

RABBI ZVI ELIMELEC, OF THE CITY OF DINOV.

Author of the famous classic work – “Bnei Issachar”.

Yahrzeit date: 18th of Tevet, 1,841

We have scant biographical material about this great Hassidic sage. His monumental works have so eclipsed his personal name that most of the population cannot identify him by his personal name, but only by the title of his major work (which has been republished again and again in tens of thousands of copies): the “Bnei Issachar” which deals with Aggadic and kabbalistic material appertaining to the Shabbat and all festivals of the year. The book is efficiently parceled out into twelve months with numbered paragraphs, so to easily find wanted material.

We know that his father, Rabbi Pesach Shapiro, was the brother in law of the world famous Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk (who authored the “No’am Elimelech”). But Rabbi Zvi did his major Hassidic studies under the tutelage of The Hozeh of Lublin. Rabbi Zvi mentions that he was a direct descendent of the great martyr Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropolier. Of Rabbi Zvi’s grandchildren we have Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Shapira, the famous author of “Darkei Teshuva” the gigantic encyclopedic work gathering together the basic halachic opinions of the Poskim to Shulchan Oruch Yoreh Da’oh; and so the latter’s son Rabbi Elazar, the famous grand Rabbi of Munkatch (Hungary), one of the great lights of his age.

Although Rabbi Zvi lived a life quite too short (he died at the age of 51!) he was a studious scholar, dedicated constantly to his studies and writings. We know today of at least 15 treasures of Jewish erudition that he penned, and he left behind him other works, till now unpublished.

1. Bnei Issachar (aforementioned)
2. Igra de-Kalah, a homiletic work on Parshat ha-Shavua
3. Igra de-Pirka, a collection of hundreds of short essays on various topics
4. Derech Pikudecha, dissertations on the 613 mitzvot. He covered less than ten, but even that took 200 pages.
5. Likkutei Maharza, remarks on alterations of the Massoretic spelling of Biblical words.

6. Kli Ha-Ro'im, commentaries on the Book of Ovadia and other passages. So too a list of daily regulations for proper behavior.
7. Hagahot Maharza, remarks on Zohar passages, so too of Tikkunei Zohar.
8. Dvarim Nechmadim. (drashot and Remazim in the Chassidic style, to Mishna, Talmud, Isaiah, Tehillim, Mishlei, the Rambam and Pirkei Avot)
9. Regel Yeshara, a wonderful dictionary of kabbalistic terms, helping every beginning student of the Zohar.
10. Ma'ayan Ganim
11. Maggid Ta'alumo, very adept remarks referring to the Tractate of Berachot, including separate chapters concerning the Rif and the Rosh, thereby.
12. Reiach Duda'im, comments on the Tractate of Megilla
13. Veheyeh Beracha, comments on Mishnayot and Tosefta of Tractate Berachot
14. Beracha Meshuleshet (comments on many Mishnayot)
15. Marginal comments on his teacher's book "Sur Mera v-Aseh Tov", which guides the initiate how to be careful before studying esoteric lore. This final work is a gem in itself, shedding great light upon proper conduct.

◆ Let us begin with a great point of advice from this book (Part one, comment 97).

It is well known that one of the most famous tenets of Hassidic credo is "Faith in the Tzaddik", i.e. to have implicit belief that he is G-d directed in all of his utterances and deeds. Therefore, it goes without saying that since all of his actions are unquestionable, one cannot claim them to be non-halachic since if G-d has so guided the Tzaddik, his conduct is unimpeachable. It is common knowledge that the Mitnagdim disagree with this attitude. They rely on the Talmudic dictum (Baba Metzia 31a) that one must chastise even one's Rebbe (and so the Law is recorded in Shulchan Oruch, Yoreh Da'oh, chapter 242 paragraph 22).



◆ It is interesting that Rabbi Zvi took the Mitnagdim standard.

He writes that when one sees his Teacher doing any sin, no matter, whether Di-oraita or D'Rabbanan, certainly one must judge him charitably, and estimate that for some particular reason he has done so (for health reasons etc.) but it is absolutely

forbidden for anyone to imitate his non halachic behavior. Eben more so, if the Teacher claims that he trespasses the Halacha due to prophetic knowledge, or that Elijah the Prophet has divulged him this ruling, it is nevertheless prohibited to infringe ny law (as particularly written by the Rambam, at the beginning to his Introduction to his Commentary to the Mishna). Rabbi Zvi goes even further. He writes that even if the great Teacher works a miracle (even if he halts the passage of the sun in the heavens) it is prohibited to obey him and infringe any mitzva.



◆ If we wish to taste more of his original and novel teachings, we will cite here several interesting points. Even before the arousal of Feminist Groups, Rabbi Zvi aptly pointed out that all of our Redemptions up to date were brought about by the women-folk.

- In Egypt, we were rescued due to the z'chut of the righteous women (Tractate Sotah 11b).
- So too it was a woman that advised the King Bel'shazzar to ask Daniel to unravel the riddle of the cryptic writing on the wall (Daniel v, 10) and she brought about the downfall of the Babylonian Empire.
- So too it was Esther the Queen that rescued us from the Median king Achash-verus.
- And it was Yudit that decapitated the Greek general and tyrant Holofernus (Midrash Megillat Hanukka).

All this is gathered by Rabbi Zvi ("Bnei Issachar", Av-Ellul, seven consolationes, Section 6 consolationes two) and is splendid praise for our women.



◆ Another great point that Rabbi Zvi makes is that when one is able to clarify a halachic issue, and comply with a lenient ruling, this is preferable to being stringent and prohibiting an action due to lack of proper knowledge. This is his explanation to "Greater is he who enjoys his handiwork than a G-dfearing person" (Berachot 8a). A person who has studied properly and knows why a certain action is permissible, he enjoys life in this present temporal world, and so too will enjoy the future Eternal World, since he is also a scholar. Not so a "hasid" who possibly is ultra religious, but is also an ignoramus. Who doesn't enjoy his world

(since he must perforce deny himself usage of certain commodities of the world, since he is in doubt whether they are permitted) and certainly cannot expect reward in the future world, for his abstinence. Since it was all a mistake and would he have applied himself diligently to Torah Studies he would have discovered that it was permitted. This novel idea he mentions in "Bnei Issachar" (Ellul, article two, paragraph four). [This same idea is expressed by the Maharsha (on Tractate Hullin 44b) and so too by the Sha'loh (page 184b).] As Rabbi Zvi writes in "Igra de-Pirka" (paragraph 123), Torah study is worth more than Revelations of Elijah the Prophet.



◆ A big problem that we have in Jewish medieval literature is that we are "blessed" with several alternative prospective dates for our impending Redemption and the arrival of the Messiah.

The trouble is (beyond the contradictory dates) is that all of the dates have passed and have been "proved" false. However, Rabbi Zvi offers us a novel explanation (ibid, Sivan; article 5 paragraph 19). He claims that all of the projected dates are true, since during that prospective year there was an important movement' a certain stage, in the general Master Plan.

- If we wish to expand on this point, the year 335 (of this millenia) was the demise of the Arizal, who gave a great push towards studying the Secret Lore of the Kabbala, which a major milestone before the Redemption (Zohar, Book three, page 124b).
- The year 1840 (profered by the Zohar itself, as opening the Portals of Heavenly Wisdom) was the year of inventive genius. Then the human race perfected the steam engine, and then the mass production by assembly process was made efficient.
- So too the year of 1,948 (pretold by great Kabbalists as the numerical equivalent of "Tashuvu" (Vayikra xxv 13) we had the erection of our present Israeli State.

So at the end of Time we will look back retrospectively and recognize how each year proferred by our great Torah scholars was truly getting one step ahead.



◆ In another book ("Igra de-Pirka", paragraph 122) the great Rabbi Zvi adjures us not to comply with any Minhag which looks odd in other people's eyes. So to say,

practices which are not in common usage, even if superficially they appear to be proper, since they will cause derision by others, it is not proper to cause others "to stumble"

We cannot do proper justice to the many teachings that we can benefit from his books. We attempted here to give "a taste" thereof. His books are written in simple language and make interesting reading due to the interesting points he makes.