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OHR HAZOHAR - ZOHAR CHABAD Leaflet 1

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THE REBBE AND THE ZOHAR

PRESENTED IN HONOR OF THE REBBE'S YAHRTZEIT
3RD OF TAMUZ - 5773

Question: A certain Chabad Chasid asked me why I bother sending our books to Chabad synagogues? Don't you know that we don't learn Zohar?

Answer: First of all, anyone who says such a thing is obviously a big ignoramus as not only does he does not understand the Torah properly but he certainly does not even know the customs of Chabad! A Chabad Chasid who speaks in such a fashion is certainly not even on the doorstep of Chasidut in the very least – and certainly not on the doorstep of Chabad Chasidut!

And now I'll prove to you just how wrong you are. The Leubavicher Rebbe Ztl' once asked the 'Rishon Le'Zion' Rav Mordechai Eliyahu Ztl' if they learn Zohar in the holy land. He told him that only the Sephardim learn Zohar on a regular basis. The Rebbe retorted: 'Why such discrimination? After all, the Zohar was given to the Ashkenazim as well, as certainly the Ashkenazim must also learn the Zohar Ha'Kadosh.' The Rebbe then told him (30 years ago in 5744): **'When you get back to the holy land put up giant posters all over the Eretz Yisrael to impress upon them that it I hold and command that everyone should learn and toil in the Zohar Ha'Kadosh!'**

There is another wonderful story I can tell you that is found in the book **'The Rebbe and Yahadut Sepharad'** (in footnote 11 – Pg. 84). This is a real life story that happened to a certain Yeshiva student

who was a **phenomenal learner** in a certain Yeshiva, and as a result of his great learning prowess he earned the respect and awe of his friends and Rabbis. The full story is very long and touching, so I'll tell you only the gist.

One day the boy was fortunate to enter a 'Yechidut' with the Rebbe (with the help of a certain Chasid who brought him before the Rebbe). During that 'Yechidut' the Rebbe impressed upon him the great importance of learning the secrets of the Torah and Chasidut. The boy asked the Rebbe: 'But why?' The Rebbe answered him (in approximately these words): 'Because if at any point they'll stop respecting you – you may stop learning altogether!' As the boy left the holy midst of the Rebbe, his Chasidim approached him hoping to hear what the Rebbe said to him. However, he was in no mood to exchange even one single word with them as he was quite upset about how the Rebbe spoke to him. However, precisely what the Rebbe predicted unfortunately happened to that boy – as this previously phenomenal learner eventually left the Torah and the Mitzvot altogether. (By the way – from here we learn that when one does not learn and cleave to the Zohar Ha'Kadosh this is a sign that all his learning is for the sake of personal fame and glory. The primary sign of this is that if he will not succeed in attaining that fame and glory he will immediately abandon the Torah – and who knows what will become of him!)

Till one day the boy met that same Chasid that previously took him to the Rebbe. When he saw him

from across the street he screamed out: 'I want to learn Chasidut!' The Chasid eventually recognized the boy even though his appearance had changed so much. At that point he asked him: 'What happened to you? How did you deteriorate to such a degree?' And the previous Yeshiva student admitted: 'The Rebbe told me in our Yechidut that this will happen to me and I was very angry in my heart for speaking to me that way. However, the next time it was my turn to say the 'Chabura' (i.e. an in-depth discourse of the Gemorah) in Yeshiva in front of my colleagues I failed tremendously and my honor was thrown to the floor. From that point on they respected me less and less in Yeshiva until I lost the taste for Torah learning. I stopped learning and with time left Torah and Mitzvot altogether. But when I saw you today I recalled the words of the holy Rebbe who predicted a head of time what would happen to me. That shook me up tremendously and aroused in me a great sense of remorse. Therefore, I beg of you – please teach me Chasidut! (The name of this Avrech is well known).

The following is the gist of the historical meeting with the Rebbe as accounted in the book 'The Rebbe and Yahadut Sepharad'

The unification of Ashkenazim and Sephardim!

We often here talk of the great necessity to break the barriers that separate the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim.

In the year 5744 both chief Rabbis of Yisrael (Ashkenazi and Sepharadi – namely **Rav Avraham Shapira and Rav Mordechai Eliyahu**) soon after beginning their post met with the Leubavicher Rebbe. During that conversation they discussed the need to learn the secrets of the Torah and the urgency to break the barriers that separate between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim. This is part of their conversation, as quoted from the book 'Be'Tzel Ha'Chochma':

Rav Shapira: The learning of Kabbalah was common amongst the Sephardim more than it was amongst the Ashkenazim, however **the leaders of the Ashkenazim** received the Kabbalah heritage **from the Sephardim** when they ascended to Eretz Yisrael. (It is worthy to quote from the book 'Shorshei Ha'Chasidut' that **the first to spread** the secrets of the Torah in the Ashkenazi countries were the Sephardim that arrived there after the Spanish expulsion. According to this insight, we therefore learn that both when the Ashkenazi leaders **ascended to Eretz Yisrael** as well as initially after the Spanish expulsion when the

Sephardim arrived in the Ashkenazi countries – the spread of Kabbalah was attributed primarily to the Sepharadi Jewry. This goes hand in hand with the Rebbe's assessment that the Sephardim preceded the Ashkenazim with regards to the secrets of the Torah).

The honorable Admor: The learning of the Torah's secrets belongs to the entire nation of Yisrael – both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. With regards to Ashkenazim, the GRA who was one of the greatest Ashkenazi leaders wrote in his commentary to Mishley (Ch. 2: verse 9 – and we'll cite the GRA word by word): 'Once he understands the secrets properly everything else will be understood properly as well – the Peshat, the Remez and the Drush. However, until he understands the secrets of the Torah he did not even acquire the Peshat yet!' – these are the words of the GRA.

During the continuation of their Yechidut with the Rebbe the chief Rabbis requested a blessing so that they will not stumble in matters of Hallacha rulings. The Rebbe responded that according to the words of the GRA that only one who learns the secrets of the Torah is assured to arrive at the true Hallachic ruling – be it 'Yoreh Yoreh' or 'Yadin Yadin' – as we saw above from the GRA's words that without learning the secrets of the Torah it is impossible to know the Hallacha properly (i.e. not even the Peshat)! Furthermore, the GRA's famous disciple Rav Chaim of Vilozin published his famous 'Nephesh Ha'Chaim' which draws mostly from previous Kabbalah works.

If so, we clearly learn from the Rebbe that the learning of Kabbalah belongs to all the different circles in our holy nation – both Ashkenazim and Sephardim!

The following is also related to our discussion regarding the need to break the barriers between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim. As we know, certainly everything begins with the Torah as stated in the Zohar (Part 2 – top of Pg. 161b) that before the Almighty created the world **'he looked at the Torah and proceeded to create the world'**. Therefore, in order to break the barriers between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim we must certainly start with the Torah as we learned from the words of the Rebbe. (One could incorrectly argue otherwise from that which the Rebbe disagreed with the Rav Shapira's assessment that Chasidut belongs to the entire nation of Yisrael 'both Ashkenazim and Sepharadim', as well as from what the Rebbe said with regards to the learning of Kabbalah when he agreed with Rav Shapira that the learning of Kabbalah is stronger

amongst Sepharadim. Nevertheless, there is certainly no contradiction between the two statements. Surely, in spite of the excellence of the Sephardim when it comes to learning the secrets of the Torah and in spite of their merit for having initiated this learning amongst our nation in the first place – nevertheless by no means does their merit (God-forbid) negate or diminish the duty that is surely placed upon our Ashkenazi brethren to also participate in this learning as well – as we clearly saw in the words of the GRA that the Rebbe quoted.)

Furthermore, this seems to be the proper fashion to break the dividing wall and bring together the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim. Till now Sephardim were more attached to this learning – it is therefore time for the Ashkenazim to ‘catch up’ and in doing so break this division! (From Be’Tzel Ha’Chochma – Pg. 802-902)

This is the gist of that famous meeting. In addition we’ll quote a few sections from ‘IgroT Ha’Kodesh’ that relate to the Zohar Ha’Kadosh so that we’ll all understand to what great extent the Rebbe actually pushed the learning of the Torah’s secrets.

First letter brought in Igrot Ha’Kodesh (Pg. 142):

Serving Hashem – Learning the secrets of the Torah in depth!

... And it is certainly permitted to point out that although in previous generations it sufficed to

merely take on Chasidic customs or recite Chasidic Torah articles as if they were merely a ‘Segulah’ to read them without needing to understand their contents in depth and breadth – as back then the world was not mired in attitudes that contradict the holy Torah and the Jewish character was evident in the streets and ever the more so inside the home – nevertheless in our current generation when we are mired deeply in matters of conniving and the sorts that originate in the foreign wisdoms (and not the least from the ‘wisdom of denial/Kefirah’), on top of the fact that we mire our Chabad (i.e. our personal Chochma, Bina and Daat in our heads) in matters of Parnasa, and uncommon sprits blow in the streets... **Clearly we must counteract all of that with a deep understanding in learning the Torah’s secrets that the Zohar Ha’Kadosh calls ‘the tree of life’,** which also adds life to our learning of the revealed parts of the Torah in order to improve our performance of the Mitzvot which reaches the very body of the Jew which is also holy. After all, these matters are clarified in great depth in several places including the Igeret Ha’Kodesh of our elder Rebbe the author of the Tania (Posek Be’Nistar Ha’Torah) and the Shulchan Aruch (Posek Be’Nigleh Ha’Torah) in Siman 26, and in the Kuntres ‘Etz Chaim’ written by his grandson’s grandson and eventual replacement (אדמור מוהרש"ב). And let this learning find favour in the eyes of the Almighty, etc.



