?

"Rav Elchanan answered that he cannot determine what is considered too much *hishtadlus* and how much time needs to be allowed. But one must know a fundamental concept in Torah and *emunah* — that there is no snatching up of things in this world. That means no matter how much a person tries, he cannot snatch anything more from this world than he is destined to receive. Even if he manages to earn more through his extensive *hishtadlus*, because a person cannot get more than is allocated to him, a trouble will then befall him from Above, and the extra grief will cancel out the extra pleasure that he grabbed for himself. He will get exactly what Hashem allocated, and he cannot increase the pleasure through 'snatching,' so to speak.

"Sometimes we see a person who

neglects his spirituality in order to get wealthy, and invests his life in *gashmiyus* instead of *ruchniyus*, and actually becomes wealthy. It seems that through leaving the Torah he became successful. But we need to know that the truth is that not only did he not gain anything, he lost from it. Afterwards, he may be afflicted with troubles in order to pay for the wealth and pleasures that he took through misplaced *hishtadlus*, leaving his spiritual life for material pleasures. And a person needs to remember this always: there is no way to grab more pleasures in this world. One can only grab more *mitzvos*. And in the World to Come, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will explain to us the way He treated each individual and the *Klal* in This World.

"Rav Elchanan added that the principle *hishtadlus* of a person in this world needs to be on one matter — to increase *kvod Shamayim* and to try and benefit his eternal soul, not to focus too much *hishtadlus* on matters of This World, which is temporary."

### Special Hishtadlus Affects the Middah of Bitachon

The *Raavad* shares what he heard from the Brisker Rav, in the name of the Vilna Gaon — although some say it is in the name of the Dubno Maggid:

"They described what a 'baal bitachon' is with a *mashal* of a person riding on a donkey who puts a heavy load on the donkey as well. When he feels that the donkey is going to collapse under the weight, he takes the burden and puts it on his shoulders to ease the load for the donkey. This person has done nothing, because there is no difference for the donkey if the burden is on his body or on the shoulders of his rider. That's what someone with *bitachon* feels like — that he does not effect anything through *hishtadlus*, because even *hishtadlus* needs help from the Creator. If so, what is the difference if he makes *hishtadlus* or

not? For *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, light and heavy is equal, and therefore, one with complete *bitachon* casts his entire lot on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and makes no *hishtadlus*.

"I have seen a few times how the Brisker Rav would ponder whether his *hishtadlus* was superfluous and if it was a flaw in the *middah* of *bitachon*. It was awe-inspiring to see that while with regard to spiritual matters he always worried that he did not fulfill his obligation, with matters relating to himself he was always worried the opposite — perhaps he had done too much and had violated his obligation to have *bitachon*."

### His Work Is Done by Hakadosh Baruch Hu

The *Raavad* explained this concept: "In *Parashas Vayakhel* it says 'Sheishes yamim te'aseh melachah ubayom hashevi'i yihiyeh lachem kodesh Shabbos Shabbason V'Hashem.' What is the meaning of the word 'te'aseh,' it will be done? Shouldn't it say 'taaseh,' you should do?"

"There is an allusion here that a person does not accomplish anything because of his own actions, as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* already determined how much the person will have. The person's actions are only a tool to fulfill the Will of Hashem, Who already decreed that through the person's actions this is what he will get. What is not decreed from above cannot be attained with all the *hishtadlus* in the world. That is why it says 'te'aseh' — to hint to us that a person's actions are not the reason for the results that appear to be from the actions; rather, it is all from Hashem, no matter what.

"The Chofetz Chaim explained this with a parable: There was a large barrel filled with water that had one spout. A fool came and suggested that another faucet should be affixed to the barrel and then there would be lots more water in the bar-

rel. Of course, he is very foolish and there will not be any more water in the barrel just because there is another faucet.

"The Chofetz Chaim says that the *nimshal* is the person's *hishtadlus*, which is merely the spout and the place from which the person extracts the *shefa* that has already been decreed for him from Above. Therefore, extra *hishtadlus* will not help him get more than *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* decreed, because that is merely like adding another spout from where to bring down the abundance that he received. But there won't be more abundance just because there is more *hishtadlus*.

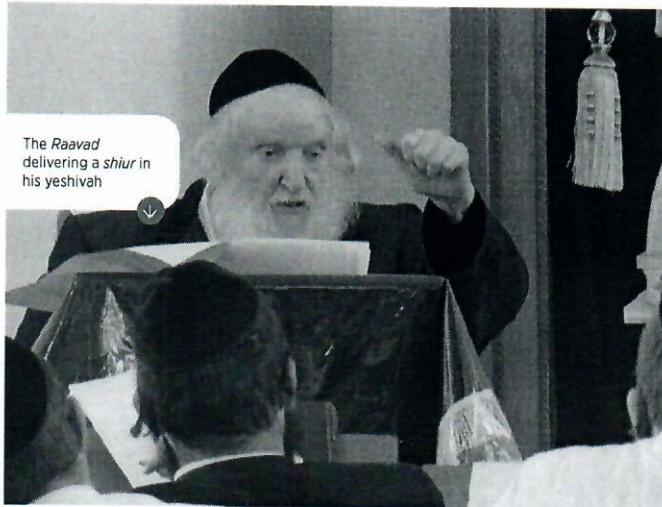
"I often mention the words of the Maggid of Kelm, who said: 'The world tends to say "bezas Hashem," but that is not accurate, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not help us fulfill our wishes and our actions. On the contrary, we do His will, and therefore, it is more apt to say "birtzos Hashem.'" And even though we do not actually do that, the idea is certainly correct. As noted, we do nothing, we just fulfill the decree of the Creator which was already determined before we do anything."

#### Hishtadlus in One Place Helps the Yeshuah Come From Elsewhere

"Let me tell you a story that happened to me when I was a *talmid* in the yeshivah of Harav Moshe Schneider, *zt"l*, in London. The financial situation when I learned in the yeshivah was dire, and sometimes we had nothing to eat, plain and simple. It's not like in our generation, where the *bachurim* have, *baruch Hashem*, become accustomed to so much plenty. We don't have anything like that poverty in our yeshivos today.

"One evening, the *Rosh Yeshivah* summoned me and asked me to knock on the doors of wealthy people to ask them to help save the yeshivah from starvation. I did as he asked; each evening, I plodded from house to house, but as much as I tried, nothing worked out, because most of the doors that I knocked on were not even opened. Some opened the door and claimed that they had other commitments and such excuses. Others shouted at me that the yeshivah students should go work and then we would not have to ask them to help support the yeshivah, and we could support ourselves. Some hung signs at the entrance to their homes that entry to dogs and solicitors was forbidden! So I returned to the yeshivah dejected, feeling that not only had I not been able to collect any money, but the yeshivah had also lost the cost of my trip.

"The next day I sat down to learn, and I heard that the *Rosh Yeshivah* was looking for me. I was afraid that he was upset with me for not having accomplished anything. I planned to tell him that I had gone around to collect money but had failed. To my surprise, I saw him coming towards me, his face beaming with happiness. 'You deserve a thank you. *Baruch Hashem*, you were very successful!' I quickly replied that he was mistaken, because I hadn't done anything. I knew how badly I had failed. But the *Rosh Yeshivah* happily informed me that due to my actions yesterday, a Yid had come to him that morning and given him 25 pounds sterling — a generous sum in those days. I asked him what that had to do with what I had done the day before, and he replied that we believe and know that *hishtadlus* is not a cause of the results. Rather, it is decreed before Hashem that without the *hishtadlus* of a person, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not give what was already decreed. So therefore, it is certainly relevant to you, because you



The Raavad delivering a *shiur* in his yeshivah

did the *hishtadlus* and therefore Hashem helped us. Hashem has many ways of doing things, and because of your efforts in one place, Hashem sent salvation from a different place. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rav Moshe Schneider, lived with *emunah* and *bitachon*, and therefore, he also viewed *hishtadlus* differently."

#### With the Gaon of Baranowitz in London

The *Raavad* shared memories of when Harav Elchanan Wasserman, *Hy"d*, stayed in his parents' home in London, and the ensuing bond between the "Londoner *Ihuy*" and the "Baranovicher Gaon" — the *Rosh Yeshivah* of the largest yeshivah in the world at the time.

Harav Elchanan Wasserman would travel nearly each year to London to collect funds for his yeshivah in Baranowitz, Lithuania. He would stay in the home of the *Raavad's* parents, as he knew that he could rely on the *kashrus* and that the home was one of Torah. He would eat the Shabbos meals with the family.

"When Reb Elchanan would come to our home, my father would close his store and dedicate himself to helping the Rav. He escorted him wherever he had to go and helped with whatever he needed. This was especially necessary as Reb Elchanan did not know English. When my father could not accompany him, I would go with him, guiding him through the streets of London."

After the passing of Reb Asher Sternbuch, *zt"l*, Reb Elchanan was not able to continue staying in the home of the widow, but he did come visit so as not to offend her. He would take the opportunity during these visits to speak to the orphans, offering them encouragement and consolation, and testing them on their learning. Then, Reb Moshe, *shlita*, would take his father's place escorting Reb Elchanan around the city. He took him to different shuls each day and heard the *drashos* that he gave there. Reb Elchanan got to know the young man, and remarked of him, "He is a *davar sheyesh bo mamash*." When he was 6 or 7 years old, he was tested by Reb Elchanan on the *sugya* of *sachiv* and *toshav* in *Kiddushin*, and Reb Elchanan helped him further explain the *Gemara*.

The mother asked for a *brachah* for her son Moshe from Rav Elchanan, but the *Gaon* refused, because he did not think *brachos* should be given on matters of *ruchniyus* (as such *brachos* are ineffective, and also because a child who received such

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a *brachah* might think that he did not have to toil — because he could rely on the *brachah*). But she firmly said to him, "I am a widow, and I instruct you to do so." Indeed, Rav Elchanan agreed and blessed him, and praised him at length. When the *Raavad* was asked what the *brachah* was, he did not want to say anything but this: "When he gave a *brachah*, it was a real *brachah*."

Rav Sternbuch shares more memories of helping Rav Elchanan:

"One day, Rav Elchanan needed to travel by bus and I escorted him. At the time, the buses in London already had upholstered seats. Rav Elchanan, in his pure *yiras Shamayim*, feared that perhaps the upholstery had *shaatnez*, and there are some *poskim* who say that it is forbidden to sit on a seat made of *shaatnez*. Hence he stood during the ride, even though according to the law in London at that time, it was forbidden to stand on a bus as long as there was an empty seat.

"The bus driver noticed Rav Elchanan standing during the ride while there was an empty seat beside him, and he yelled at Rav Elchanan that he was breaking the law. Rav Elchanan didn't know how to explain his concerns to the gentle driver, so he asked me to reply to the driver briefly in English: 'It's not kosher.' But the driver replied furiously, 'I didn't ask you to eat it, I asked you to sit on it.' And he ordered Rav Elchanan to get off the bus right away — which he did, and walked the rest of the way to be spared the *issur* of *shaatnez*. This display of Rav Elchanan's *yiras Shamayim* was etched in my memory from that young age, and has served as a guiding light for me in my *yiras Shamayim*."

#### There Is No Torah Like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael

The *Raavad's* war experiences and the miracle of his survival are a story in their own right, which we will not focus on here, although we did hear a bit about it.

After the war, the *Raavad* wanted to go to Eretz Yisrael in order to be able to learn from the *Gedolei Torah* who lived there. As soon as he arrived, he began visiting *Gedolei Yisrael* who took a liking to him, and he set up times to visit their homes. On Wednesdays he went to the Tchebener Rav. Once, when he came to the Tchebener Rav, the Rav shared a powerful question that he had, and Rav Moshe answered him immediately with a clear answer. The Tchebener Rav was most impressed by his answer, and asked: "Does your mother cry when she *bentches licht*?" And when the *Raavad* answered that she cried a lot, the Tchebener Rav answered: "Know that your *chiddush* is not your own, it is from your mother's tears at *hadlakas neiros*!"

Once every two weeks, on Thursdays, the *Raavad* would travel from Yerushalayim to the Chazon Ish in Bnei Brak, even though at the time it was both a great exertion and quite an expense. On Friday, he would visit the home of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Beis Yisrael, *zy"u*. At the time, he became very close to the Brisker Rav, *zt"l*, who took a walk with him each day in the streets of Yerushalayim for nine months — every single day.

The second part of the conversation with the *Raavad* was focused on the deeds and conversations of the holy *tzaddikim* with whom he was close and from whom he learned.

#### Torah and Chassidus in the Home of the Tzaddik

One of the *tzaddikim* with whom the *Raavad* was close was Harav Aharon of Belz, *zy"u*, and he traveled frequently to his home in Tel Aviv. The Belzer Rav was very fond of him, and instructed the *meshamshim* to allow Rav Moshe to come into the house whenever he wanted to. He even told the *Raavad's* son-in-law, Rav Yaakov Shechter, *zt"l*, "Ehr iz fin unzere — He is one of ours." Once, when he proffered his hand to the Rebbe in greeting, the Rebbe held his hand lovingly and said, "A *einikel fin Rav Elya Vilner*, a grandson of Rav Elyahu of Vilna is here to remind us of *divrei Torah* of Rav Elya Vilner at the *tisch*..."

The *Raavad* relates:

"When I came for the first time to Rav Aharon of Belz, he asked me where I learn. When I replied that I learn in Chevron, he asked me to tell the *bachurim* that when they learn a *masechta*, they have to make sure to learn it from beginning to end. He explained that when someone learns a *masechta* in This World he builds for himself a corresponding home in the World to Come, and if he learned a *masechta* and didn't finish it, then he will have an incomplete house, like one who builds a house that is missing a door or window. And only if he finishes the *masechta* will he have a complete, nice house. Therefore, one should strive to finish a *masechta*."

When I asked him how an *ihuy* from London basked in the holy presence of the Belzer Rebbe, one of his *talmidim* replied: "As a *bachur*, the *Raavad* heard a lot about the Belzer Rebbe from Harav Elimelech Rumpel, *zt"l*, who lived in Vienna and learned under the Chavatzeles Hasharon. Rav Rumpel was an ardent Chassid of the Belzer Rebbe. He would travel with the *bachurim* of his yeshivah for Shabbos and Yom Tov to the Belzer court."

Rav Elimelech and Rav Moshe *davened*

in the same shul on Shabbos, at the same time, and after *davening*, they spoke together for three hours or more, sharing practices and *divrei Torah* from the Rebbe. The *Raavad's* mother would encourage him to do this and was happy that he was engaging in *divrei Torah* and in serving *talmidei chachamim*. She would wait to eat the Shabbos meal until he returned.

#### With the Chazon Ish

The *Raavad* had a regular visit every second Thursday with the Chazon Ish in Bnei Brak. This was a long and expensive trip at the time, but he would make the effort to go so that he could share his questions with the Chazon Ish and discuss matters of *halachah* and complex subjects in *Kodshim*. Sometimes, the Chazon Ish would escort Rav Moshe to the door of the house, indicating the great respect that the Chazon Ish had for him. While Rav Moshe was still a *bachur*, the Chazon Ish called him "Harav." The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kamenitz, Harav Yitzchak Sheiner, *shlita*, related that he was present in the home of the Chazon Ish when Rav Moshe came to speak to him in learning. When the young man left, the Chazon Ish remarked, impressed: "I didn't know there were still Yidden like that in *chutz laAretz*."

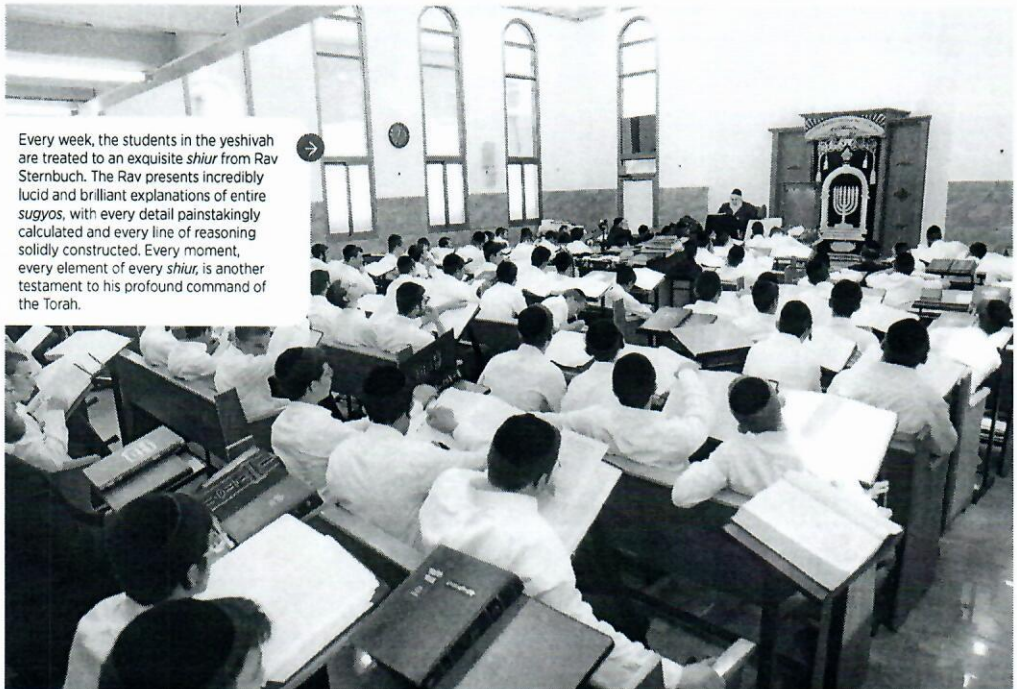
Harav Gedalya Schwartz, *zt"l*, of America, related:

"After the *Raavad*, Harav Moshe Sternbuch, began to visit the Chazon Ish regularly to speak with him in learning, the Chazon Ish was deeply impressed and asked me if I knew the father of the Sternbuch family, Rav Osher, *zt"l*, [the father of the *Raavad* Rav Moshe, Harav Eliyahu Sternbuch, the *Gaavad* of Antwerp, *zt"l*, and Harav Dov Sternbuch, *zt"l*, and the father-in-law of, *ybl"o*, the Brisker Rosh Yeshivah Harav Meshulam Dovid Soloveichik, *shlita*, and Dayan Chanoch Henoch Ehrentreu of London, *shlita*]. The Chazon Ish said that he wanted to know what his father had done to merit such a son. I replied that indeed, I had been very close to Rav Osher, and he would always give *tzedakah* to the poor in a way that they did not feel that he was the giver. His giving was the embodiment of *matan b'seser*."

"The Chazon Ish asked to hear more about Reb Osher's life, and Rav Gedalya related that when Rav Osher was sick, he asked that a sum of money be given to *tzedakah* as a merit for his recovery. When he heard how those close to him said they were donating a large sum of money but 'on condition that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should help him recover,' Rav Osher stood up, and in his weak state, shouted: 'We don't make conditions with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is *Kulo Tov!* Give the *tzedakah* without any conditions, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will do as He wishes and will have mercy on me!' When the Chazon Ish heard this he remarked, 'Enough! I don't need to hear any more! This is enough for me to know about him!'"

#### The Power of Torah of the Chazon Ish

"*Bein hazmanim* is soon upon us," the *Raavad* said. "I'll tell you what I heard from a *bachur* who came to the Chazon Ish to bid farewell before traveling home for *bein hazmanim*. The Chazon Ish told him that during *bein hazmanim*, obviously he needed to rest to become refreshed, and that he didn't have to learn like he did during the *zeman*. But at least he should learn like a '*baal habayis*,' a layman. And the *bachur* asked the Chazon Ish what it means to learn like a *baal habayis*. The Chazon Ish quoted to him the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah*, 1:12) which explains



Every week, the students in the yeshiva are treated to an exquisite *shiur* from Rav Sternbuch. The Rav presents incredibly lucid and brilliant explanations of entire *sugyos*, with every detail painstakingly calculated and every line of reasoning solidly constructed. Every moment, every element of every *shiur*, is another testament to his profound command of the Torah.

how someone who is an artisan and who engages in his trade for just three hours a day and in Torah for nine hours a day. It explains that the *baal habayis* according to the Torah is someone who learns nine hours a day! And works for three hours. The Chazon Ish told the *bachur* that based on this, he should learn nine hours a day during *bein hazmanim*. The Chazon Ish recoiled when the boy replied that he was doubtful if during the *zeman* he learned nine hours."

*It is said that the wisdom of the Chazon Ish in worldly matters came from the power of his Torah.*

"I heard this story from people who witnessed it: A Yid needed to undergo an operation on his head, and the specialist, Dr. Ashkenazi, felt that he could not operate because the man would remain a vegetable. The sick man came to the Chazon Ish and told him about this. The Chazon Ish took a piece of paper and sketched the structure of the head and the brain, and draw a path where it would be possible to do the surgery without damaging sensitive places. He instructed the patient to show the sketch to Dr. Ashkenazi, and he would be able to operate based on it. Indeed, the doctor was most impressed by the sketch and did the surgery based on the Chazon Ish's diagram. *Baruch Hashem* it was very successful and the patient recovered."

"When the other doctors heard this, they wanted to come to the Chazon Ish to learn medical wisdom from him. But the surgeon replied that the Chazon Ish, in his great holiness, drew his wisdom from the power of studying the Torah, and it was impossible for a simple person to understand and fathom the wisdom of the Chazon Ish, built entirely on the foundations of the holy Torah."

#### Tzedakah at All Times

"The *hasmadah* of the Chazon Ish and his power of Torah are known to all. But he also was concerned for each individual. On Erev Yom Kippur, after *Minchah*, people passed by the Chazon Ish to receive a *brachah* before the holy day. In the middle, the Chazon Ish once stopped one of the visitors and asked how his *parnassah* was.

“**The Tchebiner Rav answered: “Know that your chiddush is not your own, it is from your mother’s tears at hadlakas neiros!”**”

The man replied, '*Rebbi*, we are approaching the holy day and we don't think now about *gashmiyus*.' The Chazon Ish replied that the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur would *daven* for the *parnassah* of *Am Yisrael* and therefore, it was correct for me to ask about your *parnassah*. Even though for you it is only *gashmiyus*, the *gashmiyus* of one Yid is *ruchniyus* for me, and therefore I worry about your *parnassah*."

*With regard to tzedakah, I heard that the Rav said in the name of the Chazon Ish that tzedakah should be given also to needy people who do not observe Torah and mitzvos. Is this the case?*

"I wrote about this in *Teshuvos V'Hanugos* (Vol. II 467). Indeed, I heard from the Chazon Ish that one needs to give *tzedakah* to Shabbos desecrators as well, because even if we say they are *tinokos shenishbu*, they still have young children, and even if they sinned, what did their children do wrong? However, in every question of *tzedakah* there is an order of preferences.

"I also remember that the Chazon Ish would encourage people to sign '*arvus*,' as guarantors for loans for needy people who borrowed money. He would say that the main part of the *mitzvah* is to do so even though there was a chance the borrower

would not be able to pay the loan and the guarantor would have to do it. But it is clear that all this is specifically when the guarantor has where to pay from if need be. However, if the guarantor does not have the money, then he should not sign."

*The Raavad shared other memories of the Chazon Ish:*

"A Yid once came to him and asked if he was allowed to lie in order to get a certain grant, which would not cause anyone a loss. The Chazon Ish replied, 'When someone seeks only the truth then *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* provides for his needs with truth and he will not need to lie. And only if a person is willing to lie is he presented with a challenge that shows him that his *parnassah* will be coming to him through falsehood...'"

*We asked the Raavad to share some of the Chazon Ish's practices with regard to Pesach.*

"There was a *ben Torah* who married a girl from a *chassidische* family who were very strict about not eating *gebrochts*. She said she was willing to cook for him as he wanted, with *gebrochts*, but she herself would not touch it. Her husband would not feel any difference, she said. This generated some loud arguments between them, and they agreed to go to the Chazon Ish to render a decision. The sage said he did not see why the husband insisted she eat *gebrochts*; he should let her practice the *minhag* of her parents' home if it did not disturb his own *minhagim*, and he should not force her to change her *minhag* and fight with her over it if she did not want to do so."

#### Settling in Yerushalayim

*The Raavad's constant aspiration to be close to the tzaddikim of his generation led him to settle in Yerushalayim after his marriage, even though his mother lived abroad and his in-laws in Tel Aviv. Primarily, he wanted to live near the Brisker Rav. So, with the Rebbetzin's agreement they moved.*

After coming to Eretz Yisrael and forging a relationship with the Brisker Rav, a *bachur* from London came to ask the Rav whether he should permanently move to

Eretz Yisrael to learn in the yeshivos there. The Brisker Rav replied: "I spoke in learning with the *bachur* Sternbuch from London, and if the yeshivah there can produce such a *bachur* then you can also learn in London. There is no need to come to Eretz Yisrael."

In 5712/1952, the *Raavad* would go for a walk with the Brisker Rav each day; this lasted nine months. The Rav needed to walk for his health, as he suffered from respiratory difficulties, and they would talk in Torah and relevant matters of the time.

Those close to the Brisker Rav related that he would be silent when others told him *chiddushei Torah*, and sometimes he would go and rest on his bed while they spoke. There were just a few exceptions, people to whom he would react and correct or add to their words. Rav Moshe Sternbuch, *shlita*, was among the select few to whom the Rav would reply, because he was very close to him. He held him in such great esteem that he took Rav Moshe to do *hatavas chalom*; it was known that the Brisker Rav did not take just anyone for this, only those who he was close to.

**Guarding the Matzos Has No Measure**

When we asked the *Raavad* about the practices of the Brisker Rav, he said:

"If I would know what thirst there would be in our generation to hear every word that the Brisker Rav uttered, I would have tried to write down each day what I saw and heard, and it surely would have accumulated into a number of *sefarim*... What subject do you want to hear about? I heard so much from him."

Let's focus on the halachos of Pesach.

"A man once asked the Brisker Rav what is the *chiddush* in the Torah that the matzos need *'shemirah'*, as it says, *'Ushemartem es hamatzos.'* Even without this warning we are obligated to be careful to avoid *chametz* and not to see it or have it in our possession. I heard that he answered that they were experts in the signs of leavening of the dough, as the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* says (48b) the signs are cracks in the dough and describes what they look like. And the obligation to guard the dough is not to rely on the signs, but rather to make sure during the grinding and kneading and baking that it should not reach a state of *chametz*. This way the matzah is guarded from becoming *chametz* through an act of *shemirah*, not only from the knowledge through the signs.

"Incidentally, I heard from him that the *Rishonim* recognized the signs of leavening in matzah and therefore they baked thick matzos (sort of like a pita) and were not afraid it would become *chametz*. But we need to be careful because it is more common in thicker matzos, that are not baked right away, to become *chametz* before they are baked.

"Regarding the *shemirah*, the Brisker Rav said that any *shemirah* that a person adds to what he is obligated to do is not *hiddur mitzvah* like a nicer *esrog*; rather it is the fulfillment of the *mitzvas aseil* of *'Ushemartem es hamatzos.'*"

**Guarding Against Leavening Does Not Stem From Chumros**

"I once heard that the owners of a bakery demanded from the Brisker Rav a large sum of money because of his stringencies in kashrus and his *hiddur* in matzos. They told him that he could forgo some of his stringencies and his matzos would not be any less kosher and he wouldn't have to pay such a high sum. But he refused,



Harav Sternbuch (L) seen together with the Brisker Rav (R), in this historic picture

and said that he had no *'chumros'* and that everything was included in the *mitzvah* of *'ushemartem,'* which has no measure. Each one does it to the best of his ability, and that is how he fulfills the *mitzvah*.

"When the Brisker Rav was in Vilna at the beginning of the war and baked matzos there, Harav Chaim Ozer, *zt"l*, heard about his *chumros* and said, 'It is true that it says *'ushemartem es hamatzos'* but it doesn't say one needs to be tense (have *nerven*) about it...' When this was related to the Brisker Rav he replied tersely: 'And I explain *'ushemartem'* to be even with *nerven*. He meant that there was no limit to the observance of this *mitzvah*, and the obligation also included being tense if that what is needed to add protection against leavening."

Was it only with matzos or with everything?

"He had a special *inyan* in the matzos and *'ushemartem.'* But I will note that I

heard from the Brisker Rav in the name of *tzaddikim* of previous generations regarding the *passuk* in *Akeidas Yitzchak*, *'Vayashkem Avraham baboker'* (*Bereishis* 22:3). The word *'Vayashkem'* only applies if a person slept that night and awoke the next morning. That is the greatness of Avraham Avinu, *a"h*, that even though he knew that he was going to sacrifice his son the next day, he was not tense that night and went to sleep as he always did. Then he arose to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Hashem just like he arose to do every other *mitzvah*, without any nerves or tension.

"I heard from Rav Yosef Sheinberger, *zt"l*, that one year, two years before the passing of the Brisker Rav, he stopped the *chaburah* in the midst of baking matzos because a question arose in his mind about *Krias Shema* and he needed to recite it again. He asked that the baking be halted. When the bakery owner saw this he told the Brisker Rav that he would incur losses



Harav Sternbuch (R) visits Harav Chaim Kanievsky



Harav Sternbuch delivers a shiur in Lakewood

of 200 liras as a result — which was a big sum at the time. The Brisker Rav told him that *Krias Shema* was worth the two hundred liras, which he paid, and then went to another room and recited *Krias Shema*. They then resumed baking."

Can you tell us about the close relationship you had with the Gerrer Rebbe, *zy"ta*?

"Indeed, the Gerrer Rebbe was a torch of fire; his entire being cleaved to the Creator. But his humility was so remarkable, that he spoke even to the simplest *bachurim* eye to eye. He was also soft as a reed, and brokenhearted, but only those closest to him realized this. I remember that when he moved to his new house (from David Yellin Street to Malchei Yisrael) and I went in, he looked at the walls of his new home and said to me: 'Don't worry; I certainly don't have *Olam Hazeh*, and I don't know what *Olam Haba* I am going to have...' These words penetrated my heard and resonate in my ears to this day!"

The *Raavad* discussed matters of halachah with the Rebbe, *zy"ta*; one example is what he writes in his *sefer* (*Moadim Uzmanim* Vol. VIII, 150) about *maaser money*:

"He told me once that he felt that one should give *maaser* only to those who needed the money for vital necessities, and not in order to give the poor man all that he lacked, such as a 'horse to ride on and a servant to run before him,' if that's what he had been accustomed to. Even though this is also included in the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, it states in *Kesubos* (67b) that *maaser* money is set aside specifically to give very poor people their vital needs. He felt it was the right thing to do to set aside *maaser* separate from the rest of the *tzedakah* money, and to use it only for necessary needs for very poor people, because it is only through this that the *tikkun* of *maaser* is fulfilled. But he decided not to publicize this; he was likely concerned that if he would, people would be very strict about it and for fear that they would not give the money to the right people, they would not give at all."

The *Raavad* shared some more memories:

"He was once asked a question about a practice relating to the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av va'eim*, but he refused to render a decision. He said that the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av va'eim* is one of the most serious, and such a question needed to be asked to a leading *posek*."

After the conversation ended, a confidant of the *Raavad* related that he was once sitting with the Beis Yisrael when someone entered to ask him an urgent question regarding halachah, and he replied, 'I do not make halachic rulings.' He then referred the person to ask Rav Moshe Sternbuch the question and to accept his answer.

The *Raavad* concluded:

"When I came to part from him before traveling to London, the Rebbe asked me if I had *mezonos* to eat on the way. I told him that I don't eat *mezonos* [the Rav avoids eating *mezonos* in order not to raise questions of *Hamotzi*, as per the rulings of several *poskim*. —T.F.] The next day, at four in the morning, a messenger came from the Rebbe with a package of confections whose *brachah* is *Shehakol*, and told me that the Rebbe had asked the *Rebbetzin* to bake almond cake, that is *Shehakol*, so he should have food for the way. I was deeply moved by the Rebbe's tremendous *chesed*, and his concern for me, a young *bachur*."