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"NITEL NACHT" AND
THE WINTER VACATION.

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION
FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE REBBE
5748-5752

A PROJECT OF
HaMaaseh Hu HaIkar

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*Translated in the memory of
Yitzchok Yosef ben Yaakov Mordechai.*

TEACH THEM TORAH

- We should utilize the winter vacation by reaching out to Jewish children who study in Public Schools and are exposed to the non-Jewish environment.

We should positively influence them by drawing them into a Jewish environment and enrolling them in Jewish schools; we should teach them Torah and matters of general Judaism, and give them a kosher education founded on pure holiness.⁸

ENROLL IN YESHIVAH

- Clearly, we should work on influencing parents to enroll their children – immediately – in an institution where they will receive a fully sanctified education.⁸



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8. Parshas Vayeishev 5750; Hisva'aduyos p.51-52.

perform acts of Tzedakah and kindness – or even by simply taking care of the house and so forth.⁶

VIEW IMAGES OF THE REBBE

- We could also utilize the time to picture the image of the Rebbe Rashab in our minds, either through personal memories or based on a picture that is presently available.⁷

The very image of his holy countenance is enough to inspire love and awe of Heaven and the like, in accordance with the manner in which he conducted himself. This will encourage us to follow his ways and implement his instructions.²

Winter Vacation

INTRODUCTION

Winter Vacation coincides with the non-Jewish festive season. Jewish students in non-Jewish public schools find themselves free from their studies and open to the prevalent influences.

The Rebbe suggests turning this factor to the benefit of Jewry, by reaching out to these students.

chess-player, not only is chess no worse than any other form of business, it in fact has the advantage of involving wisdom. (ibid.)

6. **He always had a missing button**

I once heard an account concerning one of the Yeshivah Bochorim who regularly wore garments that lacked some buttons. When asked what it is that prevents him from simply sewing them back on, he answered that if he were to do so now, he would have nothing to do on "Nitel Nacht"! ... Which Yeshivah Bochor would dream of doing absolutely nothing with his time?! He would rather use the time gainfully, to sew his buttons back on; sewing them in accordance with Jewish custom, so that the garment closes right-over-left, leaving the right side predominant. [The right symbolizes Chesed, "kindness" and holiness, while the left represents Gevurah, "severity"] (ibid.)

7. Similar to the verse, "And your eyes will behold your Teacher," which in this case refers to the [the Rebbe Rashab] founder of the Tomchei Temimim Yeshivah.

Foreword

We are pleased to bring you this newly revised edition of *a CALL to ACTION*. Translated from its Hebrew counterpart, *HaMaaseh Hu Halkar*, this presentation is a collection of practical instruction from the Rebbe's Sichos pertaining to "Nitel Nacht" and the winter vacation.

HaMaaseh Hu Halkar is a compilation of Hora'os ("directives") culled from the Rebbe's talks in the years 5748 to 5752 (1988-1992), from both edited and unedited sources ("Muga" and "Bilti Muga"); we have expended great effort in our attempt to capture some of the Rebbe's carefully calculated and instructive phrasing. This edition's English translation was provided by Rabbi Yaakov Paley.

At this time, when Moshiach's arrival is imminent, the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, has emphasized the primacy of action. We are now beginning to experience the era when we will fully appreciate "the superiority of deed" above scholarship. May this take place completely and immediately!

Editorial Office of
HaMaaseh Hu Halkar
Tevet, 5768

Nitel Nacht

The Jewish way to pass the Eve of Dec 25th

BRIEF HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION

December 25th is universally celebrated by non-Jews as the birthday of the person upon whom a dominant non-Jewish religion was founded; a person who unfortunately also “carried the Halachic status of ‘a Jew who lures other Jews to idol-worship.’” For that reason, a spirit of extreme spiritual impurity prevails on that night.

Additionally, there was a lengthy period in history when it was common for members of that religion to “celebrate” the eve of Dec 25th by attacking Jews; this led to a Rabbinic decision against keeping the Yeshivas open on the eve of Dec 25th.

In the words of the Previous Rebbe, “It is our custom to refrain from studying Torah on “Nitel Nacht”¹ until midnight.” The reason for this restriction – as heard from his father, the Rebbe Rashab – is “in order not to add spiritual vitality” to the forces of impurity. In other words, we do not wish to add spiritual vitality to “that person” [the one whose birth they celebrate] nor to “those who presently follow his views.”²

“Hayom Yom” (entry for Teves 17) quotes the Rebbe Rashab as saying, “I am not fond of those students who begrudge these eight hours and cannot tear themselves away from Torah study...”

1. What does “Nitel” mean?

The word “Nitel” (ניטל) is an allusion to a “lack.” Others say that the word comes from ניתל, meaning “suspended.” In Latin, “natal” means “born”; in this context it refers to the time of birth. (Letter dated 9th Kislev 5735, printed in Likutei Sichos Vol.15, p.554)

2. Letter dated 9th Kislev 5735, printed in Likutei Sichos Vol.15, p.554 and Parshas Vayeishev 5750, footnote 63; Hisva’aduyos p.49-50.

FOLLOW THE CURRENT NON-JEWISH CALENDAR

- Nowadays, the timing of “Nitel Nacht” follows the non-Jewish calendar that is used in America and most other countries (including Russia, who used to follow a different calendar), i.e., the 25th of December.³

REBBE’S GAME OF CHESS

- The Rebbe Rashab would spend “Nitel Nacht” playing chess or providing advice for those playing the game.

The reason⁴ behind this practice is that even the very lowliest time on the calendar, which cannot be refined in a “direct” manner via Torah study, should at least be utilized – and thereby elevated – by engaging in a gainful pursuit, such as a game which clearly sharpens one’s mind.²

DON’T SQUANDER YOUR TIME

- The Rebbe Rashab’s custom provides us with an instruction:

We should not squander the time of “Nitel Nacht” by doing nothing at all, G-d Forbid; rather we should spend it in a gainful manner (particularly in a manner that increases wisdom⁵) or to

3. ... Unlike the Russian Calendar that existed prior to the Revolution. (ibid, footnote 63) [December 25 in the Gregorian calendar, comes in the Julian calendar on January 7.]

4. The lack is not ours

The Previous Rebbe once recounted how his father (the Rebbe Rashab) would play chess on that night ... This was the Rebbe Rashab’s way of providing a lesson and directive that even during a time which apparently can only be used to guard oneself from evil, a “lack” [as opposed to actively doing good via Torah and Mitzvos], nevertheless, this very lowest point in time ... should at least be utilized, etc. [see main text above for continuation] (ibid, page 50)

5. Three winning reasons

... When one does so with the above intentions in mind. (ibid.)

(1) The game of chess increases the sharpness of one’s mind, enabling him to later study Torah on a far better level; (2) it leads to a Kiddush Hashem and the praise of the Jewish people by the gentiles (who prize skilled chess-players and) who see that the Jews are “a wise and understanding nation” in this particular field of wisdom as well; and (3) even as a mundane way to make an income, i.e. as a