



חסידי הראשונים

Stories of the Early Chassidim

Reb Dov Zev Kozhevnikov, the Rav of Yekatrinoslav

The Chossid, Reb Dov Zev (also known as Reb Bere Volf) was a Chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek and the Rebbe MaHaRash. He was the Rav in Yekatrinoslav, and after he passed away, the Rebbe's father succeeded him. He was known as a holy man, and many miracle stories were said about him. He was famous for his ability to explain Chassidus. He would not eat or sleep much, and most of the day he would spend in his Tallis and Tefillin, davening at length.

The Rebbe Rashab once asked Reb Dov Zev: What is a Chossid?

He answered, "A Chossid is אן איבערגעגעבענער דורש טובת זולתו – someone who is totally dedicated to doing a favor for someone else. And for doing this you get a very big reward.

Then Reb Zev Dov went on to say a story about how he went out of his way to do good for other people and the reward that he got for it.

I was born and I grew up in a small settlement near the city of Dobrianka. In this settlement there lived great Chassidim who knew a lot of Nigleh and Chassidus. Reb Yoel Zalman, who was one of the great Chassidische Lamdonim, took care of my Chinuch and planted in me the good Middah of being a דורש טובת זולתו – always looking out to do good for someone else. When I was 12 years old, I had already learned a lot, and I knew a lot of Medrashim and stories from the Gemorah.

In that settlement, there were also many simple Yiddishe families. These were people who had not learned Torah, and hardly even knew the meaning of the words of davening. I felt very sorry for these people, and I decided to make a Shiur with them and teach them the meaning of the davening, and I would also tell them stories from the Gemorah and the Midrash.

I did this for three years, even though it was hard for me to talk, because of a problem that I had. As the years went on, it became even harder for me to speak, and when my father passed away, and I became an orphan, it became even harder for me to speak, but nevertheless, I still kept learning and *farbrenging* with the simple people.

When I turned 17, I traveled to the Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek. When I went into Yechidus, I told the Rebbe about my learning with the simple people, and I complained about how difficult it was for me to speak.

The Rebbe thought deeply, and then said to me, "You should continue with what you are doing with the simple people, and you should be a teacher," and then the Rebbe gave me a Bracha that I should be able to speak easily and explain things to people.

When I went out of the Rebbe's room – Reb Zev Dov finished his story – I did not recognize myself. I was able to talk like a regular person and I did not understand what happened to me. When I came back home and reviewed the three Maamorim that I heard in Lubavitch, everyone was amazed.

[Told by the Frieddiker Rebbe in ה'שנת תש"ח]