



## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

# RABBI AKIVA EIGER

**T**he Beit Rubinstein Yeshiva, which was under the direction of the Rav of Poneiwitz, included among its teachers Rabbi Bertchik (Dov) Rickels Zatzal. He was a Torah genius, with a lucid and penetrating mind. In his courses, he always went deeply into the teachings of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and truly weighed each word and letter of his holy words. He used to tell his students in juicy Yiddish, “My children, everyone makes a sentence out of a word, but Rabbi Akiva Eiger makes a word out of a sentence.” Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s teachings were concise. He was very exacting with the language he used, and he weighed words like people weigh gold.

The son of Rabbi Moshe Guens and his wife Gitel (the daughter of Rabbi Eiger the Elder), Rabbi Akiva Eiger was born on Heshvan 11, 5522 (Nov 8, 1761) in Eisenstadt, which then belonged to Hungary.

From his youth, people could see that he had the makings of greatness. He was a child prodigy who did nothing like others, and he distinguished himself by his extraordinary diligence, rapid comprehension, and his incredibly sharp mind.

People say that by the age of six, he completely knew the six orders of the Mishnah with the commentary of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura.

During his early years, he was raised primarily by this father Rabbi Moshe, a great Talmid Chacham, and his mother, who was known for her tremendous scholarship.

At the age of 12 he went to study at the yeshiva of the Gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Yossef Teomim in Breslau, where he remained for six years. During that time he began to gain a reputation as a person who studied Torah deeply. He also began to give courses and showed his students the way that enables a person to arrive at the depths and truth of Torah.

At 18 years of age he married the daughter of the wealthy Rabbi Yitzchak Margalioth of Lissa, and there he devoted himself to Torah study and serving G-d, his mind free from all material concerns. He lived in a holy a pious way, studying intensively while eating and sleeping little.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was a rabbi for 25 years, first in Märkisch-Friedland (in West Prussia), then in Posen. He had a large yeshiva that students flocked to from far and near to hear Torah directly from him, and he treated them with great affection. In him they saw a father, while in them he saw sons, even going to the extent of finding them wives and helping them obtain livelihoods.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger detested the rabbinate. People say that he would have preferred to be a Gabbai, or even to work in a mikveh.

It seems that one day he learned that in the neighboring town of Posen, a person who worked in the mikveh there died. He hurried to write to his daughter, who was then living in that town, and asked her to try to get him that job.

He wrote to her and stated, “In my old age, I want to earn a living in a permissible way, not in a forbidden one.”

Yet since he was obligated to be a Rav, he did not enclose himself within the tent of Torah learning. He was entirely devoted to his

community, for which he performed work that was also recognized by the Government of Prussia as being exceptional.

In 5591 (1831) a plague broke out in Germany and also spread to Posen, where Rabbi Akiva Eiger then lived. More than 600 people died among the Christian population, but among the Jews only a few perished, which surprised everyone. Needless to say, the Jews had been protected by the merit of their Rav. He issued decrees on what they were to do during the epidemic, supplied the poor with food, and even taught his people the basics of hygiene. He also organized special committees to ensure that these decrees were kept. When Emperor Frederic Guillaume III learned of the Rav’s great devotion for the members of his community, he personally decided to send him a thank you letter bearing his signature.

This humble spiritual giant viewed honors with disdain. When the residents of Vilna once asked him to be their Rav, he was taken aback by this. He said in response, “Who am I that I should fill the position of Rav in the city of the Gra? I would like to have the merit of being a Gabbai in Vilna’s synagogue!”

One day, Rabbi Akiva went to Krakow with Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa (the author of Netivot HaMishpat). They entered an inn, and many people came to welcome these two greats of the generation. At one point, while Rabbi Yaakov was absent and Rabbi Akiva was alone in their room, someone came to the inn and knocked on their door. Rabbi Akiva opened the door asked him what he wanted.

As the man trembled with emotion, he said, “I have come to see our Rav.”

“Our Rav,” Rabbi Eiger replied, “is not here right now. He will return soon.”

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was extremely meticulous concerning the mitzvah of hospitality. During Shabbat and holidays, he invited many people to come and eat at his table.

During one Passover Seder, while Rabbi Akiva and his guests were seated at the table and speaking of the exodus from Egypt, the hand of one of guests accidentally hit a glass of wine. The glass tipped over and the wine spilled on the white tablecloth.

In order that his guest not be embarrassed, Rabbi Akiva rattled the table to make the glass in front of him spill over. He then said, “I have the feeling that this table is wobbly.”

On Tishri 13, 5598 (October 12, 1837), at the age of 76, our teacher rendered his pure soul to his Father in Heaven.

People say that up to his last moment, the one at which his soul departed, he had on his lips the verse, “My mouth will utter the praise of the L-RD.” And in truth, this verse reflected all his virtues, deeds and manners, for his entire life was an embodiment of praising G-d.

Our teacher left behind seven sons and six daughters. All were great in Torah, starting with his son-in-law Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the author of Chatam Sofer. Many of his commentaries on the Mishnah and Gemara were also published, and up to our day his Torah and wisdom are studied in every yeshiva throughout the world.

# THE STORY OF THE WEEK

## BY THE MERIT OF A HEARTFELT SIGH

A knock at the door removed Reb Moshe from his thoughts. He opened the door and let in an old Russian named Ivan. Ivan was among the prominent members of the village, and he had the habit of coming to see him every now and then to drink a small glass of vodka to his health. Reb Moshe wanted to tell him that he had nothing in his house, but Ivan did not give him enough time to say anything, telling him that this time the goal of his visit was far more important than a simple glass of alcohol.

He whispered in Reb Moshe's ear that he wanted to tell him a secret, something that nobody but themselves should ever hear again. "Listen Moshe," he said to the astonished Jew, "I am old, weak, and sick. It's true that I live with my daughter and her husband, but I don't get along with them very well, which is why I would like to ask you a favor. I want to come and live with you. I don't need very much, but you will be compensated for your hospitality. Greatly compensated. I have a large treasure hidden in the forest, a treasure of tens of thousands of gold coins. You can go and take whatever you want right away, and after I die it will belong entirely to you."

Reb Moshe didn't know how to respond to these strange remarks, nor what to think. Was Ivan crazy or was he drunk? Had he even lost his mind? However Ivan did not wait long, for he apparently understood that his muddled words did not garner much confidence. He therefore took Reb Moshe by the hand and brought him to his hiding place in the forest, which was close to their village. He dug a little under a large tree and quickly removed a plain-looking bag that was filled with gold coins. "Bring this to your home!" Ivan told him. "Nobody has to know anything. It belongs to you, period."

Light and joy filled Reb Moshe's home. Scarcity disappeared, and all the members of his family felt the consequences of that great miracle. Reb Moshe purchased several acres of land, and little by little he became a rich and influential man.

As for old Ivan, he lived with Reb Moshe for a few weeks. Then one day he went to visit his daughter, and while there he suddenly died. At that point Reb Moshe inherited his treasure in full. He gave great amounts to charity and conducted himself like a good Jew in every respect.

Several years later he recalled his former poverty and the visit that the Baal Shem Tov had once made to his home, and so he decided to travel to Mezhibuzh to see the Tzaddik. When he arrived, the Baal Shem Tov immediately recognized him. He said hello, asked about his family, and warmly welcomed him. His disciples were very surprised, since they were unaware of the identity of this man whom their Rav was greatly honoring.

The Baal Shem Tov noticed their astonishment and said to them, "Do you not remember this man? We visited him and were his guests for five days. We also took the last remaining pieces of bread in his house. Do you remember? I can now reveal to you the reason why we journeyed into his village to profit from him.

"In Heaven it was decreed that the merit of the mitzvah of hospitality, which he practiced to perfection, would make him very rich. Yet the problem was that he was quite happy with the little he had, and so he asked for nothing. He did not even pray for a piece of bread, to the extent that this blessing risked being ineffective, meaning that he would forever remain poor and lose the treasure that had been reserved for him.

"It was only when we arrived at his home and imposed ourselves on him for five days – when there was nothing left to eat in the house and his children cried from hunger – that he 'cracked' by letting out a heartfelt sigh from the depths of his being and asked the Creator to give him food. Only then could

the blessing have its effect, and an old Russian was immediately sent to him with the promise that he would inherit his treasure. The blessing was such that, in accord with Heaven's decision, he became extremely rich."

The Baal Shem Tov's disciples listened in amazement to the story. They said, "This shows the power of a Jew's heartfelt sigh that comes from his broken heart."

– Sichot LaNoar

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves...'" (Exodus 7:9).

The Midrash states: "Rabbi Pinchas bar Chama began his discourse by citing the following verse: 'From the beginning I foretell the outcome' [Isaiah 46:10]. From the outset, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses what would follow. Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Shalom said, 'Pharaoh had a reason to ask for a sign. We find a similar thing concerning Noah, who after all the miracles that G-d did for him, began to ask for a sign, to the extent that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I have set My rainbow in the cloud" [Genesis 9:13]. If righteous Noah asked for a sign, how much more did wicked Pharaoh need one?"

Why did the Sages deem it proper to justify Pharaoh by affirming that he was right in asking for a sign?

The following parable will help us to understand:

A man had a faithful servant who worked for him for several years. Whenever he needed to borrow some money, he would send his servant to one of his wealthy friends. One day the servant got married, and the man employed another servant in his place. After a certain time, he sent this new servant to his friend to ask him for a loan. However his friend told the servant, "I will not give over any money to you before you bring me an IOU from your master for the amount you're asking. Now leave!" The servant then returned to his master's house and told him that he had been driven out. Greatly surprised, the man himself went to his friend and asked him what he meant by this.

"My brother, you definitely have been honest with me up to now," his friend replied. "I knew that your servant had enjoyed your full trust, and I never asked him for such documentation in the past. Yet I didn't know who this young man was that came to me, and it was therefore only right that I asked him for some proof."

The Midrash explains (Shemot Rabba 5) that when Moses came to Pharaoh to say, "So said the L-RD..." (Exodus 5:1), Pharaoh got angry and said, "Who is the L-RD that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know the L-RD' [v.2] – but wait until I consult my book!" Pharaoh immediately went to his palace to see who were the gods of each people, and he began to list them: The gods of Moab, the gods of Ammon, the gods of Sidon, etc. However Pharaoh did not find the gods of Israel.

"I will tell you what your approach is like," Moses retorted. "A Cohen traveled abroad on a trip, leaving behind his foolish servant. Not finding his master, the servant went to the cemetery to try and locate him. [Note: According to Halachah, a Cohen does not have the right to defile himself by being in the same place as a dead body. Hence a Cohen is not allowed to go to a cemetery]. The people of the town began to mock the servant. 'You fool! What would your master – a Cohen – be doing in a cemetery?'"

Pharaoh was therefore justified to ask for a sign, for he did not yet know Hashem and could not understand that His place was not among a list of impure names.