

# WHERE DO I FIT IN?

ONE OF THE EXCITING PROGRAMS THAT ASCENT OF TZFAS OFFERS IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD. USING TORAH SOURCES, IT UNEARTHS THE INNER POINT WITHIN THE HEARTS OF THOUSANDS OF JEWS, WITH CODES, WITH TECHNOLOGY, AND WITH DIVINE PROVIDENCE... \* A FOLLOW-UP ON LAST WEEK'S FEATURE ARTICLE ON ASCENT

BY MENACHEM ZIEGELBOIM

I've told you all about Ascent of Tzfas and about the souls discovering Judaism by the light of the full moon. I described Ascent's work and related the stories of some of the people who have come to Ascent to hear about mysticism, spirituality, and Kabbala, and to learn about Chassidus and Torah in general. But I left out one of Ascent's unique programs because it deserved an article unto itself. It was initiated by the director of Ascent, Rabbi Shaul Leiter, and is run by Rabbi

Eliyahu Kaye. It is one of the most popular and riveting programs that Ascent has to offer.

This unique program of *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe by means of a personal analysis and with the aid of Ascent's Multimedia Center, took place on Thursday night at the end of the Musical Meditative Trip, while live music continued to play until late at night.

In the crowded library sat R' Eliyahu Kaye, who greeted people as they

entered one by one and sat down facing him and his computer. He leads them to destinations that they never, ever dreamed they would get to.

"Are they really distant destinations for them?" I asked Eliyahu when my turn came at 2:00 a.m. He laughed and said, "It's as close as possible. They don't even know how close these things really are – '*ki karov eilecha ha'davar me'od*' – because to them it seems so distant and new."

The session begins in front of the computer. Kaye's smile breaks the ice and he seems to be comfortable with what he does. For five years now, since the project began, thousands of people of all types and backgrounds have sat before him.

"The general idea is that we find for everybody a personal code in the Torah. The way of finding the code is based on the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe that 'whatever a person sees or hears – even a leaf falling from a branch – is by Divine providence, and a person has to learn a lesson from it.'

"Where do we find the code? That's where the Alter Rebbe's aphorism of 'living with the times' comes in. We search for a connection between the person and the *sidra* on which he was born. The Rebbe refers to this concept in the *sichos*, quoting the Shela and the Tzemach Tzedek."



The idea is simple, but how do you find a connection?

“We use the system of skipping letters. We have a computer program which searches in a person’s *sidra* for the letters of his name as they appear at the closest possible intervals. When we find the *p’sukim* that contain his name, we try to derive a personal lesson for him.” That’s where things get complicated, but more on that later.

Kaye gets the program up and running. First he tries to find the person’s Jewish birthday. Most people don’t know their Jewish birthday. “There are people who come from abroad who don’t even

**“If it can help a Jew in his yiras Shamayim, Torah study, and mitzva observance, and it doesn’t contradict the Torah in any way, then one may – and must – use it.”**

know *there is* a Jewish calendar!”

The program quickly locates the English date and translates it into the

Jewish date. Once that’s done, it’s easy to find the *sidra*. Kaye closes that program and goes to the letter-skipping program. He enters the person’s name and orders it to search. Within seconds the computer finds the person’s name in his *sidra*.

I stood on the side and watched as people looked on in amazement as Kaye did his thing. Generally, this program is administered to people who’ve developed a deeper interest at Ascent. Kaye hands the person a Jewish calendar (writing a big “Mazal Tov” on the date of the person’s Jewish birthday) as well as a print out of the verses in which the person’s name appears in the Torah,

#### THE RAMBAN UNCOVERS THE HIDDEN NAME

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, a.k.a. the Ramban, had a student by the name of Avner. At some point in his life, Avner left Judaism and converted. He was extremely successful among the gentiles and became an important dignitary in his land.

Avner wanted to display his hatred for Judaism, so he sent emissaries to force the Ramban to appear before him on Yom Kippur! When the Ramban arrived, Avner killed a pig in front of him, cooked it, and ate it on Yom Kippur.

The Ramban, of course, was tremendously pained by this, and asked his former student, “What led you to convert?”

“A lecture I heard from you,” said Avner. On Parshas Haazinu you said that everything in the world and all the *mitzvos* are included in that *parsha*! I couldn’t believe that such a small *parsha* could contain everything in the world, so I concluded that everything you said was false, so I left Judaism.”

Hearing this, the Ramban said, “I still say so! Parshas Haazinu contains everything in the world!”

“Show me my name in the *parsha*!” Avner demanded.

“If that’s what you want, I will show it to you,” replied the Ramban.

The Ramban turned aside and *davened* to Hashem for help, after which he found a *pasuk* that alluded to Avner’s name in the third letter of each word. He went

back to Avner and said, “In Parshas Haazinu, chapter 32, *pasuk* 26, your name is mentioned. Take the third letter of each word and find your name!”

Avner read the *pasuk*, “*Amarti afeihem ashbisa mei’enosh zichram*” (I had said I would scatter them, I will cause their memory to cease from man). The third letter of each word spells “R’ Avner”!

Seeing this, Avner became crestfallen and he decided to do *t’shuva*. He asked his former teacher whether there was any *tikkun* (rectification) for him. The Ramban told him to do as the *pasuk* says: “I will cause their memory to cease from man!” Erase your memory from mankind!”

The Ramban left, and immediately thereafter, Avner boarded a boat with no sailor and no oars, and let the wind blow him where it would. He was never heard from again, and the *pasuk* was fulfilled.

\* \* \*

The Rebbe MH”M observed the following: The story contains something wondrous and frightening! Why is Avner’s name alluded to with the title R’ – meaning *rav* – when he was a convert and utterly wicked?

The Torah is teaching us the great power of *t’shuva*. When a Jew does complete *t’shuva*, then the Torah calls him by a title of honor, despite his evil past. Furthermore, even while still a *rasha*, the Torah hints to the fact that in the end he will do *t’shuva*, causing him to be deserving of the title.

(*Seifer Hisvaaduyos* 5742, pp. 109-110)

and then sends him off to the analyst.

The job of the analyst is to take the content of the verses in which the person's name appears and find, along with the person, the common denominator between his character and life and the content of the verses. This is followed by deriving the lessons to be learned from this connection.

Every participant receives a set of papers, with the first page explaining the idea behind this program, the Chassidic ideas which explain the importance of a person's name (which is given by parents with a little prophetic spirit), and the connection between a person's name and essence and his *sidra*. The explanation says that the lesson to be derived for a person's life is derived "by examining the inner meaning of the verses in which the person's name appears."

**Don't *p'sukim* have many meanings considering that there are seventy facets to the Torah?**

Kaye smiles and says, "As Chassidim we were raised on *Toras ha'Chassidus*. Our foremost explanations therefore, are those that are in accordance with the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and our Rebbeim. The reason is not only *hafatzas ha'maayanos*, but also because it is the only approach that combines the literal meaning with the *p'nimiyus* along with a practical lesson. This is the Rebbe's approach, where he takes a *pasuk*, explains it, and then delves into its depth only to emerge and present the practical application. This is what we try to do."

**Isn't it somewhat audacious to develop a personal approach based on a person's name as it's found in his *sidra*?**

### TO SEEK AND FIND IN THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE

Eli Kaye relates: "A month ago we had a course for a group of educators. In courses such as these, there isn't enough time to give everybody a personal analysis, so I asked for a volunteer. A woman stood up and volunteered.

"When I asked her for her Jewish birthday she proudly said she was born on Yom Kippur. In these cases I first look for skipped letters of the name in the Torah reading for Yom Kippur and not that week's *sidra*, but the *kria* is relatively short and I didn't find her name.

"Somebody suggested that I look through the *sidra*, but I said I would first look in the Torah reading for *Mincha* of Yom Kippur. The woman suddenly began to cry and told the incredulous crowd, 'Now I remember that my mother told me I was born Yom Kippur afternoon!'

"Within seconds I found her name in the *kria* for *Mincha*."

"First of all, I didn't invent it. The approach is based on the teachings of



the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe, and other *gedolei Yisroel*, who explain that everything that happens is by Divine providence, and if someone was born the week of a particular *sidra*, there is certainly a reason and a connection. We just try to find the explanation and the connection.

"Secondly, you know the shocking story about the Ramban (see box) who found his student's name in the Torah. He used that to influence the student, who ultimately carried out what he was told to do. The Rebbe tells this story in the name of his *melamed* in the *sicha* of Haazinu 5742. So I didn't make it up."

I watched for hours as dozens of people sat together with the analyst (a Chassidic young man) late into the night, listening intently as new worlds opened up before them.

The analyst doesn't know the people sitting in front of him. He meets them there for the first time. He has to be very insightful to match the content of the verses to the character of the person sitting in front of him. When I ask how he does it, Kaye responds, "It's a good question! I can't answer that except to say that when you do the Rebbe's *shlichus*, he puts the right words in your mouth, and you are merely the channel to convey them."

### And is the analysis on the mark?

"I myself am amazed by it at times... Furthermore, when I see how people sit there and are suddenly moved, I see how effective it is. Recently a fellow sat listening to me as I read the *p'sukim* and explained them according to *p'nimiyus ha'Torah*. At first he barely reacted. Then suddenly he began to tremble with emotion. I said, 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you.' The man said, 'Continue, continue!' When I finished, he asked me in

amazement, 'Do you know me from anywhere?' I answered him in true Jewish fashion with another question: 'Why do you think I know you?' He said, 'I am sitting here for ten minutes and you're telling me my life story.'

Kaye related the following story: 'Recently a young man sat here whose *sidra* was Korach. He happened to know a bit of Torah and asked, 'Am I Korach?' I said, 'Wait, we haven't finished yet.' I used the code-finding program and found his name in the words, 'And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korach and his entire congregation.'

"In the conversation that followed, it turned out that by nature he's a bit of a troublemaker. He told me that he always sensed that one day he would be punished for it."

### What did you tell him?

"*Toras ha'Chassidus* teaches that at its source, everything in Torah is positive. We know that even the curses are hidden *brachos*. I brought out the positive. I calmed him down and told him that Korach's falling into the earth wasn't merely a punishment, but rather something positive. I explained that Korach's children did not die but repented, and that Shmuel HaNavi was Korach's descendent. That's when I got practical and said that he could do *t'shuva* and strengthen his *ahavas Yisroel*.

### What do you need to know in order to do the analysis?

The analyst has to know a lot of the Rebbe's *sichos*, as well as topics in Chassidus. He also has to have a certain ability to bring the concept down into practical *avodas Hashem*.

### People are taking this seriously. What's the secret?

These people come to Ascent

because they seek something to slake their spiritual thirst. A fire burns in them and their *neshama* is restless. They want someone to ignite their fire, so when they hear something that pertains to them, they get very excited.

I know that many of them explored other religions and lifestyles without satisfying their souls. When they hear something real, something that comes from *p'nimiyus ha'Torah*, it affects them in the *p'nimiyus* of their souls.

### What sorts of people come and do this personal analysis?

"On this chair" – Kaye pointed to the chair I was sitting on – "sit



lawyers, professors, famous doctors as well as ordinary Jews. Why do they come? I see it as the fulfillment of the prophecy, 'Behold days are coming...not a hunger for bread nor a thirst for water, but only to hear the words of Hashem.'

### Of course, this approach is not known among religious Jews, and perhaps some of them would even protest.

"This can be answered on two levels. First, as I said, our goal is to ignite the Jewish spark and bring people closer to Torah and *mitzvos*. You see people sitting in front of a *Chumash* for the first time in their lives. They sit for an hour or two and

learn the *sidra* of the week in which they were born. At first they understand the topic literally. Then the analyst relates *sichos* and teachings from *p'nimiyus ha'Torah*, followed by practical guidance.

"The Jew who sits here is actually a *neshama* that descended to this world in order to fulfill *mitzvos* and learn Torah, but this *neshama* did not get the *chinuch* and opportunity to know and to learn, and so we begin to give it its first taste. This sparks the first excitement and enthusiasm.

"The idea and approach are not necessarily appropriate for observant people. If a person can sit and learn lots of *nigleh* and Chassidus, what does he need this for?

"In any case, distinguished *rabbanim* and *mashpiim* have come here, and after hearing about it they want to see where they belong in Torah and what their personal issue is. We don't refuse them. We found amazing parallels between their *sidra* and their names, so much so that they were astounded and overcome to the point that they just couldn't leave.

"Apparently the greatest *maskil* and the greatest *oveid* knows what he is supposed to be working on, and these things are brought to the fore through the analysis.

"As for those who say that this is something new and not accepted, I point out what the Rebbe said about using *gematriyos* – if it can help a Jew in his *yiras Shamayim*, Torah study, and *mitzva* observance, and it doesn't contradict the Torah in any way, then one may – and must – use it."

\* \* \*

I spent hours in Ascent's library and watched what was going on. Dozens of people received their written, "personal" part of Torah. It was amazing to see how seriously

they took it. “These Jews, who were far from Torah, suddenly feel that the Torah is close to them,” explains Kaye. “They have a portion in the Torah and so they feel closer. Under the circumstances, they express an interest in analyzing ‘their’ portion in Torah.”

After hours of work, Kaye was about to shut off the computer, but that’s when I sat down for my turn. Kaye patiently began the process again. He found all the relevant information, and within a minute had found my name in ten letter skips in the *sidra* I was born on. Then I asked for my analysis.

I examined the *pasuk* and pondered over how one could derive a lesson from this narrative-style verse. I was still puzzled when Kaye began explaining. He took the words, delved into them, explained them, and despite the fact that we hadn’t met before, he hit it on the mark!

### **What happens if you can’t find a connection between the person and his *pasuk*?**

“What we do is say an idea from Chassidus about the *p’sukim* and their content, and the individual always connects. We always see reactions like, ‘Oh, right. That’s the way it is.’

“We also try to direct the process to *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe, which is done by writing to the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*. Often people write to the Rebbe all about themselves. They pour out their hearts and receive answers, sometimes incredible ones.

“A year ago a man came here with his daughter. This man had become more religious after writing to the Rebbe and getting an amazing answer. The daughter participated in the seminar and today she is studying at Machon Alte.”

### **SERVICE PROVIDED FOR THOSE LIVING ABROAD, TOO**

Word of the mystical name analysis has gotten out and Jews in the Diaspora have asked for their codes and analyses. Modern technology is at their service: There’s an e-mail address at Ascent’s website that people can use to send their name and birthday. Eliyahu Kaye sends back (for a moderate donation to Ascent) a calendar, their name in their *sidra*, and their personal analysis.

Generally it doesn’t end there, for people call for further consultation, and Kaye graciously answers them all. Most of these people are Jews living abroad who are far from *Yiddishkeit*. Something about the mystical, mysterious part of it fascinates them.

“Many of these people don’t have a Jewish name,” says Kaye, “and it’s an opportunity to talk to them about the importance of having a Jewish name, which is a channel for G-dly influence and life to one’s soul, as the Alter Rebbe explains in *Shaar HaYichud V’HaEmuna*. Often people ask me, ‘If I don’t have a Jewish name, am I not alive?’ I tell them, ‘If you live okay without a Jewish name, imagine how much better you’ll live if you give yourself a Jewish name, through which the channels of G-dly influence will come!’

“I don’t try to convince anybody to do anything. We certainly don’t force anyone. We just inform them in the hopes that they’ll draw their own conclusions.”

### **How many requests do you get a month?**

I personally receive thirty to fifty requests a month.

### **Where do the requests come from?**

We receive requests from all over the world.

I want to conclude by saying that the main thing is that through all these activities, we should achieve the fulfillment of the main directive the Rebbe MH”M gave us – *Kabbalas pnei Moshiach Tzidkeinu b’poel mamash, v’tikef u’miyad mamash* – with visible and revealed good, with joy and gladness of heart.

### **Is that why you call it “A Personal Analysis and Connection with the Rebbe?”**

“Yes! One of our goals is to connect every single person with the Rebbe MH”M. It almost always leads to writing, using the *Igros Kodesh*. Many Jews pour out their hearts and souls to the Rebbe in their letters, telling the Rebbe their life stories, and basically, giving themselves over to the Rebbe. They become connected to him, and many of them said afterwards that they felt new *kochos*, something only the Rebbe can do.”

\* \* \*

At 3:00 a.m. I stood in Ascent’s courtyard with Eli Kaye, Yitzchok Orgad and Yaakov Weber, all of whom do some of the sensitive analytical work. We spoke about what they do and summed up the work done that evening. They each had wonderful stories about precise analyses and about the participants’ great excitement.

Analysis like this is a wonderful implementation of the contribution of modern technology in the service of Torah and Chassidus.