



Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch of Rimanov: Sensing God's Will

Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch Hakohen of Rimanov was the student and successor of Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Rimanov. Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch was orphaned at a young age and when he came to the study hall of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, the Chassidim there felt sorry for him and learned Torah with him. Eventually, Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch became Rebbe Mendele's personal assistant, and was known as Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch the Assistant. Rebbe Menachem Mendele instructed that Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch should succeed him, and after his passing, Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch became the leader of the Rimanov Chassidic congregation. Many other Chassidim, including the tzaddikim of that generation, would journey to Rimanov to consult with him. Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch passed away on the 30th of Cheshvan 1846. He is buried in Rimanov, Galicia, which today is in Poland.

A widow lived in Rimanov with her six children. For months, she couldn't pay her rent. The landlord wanted to evict her, but being a chassid, he went to ask the town rabbi what to do. The rabbi determined that according to Torah law, he could evict her. The landlord informed the widow that if she would not pay by a certain date, she would be evicted from her home.

The widow came to Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch of Rimanov in tears. "Who said this?" asked the Rebbe. "The landlord," she answered, according to the decision of the town rabbi." Without thinking twice, Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch rose and went to the rabbi to clarify the matter. "That is what is written in the *Chosehn Mishpat!*" the town rabbi claimed. "It is a clear law!"

"I honor you very much, but I would like to see the law myself," Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch answered. "Can you please open the book for me in the right place so that I may read it?"

The rabbi opened the book, looked, clutched his head and looked again. "It is just the opposite! I made a mistake," the rabbi said in dismay. "It says that in this type of case, it is prohibited to evict the tenant!"

"How did you know?" the Rebbe's students asked him. "I didn't know," Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch answered. "I am not an expert in the financial law. But when this woman came in, I felt such great compassion for her, that my heart told me that it cannot be that in the Torah of God, the Merciful Father, there could be such a cruel ruling."

Once Rebbe Zusha of Anapoli found the solution for a complicated problem in Jewish law. Later, this solution was discovered in the Jerusalem Talmud, Rebbe Zusha explained, "I am not familiar with the Jerusalem Talmud. But I perceived the solution from the same place that the Jerusalem Talmud perceived it."

The story about Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch is different than the story about Rebbe Zusha. Knowing himself and his Creator, Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch was sure that his feelings were in line with God's will. Not only was his heart tuned in to the Divine wavelength, but his body could also feel holiness and was drawn to it, as the following story will illustrate:

Everyone knew Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch as the Rebbe's assistant, an orphan boy whose lineage was not illustrious. When he became a Rebbe, there were still those who held him in disdain. Once, Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch went to visit the Yeshuot Yaakov, who was one of the greatest scholars of Jewish law in the world in that era. With complete disdain for Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch, the Yeshuot Yaakov told his family to remove all the chairs from the house so that Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch would not be able to sit down.

Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch arrived and put his hand on the mezuzah to kiss it. But his hand remained on the mezuzah, as if it was glued there. He could not remove his hand from the mezuzah in order to kiss it, as is customary. "Are you implying that my mezuzah is not kosher?" the Yeshuot Yaakov said to him with contempt. "I just checked it a few weeks ago, and it is absolutely kosher!" They called in the most expert scribe in the city, but even before he arrived, they removed the mezuzah from the doorpost and saw that the person who had re-hung the mezuzah after it had been checked had punctured it with the nail that affixed it to the doorpost. There was no question at all. Clearly, the mezuzah was completely unkosher.

The Yeshuot Yaakov immediately called for chairs to be brought in, and his entire approach to Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch became respectful.

"How did you know that the mezuzah was unkosher?" he asked. "I didn't know," answered Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch. "But when I raise my hand to the mezuzah and I feel a good feeling (today we would call it 'positive energy') then I know that the mezuzah is fine. And if not..."

The chassidim who were present said that the greatest wonder of all was that they saw no change in Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch throughout his meeting with the Yeshuot Yaakov between the time that the Yeshuot Yaakov treated him with contempt and the time that he afforded him great honor.

How did Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch acquire this sense? We can discern the answer from the words of a different tzaddik, Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin. He said that there is nothing novel about him being a tzaddik: his father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all tzaddikim. But Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch the Assistant is a novel phenomenon: "He took rough leather and turned it into delicate silk."

In Chabad, the word for 'work' (*avodah*) is cognate to the word for 'refinement' (*ibud*). We must refine our character in the same manner that leather is refined. This is the

ultimate purpose of our service of God. Those who merit to attain it feel holiness throughout their bodies and emotions. This is the gentle, ephemeral element that hovers above reality.

When the Rebbe of Ruzhin and Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch became in-laws, the Ruzhiner, as was his custom, recounted his lineage "The Magid of Mezeritch, Rebbe Abraham the Angel, and his father, Rebbe Shalom of Parhovitch. When he finished recounting his lineage, he turned to Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch and said, "Now it is *your* turn to recount *your* lineage." "My father was a simple tailor," Rebbe Tzvi Hirsch answered. "I remember one thing that he taught me: An old article of clothing should be mended, and don't ruin a new article of clothing."

"That is quite sufficient," the Rebbe of Ruzhin replied.