How Do You Pardes?

Pardes was originally conceived as a home based, synagogue sponsored, adult education program. Its applications have exceeded our expectations. Pardes groups are found in high school classrooms, university campuses, homes, synagogues, JCC’s, military bases, prisons, outreach and senior citizen centers.

We would like to know how you are using the material.

Please take a moment to call us, toll free, and tell us how do you Pardes?
Introduction

There are very few things in this world that so profoundly affect the way we feel and act, as does money. There is a Yiddish saying, “Ven es kumpt tzu gelt, iz an ander veit” - When it comes to money, it’s another world. I believe this other world is a deeper world, a world that represents our true selves, not often or easily revealed. Many people who appear kind and friendly tighten up and become selfish when approached for a loan or for a donation to charity. Other people, both those who are wealthy and those who are clearly struggling to make ends meet, are nonetheless extremely generous when it comes to giving to others. In both cases, money reveals hidden dimensions. The Talmud teaches that money is one of the few things that truly reveal the inner nature of a person. Chassidus teaches that our money, just like our physical attributes, is one of our spiritual genetic markers, connected to the very root of our souls.

Perhaps this is why the first question we often ask upon meeting someone is, “What do you do?” as if a livelihood can sum up the respondents’ identity. By contrast, one of the most personal questions one can ask is, “how much money do you make?” Personal because the question relates to the essence of each individual. Other than money, there is no other quantifiable indicator that defines who we are.

At the same time, however, there are few dimensions of our lives more superficial than our relationship to money. There are people who portray themselves as wealthy, even though they are poor, and others who insist on appearing impoverished, despite their riches. We tend to respect the advice of a rich person more than that of the wise man. Yet, when the “wise” person of means loses his or her money, we may totally disregard the advice.

These are the questions at the heart of this edition of Pardes. What is it about money, or the lack of it that so profoundly affects our lives? Is it money that defines the person, or is it how each person uses money? Does money limit or liberate? Should we strive for wealth, or is a person who has less more likely to be holy? Who is more likely to grow spiritually, the wealthy or the impoverished? Is wealth an attribute worthy of our respect?

Rabbi Yaacov Haber
Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Bardichov had a Chasid who was very pure, extremely pious and good-hearted. His most outstanding trait, however, was his hospitality. Whoever needed shelter came to Bereel’s house and found comfort. While visiting Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, he said to him, “Rebbe, if only I was wealthy, I would be able to fulfill this mitzvah with so much more grandeur. Bless me, please, with wealth.” Rabbi Levi Yitzchok blessed him and indeed the wheel of fortune turned, and he became rich. Something happened. Instead of increasing his hospitality he cut down. He lost all his piety, and became selfish and cruel. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok called him to his study.

“Bereel, look in this mirror. What do you see?” he asked.

“I see myself, Rebbe,” the man replied.

“Now look out the window. What do you see?”

“I see the people in the street.”

“Bereel, do you know the difference between a mirror and a window?”

The man could not reply.

“Both are made of glass,” continued Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, “but the mirror is covered with a thin layer of silver. When you look out of a window, you see other people. But when you cover it with just a little bit of silver, you end up seeing only yourself.”

Gan Yosef, Oni v’Ashir 919 Biography p.14

How would you respond?

1 Over the years, you and your spouse have worked hard, lived modestly and brought your children up to believe in G-d and Torah values. Unbeknownst to your children, or to anyone else in your community, your hard work and some fortunate investments have left you with a significantly sizeable portfolio of assets. As you begin the sensitive and perplexing exercise of estate planning, you consider whether to leave this eight-figure (after taxes) estate to your children, or would your children be better served with inheriting a more modest, albeit comfortable, sum of money that is less likely to pose to them the challenges that you have observed so many others fail?

2 You were as bright as your peers twenty years ago in school, and you have surely worked at your occupation as hard as anyone. Nevertheless, you observe so many of your friends and neighbors climb the ladder of financial success, while your job provides no more than a mediocre income, it has the potential, albeit with great stress, to turn into a lucrative profession. While your loving wife would not dream of inferring that she lacks for anything, you suffer the nagging feeling of stress and personal dissatisfaction. You contemplate abandoning the high pressured environment of your career, and seeking refuge in a field of greater personal satisfaction, but in a job that will surely eliminate any hope of significant financial advancement.
3 Once again you are unable to sleep as the charitable demands of yet another exceptionally needy family gnaw at your heart. Whether it be the cost of a child’s life saving surgery, a family being split apart by poverty, or a wedding that may not be celebrated for lack of funds, the parade of needs presented to you are so often left unsatisfied despite your own, personal agreement to do your part. And so, while you gladly contribute as much as twenty percent of your income to charity, you cannot reconcile retaining your accumulated wealth with the suffering that could be eliminated if you would simply distribute to the needy the balance of your assets that are in excess of the actual needs of your family. How much is too much?

4 They repeatedly approach you to join the board of an important communal charity. You have declined yet again, noting that you are repulsed by the practice of many to assume a heightened level of communal visibility prompted primarily by personal financial success. While the organization appreciates your generous financial contribution, the organization asserts that your joining the board will add to the organization’s prestige and significantly inure to the benefit of the community. Should you play a visible role or remain in the background?

May it be Your will, Hashem, my G-d and G-d of my fathers, that You illuminate my eyes with the light of your Torah and that You save me from all stumbling blocks and errors, whether it be in discussions of what is prohibited and what is permitted or in monetary matters, whether it be in any other Halachic decisions or just in theoretical study. I pray that I do not make any mistakes, and if I do, my study partners should not take delight in them. I pray that I should not proclaim the impure pure or the pure impure, the permitted forbidden or the forbidden permitted. I pray that I should not derive joy from the errors of my study partner. Open my eyes and allow me to see the wonders of Your Torah because it is from G-d that all wisdom comes forth, it is from His mouth that I will acquire wisdom and understanding. Amen.
Discussion Points

Wealth and poverty; which would you prefer?

1 Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me my allotted portion, lest I become satiated and deny You, saying, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I become poor and steal, and violate the name of my G-d.

Proverbs 30:8 Source, p. 20

2 Man has been placed in the midst of a raging battle. For all the affairs of the world, good or bad, are trials to him; Poverty on the one hand, and wealth on the other... serenity on the one hand and suffering on the other; so that the battle rages against him on all fronts. If he is victorious on all sides, he will become a “whole man,” and will succeed in uniting himself with his Creator; he will leave the corridor to enter the Palace, and glow in the light of life. To the extent that he subdues his evil inclination and his desires, and withdraws from those factors that pull him away from the good, and to the degree that he works to become united with the good, to that extent he will attain it and rejoice in it.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto, Mesillas Yesharim, chapter 1 Source, p. 20 Biography p. 17

3a G-d tests everyone. He tests the rich to see if they give generously to the poor, and He tests the poor, to see that they don’t rebel against Him because of their trials in this world. If the rich man withstands his test, he will enjoy his money in this world and receive his full reward in the next, he will be spared from Hell. The poor man who suffers but does not rebel will receive a double share in the world to come.

Shmos Rabbah 31:2 Source, p. 21

3b The poor man receives double because he is rewarded both for his good deeds and for the suffering he endured while performing them.

Michtav me’Eliyahu vol. 1 p. 152 Source, p. 21 Biography, p. 15

Is wealth a virtue?

4 There are two contradictory statements in the Talmud. In one place, it praises the wealthy, and says that they will sit before G-d. In another place, it says that the wealthy will go to Hell. The difference lies in how they use their wealth. Those who give generously to charity and good causes will sit before G-d, while those who are cruel and selfish will descend to the pit.

Ein Yaacov, Eruvin 88 Source, p. 22

5 The Divine Presence only rests upon a person who is wise, strong, rich and tall. Rabbi Yochanan said, “The prophets were all wealthy, as we see from the lives of Moses, Samuel, Amos and Jonah.” Moses became wealthy from the fragments of the broken Tablets. Samuel took his whole house with him wherever he went. Amos owned vineyards and orchards. And as for Jonah, it is written: “He found a ship going to Tarshish, and he paid its fare” (Jonah 1:3). Rabbi Yochanan said, “He paid for everyone on board.” Rabbi Romanos said, “It cost him four thousand gold coins.”

Nedarim 39a Source, p. 22

6 A person who has tasted true wisdom will despise wealth. For him, all the riches of the world, and its other material attractions, are on the lowest possible level.

Rabbeinu Bachya, Kad Hakoach, Osher Source, p. 23 Biography, p. 19

7 A rich person faces a great test. It’s easy for a poor person to trust in G-d— he has nothing! But a rich person, whose possessions are always whispering to him, “trust in us, trust in us,” needs great faith in order to trust in G-d.

R. Moshe Leib of Sasov, Sichos haShavua

8 He who loves money is never satisfied with money, and he who loves abundance has no harvest... The sleep of a worker is sweat, whether he eats a lot or a little, but the plenty of the rich man does not let him sleep. There is a sickening evil I have seen - riches take control of their owner for his own downfall.

Ecclesiastes 5, 9-12 Source, p. 23
Poverty is less challenging than wealth. A poor person might become a thief, but a rich person can become arrogant and deny G-d. And even if he becomes poor, he won’t change.

Aishleh, Vayikra 23:32 Source, p. 24

It is easier for a poor person to get into heaven than a rich man.

Ibid.: Vayikra 1:17 Source, p. 24

G-d examined all the traits in the world, and decided that there was none better for Israel than poverty.

Talmud Chagiga 9b Source, p. 24

If a scholar toils persistently in Torah study and is not blessed with plentiful income, this is a good omen. So, if G-d loves the Torah why doesn’t He provide its students with wealth? Because if the scholar becomes wealthy he will abandon his studies.

Tanna d’Vel Eilyahu Rabbah, chapter 3 Source, p. 24 Biography, p. 15

Righteousness, generosity, fear of G-d and Torah study only comes as a result of poverty. As the verse says, “He lifts up the destitute from the earth” (Samuel 1, 2). The verse does not say, “He lifts up the wealthy from the earth.”

Tanna d’Vel Eilyahu Zuta, chapter 5 Source, p. 25 Biography, p. 15

Be respectful of the children of the poor, because from them comes Torah.

Nedarim 81a Source, p. 25

The Divine intellect can only manifest itself in a person who does not have a share in this world. The rich have a portion of this physical world, but the poor do not. Thus, it is specifically from them that Torah scholars emerge.

Maharal, Netzach Yaroel, chapter 59 Source, p. 26 Biography, p. 15

Poverty can lead to all the best character traits. Because of his situation, a poor person learns to be humble, patient and forbearing. Not so a rich person, who can have whatever he desires. A poor person feels other people’s pain more. A poor person has a more developed sense of trust in G-d. Even though no one would ever choose to be poor, nonetheless, poverty will ultimately place a crown upon his head.

Reb Yitzchok Blazer, Kochvei Ohl, volume 1, p. 186

There was once a very pious man, who decided never to accept anything from anyone. He had one garment, and one shirt, and each night, he would cry out and pray to G-d. Things became so bad that he had no place to live but the trash heap, and his garments wore away. One day, Elijah the Prophet came to him in the guise of an Arab. “Shall I lend you two coins for you to do business with,” he asked. The poor man agreed. He took the coins and bought some goods, which he sold for profit. He continued the next day, and by the end of the year, he had become wealthy - but he forgot his piety and his prayers. G-d said to Elijah, “I had one pious person in My world, and you took him from Me.” Elijah went to the man and found him involved in his business. “I’m the one who lent you those two coins. Can you find them and return them?” The man did so. Elijah had barely left, before the man started to lose all his money, and soon after, he returned to the trash heap. He was sitting and crying, when Elijah came to him again. “Woe is me, that the wheel of fortune has turned against me,” the man cried. “Swear to me that if I give you back the two coins, you will remain pious, and involved in prayer,” said Elijah. The man swore, and Elijah gave him back the two coins. In no time, he became wealthy again.

Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 22, 601 Source, p. 27

To what can we compare a person who wastes his precious time in the pursuit of worldly pleasure? To a man who was about to set sail on a ship. As he was waiting to board, he noticed some beautiful seashells on the shore. “I will collect a few shells to show to my children,” he thought. He was busily involved in collecting when the ship’s horn sounded, indicating that the ship was ready to depart. What should he do? If he continues gathering the shells, he will miss his boat. And his whole intention in collecting shells was just to show his children. In addition, if he collects too many, he will be burdened with the heavy load.
A person who runs after the pleasures of this world is missing the boat - the holy Torah. Our lives are only given to us so that we should work at learning Torah and doing mitzvos. But clearly, this person considers life's frivolities to be life's main purpose. He has forgotten the main thing - to remember the Creator and the holy Torah. He is like the man who keeps on collecting shells, though he misses his boat and never gets home. To him, collecting pretty shells has become the main thing, and not the happiness of his children.

Rabbi Ben Zion Abba Shaul, Ohr LeTzion, Avodah 4 Source, p. 28

On the other hand...

18 Bonius bar Bonius came to visit Rebbi. Rebbi declared, "Make a place for the one with a hundred dinars." Other visitors arrived, and Rebbi declared, "Make a better place for the one with two hundred dinars, with three hundred dinars," sitting each according to his wealth. Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yossi said, "Rebbi, the father of Bonius owns a thousand ships and a thousand forests." "If so," Rebbi answered, "tell him not to send his son to me in such shabby clothing." Rebbi showed honor to the wealthy. Rebbi Akiva showed honor to the wealthy.

Eiruvin 86a Source, p. 28

19 Just as Providence gives a rich person everything he needs to accomplish great and important things in this world, so too, his strength of soul is also greater, to be fitting for his special task. It is appropriate to show respect to a person upon whom heaven has bestowed this added and unique potential.

R. M. M. Schneersohn, Sichos HaKodesh Biography, p. 14

20 Rabbi Natan bar Aba said in the name of Rav, "The world is dark for a person who is dependent upon his friend's table [for food]." Rav Chisda said, "His life isn't life." The Rabbis taught, there are three people whose lives aren't lives: one who depends upon his friend's table, a man whose wife rules over him, and a person afflicted with physical suffering. There are those who add, a person with only one piece of clothing.

Talmud Beitzah 32b Source, p. 29

Money stands a person on his feet.

Pesachim 119a Source, p. 29

Three things cause a person to violate his own will, and the will of his Creator: idolaters, evil spirits, and the pressures of poverty.

Eiruvin 41b Source, p. 30

Three things broaden a person's mind: a beautiful house, an attractive wife, and nice possessions.

Brochos 57a Source, p. 30

There is nothing harder than poverty. A person suffering from poverty experiences all the afflictions in the world, as though all the curses in the Torah have fallen upon him. Our rabbis have taught, "If you put all the afflictions of the world on one side of the scale, and poverty on the other, poverty will outweigh them all."

Midrash Rabbah, Shmos 31:14 Source, p. 30

If we are in Exile why does G-d make us wealthy? The answer is so that we can have a greater positive influence on the gentiles and increase the honor of G-d.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Devarim 47 Source, p. 31 Biography, p. 17

Why are there poor people in this world? So that they shouldn't waste their time with other things and forget the Torah.

Sochar Tov 5 Source, p. 31

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochoi had a student who left Israel and became very wealthy. When he returned, all the other students were jealous of him and wanted to leave Israel. Rabbi Shimon found out, and took them all out to a valley. "Valley, valley," he prayed, "fill up with gold coins." The valley started to fill with gold coins. "If you desire gold, take as many as you want," he told them. "Realize, however, that you are partaking of your reward in the future world, for the reward of Torah study is only in the World to Come."

Midrash Rabbah, Pikudei 52 Source, p. 32
Biographies

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740–1810)

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is one of the most popular and beloved figures in Jewish history. Born into a prominent rabbinical family, he studied with the famed author of the Pri Megadim, was himself a great scholar and served as rabbi of a number of Polish communities. However, after meeting Rabbi Shmuel of Nikolsburg and Dov Baer of Mezhirech, he was won over to Chassidism and eventually became one of the most influential leaders of Hasidism in Central Poland and the Ukraine. He is particularly famous for defending the Jewish people before God and always interpreting their actions in the best possible light. His fervor in prayer and the fulfillment of mitzvos are legendary. His song before havdalah, “Dudele,” expressing man’s yearning and awareness of God’s presence, is still sung with tenderness and great feeling. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s work, Kadushas Levi, was published in his lifetime and is ever popular.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994)

The seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, eldest son of the saintly Kabalist, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, Rav of Yekaterinoslav; fifth in direct paternal line from the Tzemach Tzedek; son-in-law of the Rebbe Rayatz.

As the leader of one of the largest Chasidic groups in the world the Rebbe expended a great deal of time and effort on outreach. “Chabad Houses” - Outreach Centers - can be found on college campuses and in Jewish communities throughout the world. These centers conduct classes, distribute literature on Judaism and promote Mitzvah observance. A Chabad house can be found almost anywhere in the world where there is a pocket of Jewish families.

The Rebbe was a renowned Torah Scholar and authored many Halachic, Chassidic and homiletic works. Y.R.

Rabbi Elyahu Ellezer Desser (1891–1954)

Rabbi Desser was born into a family steeped in the mussar movement founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter and he remained a mussar personality for his entire life. However, his thought went considerably beyond the ordinary concerns of other mussar thinkers and he integrated other systems and confronted different problems as well.

Most of Rabbi Desser’s education took place at the Kelm Talmud Torah where his father had been an outstanding disciple of R. Simcha Zissel. The family resided in Homiel where Elyahu had the opportunity to meet outstanding Chabad thinkers. In 1929, he became a rabbi in London and in 1941 accepted the directorship of the Gateshead kollel. Over the years, he became familiar with Kabbalistic and Hasidic thought, particularly the thought of Rabbi Zadok HaCohen and the Tanya.

His essays and letters have been collected in four volumes (several volumes under the title Strive for Truth have been edited and translated into English by Rabbi Aryeh Carmel). His topics include perennial questions such as free will and faith as well as contemporary problems in education, evolution and how to respond to the Holocaust.

His personal character and modesty complemented and affirmed his thought. On the last Sukkot of his life he visited the sukkah of the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish, upon seeing Rabbi Desser, rose and rushed toward him. Not imagining that he was coming toward him, Rabbi Desser turned to the door to see who the distinguished guest was that the Chazon Ish was so honoring. M.G.

Tanna d’Vei Elyahu

Tanna d’Vei Elyahu is a midrashic work. Unlike all the other Midrashim it does not consist of a compilation or collection of individual homilies but is a uniform work stamped with a character of its own. The work, which is characterized by original expressions and rhetorical constructions couched in poetic and even flowery language, is distinguished by its didactic moral aim: the author deals with the divine precepts and the reasons for them, and the importance of knowledge of Torah, prayer, and repentance. He is especially concerned with the ethical and religious values which are enshrined in the Bible and in the trials and lives of the patriarchs.

The problem of the date and place of composition of Tanna De-Vei Elyahu has not yet been resolved. It has been variously dated almost anywhere between the third and tenth centuries.

Elyahu is the speaker in the work but there is no suggestion of a pseudopigrapha. The author relates that he came from Yavneh, that he resided in Jerusalem, and that he wandered in Babylon. He disputes with a fire worshipper and with those who accept the Bible but not the Mishnah. E.J.
Rabbi Judah Loew, The Maharal of Prague (1525-1609)

The Maharal was one of the most seminal thinkers in the post-medieval period. He developed an entirely new approach to the aggada of the Talmud and it is likely that no previous author devoted so much space to the interpretation of the non-halachic thought of the rabbis of the Talmud. He was held in great esteem by his contemporaries and has had a profound impact on all streams of Judaism. Rabbi Kook stated that the “Maharal was the father of the approach of the Gaon of Vilna on the one hand, and of the father of Chasidut, on the other hand”. He has been described as a Kabbalist who wrote in philosophic garb.

The Maharal castigated the educational methods of his day when boys were taught at a very young age and insisted that children must be taught in accordance with their intellectual maturity. Thus, Talmud and certainly Tosafot should be introduced only when the child is developmentally capable of fully comprehending what is being taught. He recommended that the system proposed in Pirkei Avot be followed.

One of his leading disciples was R. Yom Tov Heller, author of the classic mishnaic commentary, Tosafot Yom Tov, who, in his introduction informs us that the Maharal greatly encouraged group study of the Mishna. Maharal may have been the founder of Chevra Misnayot.

The Maharal was one of the staunch defenders of the tradition and of the undiluted wisdom of Chazal and wrote a critique of Azriah de’Rossi’s Me’or Einyan. At the same time, he was fully conversant with the scientific knowledge of his time as well as friendly with some of the contemporary eminent scientists. His disciple, David Ganz, worked in the observatory of Tycho Brahe, the distinguished astronomer.

His works include a major commentary on Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch, volumes on Passover in all its facets, on exile and redemption, on Torah, on Pirkei Avot, on drashot chazal and on development of character.

The Maharal was held in esteem by Jew and non-Jew alike and was summoned for an interview with Emperor Rudolph II, though the subject of the interview is still the subject of speculation.

At one time it seemed that the Maharal was best known for a fictitious creation, that of a golem. However, with the passage of time it seems that his true enduring creations have become an integral part of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people. M.G.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746)

Though Rabbi Moshe Chaim is best known for his masterly ethical work, Mesillat Yesharim, probably the most popular musar work in Jewish literature, his main focus in most of his numerous works was on the kabbalah.

Born in Padua, Italy, into a distinguished family, his genius was obvious from a very early age. Besides his complete mastery of the entire Biblical, Rabbinic, and Kabbalistic literature, he was thoroughly educated in the science and literature of the time. He was the author of three full-length plays, which have been published, in modern editions. Unfortunately, his preoccupation with kabbalah and the impact he made on the young, aroused opposition and false suspicion of Sabbatean influence. About 60 years ago, a huge cache of letters was found (published by Dr. Simon Ginzburg in 1937) which describes at length in his own words, the persecution that he endured.

Eventually, he left Italy and settled in Amsterdam. In 1740, at the age of 33, he published the Mesillat Yesharim, which contains many a Kabbalistic word. It is a moving, inspiring work describing how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness. At least three English translations of this work have been made. In 1743, Reb Moshe Chaim left for Erets Yisrael with his family, arriving in the same month that the sainted R. Chaim ben Atar died. Little is known of his life in the Holy Land and just a few years later, he and his family perished in a plague.

Though most of R. Moshe Chaim’s opponents are long forgotten, his profound spirituality continues to touch and inspire Jews of all groups. Both the Gaon of Vilna and the Maggid of Mezirich were great admirers. In recent years, largely through the efforts of the late Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, a new edition of his works have been published, including several heretofore unpublished manuscripts. And, in one of the standard texts of Modern Hebrew literature, R. Moshe Chaim is hailed as the father of Modern Hebrew literature. M.G.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer (The Chasam Sofer) (1752-1838)

To mention the Chasam Sofer is to evoke an aura of unique awe. He was a towering figure sent by the Almighty to lead his people during a period of great turbulence and transition. The gates of the ghetto had been ruptured and unprecedented opportunities beckoned Jews to take advantage of the new situation. In one generation the Jewishness of the Chasam Sofer’s native Frankfurt was devastated. Reform was making inroads. The Chasam Sofer became Rabbi of Pressburg in 1806, where he remained for thirty-three years. From there he showed the way to maintain authentic Jewish life through strong communal life, first class education and uncompromising opposition to Reform and radical change.
Rabbi Bachaya ibn Pakuda (Eleventh Century) and the Duties of the Heart

Rabbi Saadyah wrote the first Jewish work of philosophy in 933. Rabbi Bachaya wrote the first work of Jewish ethics more than a century later. Rabbi Saadyah flourished during the twilight of once glorious Babylonian Jewry; Sephardic Jewry continued its magnificent history in Spain, reflecting the shift from Asia to Europe, where R. Bachaya lived and created his magnum opus, Duties of the Heart (Chovot HaLevavot).

Rabbi Bachaya lived in Muslim Spain, probably in Saragossa, and served as a judge, but little else is known about his life. He was thoroughly conversant with the entire Biblical and Talmudical literature and was also master of all the knowledge and science of his day. Though a philosopher in his own right, Rabbi Bachaya’s essential contribution is that of creator of a new genre in Jewish literature, Jewish ethics. The first chapter of his work which is devoted to the unity of G-d employs philosophical arguments which some felt were not readily understandable and was skipped over by many students. Rabbi Bachaya’s work, as indicated by its title, focused on the non-physical obligations of the Jew: the obligations of feeling, heart and mind in contrast to those mitzvot that involve the limbs. Pointing to the neglect of this group of mitzvot, he underscored their critical importance. Rabbi Bachaya’s central focus was on Service of G-d and abiding by His will, and fulfilling the duties of the heart was viewed as the entree to nearness to G-d, the ultimate objective. Understandably, the tenth and last chapter of the book is Love of G-d. Though emphasizing the importance of rational thought, Rabbi Bachaya’s real goal was the experience of G-d. A systematic, carefully constructed work, Duties of the Heart, has remained to this day a favorite of serious, sensitive students. The Chasam Sofer studied with his students from Duties of the Heart for 15 minutes before his lecture “in order to inspire their hearts with fear of G-d, and almost all his musar was taken from that book” (Chur HaMesubot). And, Rabbi Yonah Landesohn, an eighteenth century gaon wrote, “a person must attach himself to the Duties of the Heart from whence he can acquire the choice midot for the service of the Lord. And one must plummet its depths more than when studying Negayim and Oholot (Two of the most difficult tractates of the Mishne) because of the greatness of its inwardness and refinement”. M.G.

On the eve of WWII Rabbi Meir Shapiro visited Prague and Pressburg and found that Prague’s Judaism lay in its famous cemetery, while Pressburg’s Judaism was very much alive. Rabbi Shapiro attributed the contrast to the firm approach of the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg as compared with the conciliatory, compromising approach of the leaders of Prague.

What was the power of the Chasam Sofer? It was his sense that he represented the Jewish people of his generation. This historic sense manifested itself in many ways. For example, his son, Rabbi Shimon Sofer once asked him how he could respond to complex halachic questions so rapidly? To which the Chasam Sofer replied that in each generation G-d sends an individual to guide his people. Since most questions come to him he must be that person in this generation. Therefore, even if the rationale he gave for a ruling could be refuted, the ruling itself was correct since it was divinely directed. On another occasion he wrote that in 40 years of deciding halachic questions he changed his mind only twice and even in those two instances he should not have reversed himself.

He was a great teacher and had thousands of disciples. His son, Shimon quotes his father as saying, that from the day he began teaching no day—except the ninth of Av passed when he failed to teach Torah to a large group. Those who knew him sensed a divine spirit within him. His illustrious father-in-law, Rabbi Akiva Eger, referred to an aguna case in which the Chasam Sofer uncovered the truth by questioning the witnesses in an unexpected manner and commented, “I saw how great is the power of Zaddikim—the spirit of G-d spoke within him”. It was the Chasam Sofer’s custom to record his daughter’s birth with the remark, “...and with G-d’s help I will lead her to the Chupah”. When his younger daughter, Simcha was born, he omitted that statement. As it turned out he died shortly before her wedding.

He was devoted to the Land of Israel and encouraged settlement. At the same time he was a loyal citizen and saw no contradiction.

Though he was a forceful and regal leader, he was gentle, caring shepherd of his flock. He prayed with great fervor. Though a halachic decisor of the first caliper, he was possessed of a remarkably poetic soul who composed divine poetry between Yom Kippur and Succot every year.

His writings are voluminous. Some of his more popular works are the Responsa, the Derashot, and the Torah Moshe. He even wrote a remarkable description (Sefer HaZikaron) of Napoleon’s siege of Pressburg in 1809, describing the miraculous fate of the Jewish population of Pressburg. M.G.
Sources

1. Proverbs 30:8

2. Mesillas Yesharim, Chapter 1

3a. Shmos Rabbah 31:2

3b. Michtav me’Eliyahu vol 1 p 152
4.

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5.

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6.

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8.

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9.
Alishich, Vayikra 25:32

10.
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11.
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12.
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13.
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14a.
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شرع נחמיך זכר
כלי להאכיל את השם
التزام עם עקרונות
שופר על פי מדין
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17.

PMENTO

18.

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19.

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20.

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21.

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22.
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23.
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24.
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25.
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26.
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