
ביאור תניא

THE STEINSALTZ TANYA

VOLUME I



THE MAGERMAN EDITION

THE STEINSALTZ
TANYA

LIKKUTEI AMARIM
1-32

COMMENTARY & TRANSLATION BY
RABBI ADIN EVEN-ISRAEL STEINSALTZ

Steinsaltz Center
Maggid Books

The Steinsaltz Tanya:
Likkutei Amarim, Volume 1
First edition, 2022

Maggid Books
An imprint of Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd.

POB 8531, New Milford, CT 06776-8531, USA
& POB 4044, Jerusalem 9104001, Israel
www.maggidbooks.com

Original Hebrew Edition © The Steinsaltz Center Ltd., 2020
English translation © The Steinsaltz Center Ltd. 2022
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*We acknowledge with gratitude the generous support of
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Cover design by Tani Bayer

ISBN 978-1-59264-585-5, hardcover

Printed and bound in the United States

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צִדִּיק כְּתֹמֵר יִפְרַח כְּאַרְז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשָּׁגָה:
שְׂתוּלִים בְּבַיִת ה' בְּחִצְרוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרִיחוּ:
עוֹד יִנּוּבּוֹן בְּשִׂיבָה דְּשִׁנִּים וְרַעֲנָנִים יִהְיוּ:
לְהַגִּיד כִּי יֵשֶׁר ה' צוּרֵי וְלֹא עוֹלָתָהּ בּוֹ:
(תהילים עב:ג-טז)

*The righteous man flourishes like a palm tree;
like a cedar in Lebanon he grows tall.
Planted in the House of the LORD,
they blossom in the courts of our God.
They will continue to yield fruit even in old age;
they will remain full and fresh,
to tell that the LORD is upright.
He is my rock, and there is no wrongdoing in Him.
(Ps. 92:13–16)*

We dedicate this *sefer* in loving memory of our beloved grandfather and great-grandfather HaRav Avraham ben Uszer and Chana Feldman, *zichrono livracha*.

He was a true tzaddik and exemplified the beautiful words of King David. We pray that our children, Baruch Aryeh, Ezra Yishayahu, Rut Chana, Shmaryahu Yisrael, and Yitzchak Eliyahu will be the “fresh fruit” of the tree of Torah, and that along with their cousins, they will proudly carry his legacy forward.

May they take the lessons from the Ba'al HaTanya to heart and treat each other and all of Israel as brothers with love and have long lives filled with Torah, mitzvot, and joy.

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל "אֲחִים" מִמֶּשֶׁ, מִצֵּד שׁוֹרֵשׁ נַפְשָׁם בְּה' אֶחָד
*All Jews are literally called brothers on account of
their collective soul's common root in the one God.*

– Tanya, chap. 32

Maeira and Michel Werthenschlag

ספר התניא מלמד אותנו שהנפש האלוקית מסורה כל כולה לקב"ה והיא מבחינה זו חסרת אנוכיות או תחושת ישות. הנפש הבהמית לעומת זאת מרוכזת בעצמה ומסורה לקיומה הנפרד.

לפיכך לימד אותנו האדמו"ר האמצעי שכאשר שני יהודים לומדים או משוחחים בעניני עבודת ה' הרי אלו שתי נשמות אלוקיות כנגד נפש בהמית אחת. הנפש הבהמית לא מצטרפת עם חבירתה משום שכאמור היא מסורה לעצמה אבל הנפשות האלוקיות מצטרפות יחד בלי כל חציצה או הבדל.

(מתוך: "היום יום" כ' לטבת)

לזכות

משה ליב בן זיסל שיחי' לאיוש"ט
שולמית בת זהרה שתחי' לאיוש"ט



The *Tanya* teaches us that the divine soul is fully devoted to G-d, and therefore it is selfless. By contrast, the animal soul is selfish, devoted only to maintaining its own existence.

The Mittlerer Rebbe, Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, taught that when two Jews learn or discuss matters pertaining to service of God, there are two divine souls against one animal soul. The animal soul thinks only of itself and will not attach itself to the animal soul of the other. But the two divine souls are joined together with no division or barrier.

(Cited from *HaYom Yom*, 20 Tevet)

In the merit of

MOSHE LEIB BEN ZISEL
SHULAMIT BAT ZOHARA

A blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, regarding Rabbi Steinsaltz's unique commentary on the *Tanya*, dated 21 Av 5721 (August 3, 1961):

(ושאלות ותשובות – כהמצורף למכתבו) בעניינים
המובאים בתניא, כן ביאור קצר או גם ארוך, ובסגנון
ערוכים בלשון בני דורנו...

בברכה לבשו"ט



In December 2012, the final volume of the Hebrew edition of *The Steinsaltz Tanya* was published. That year, at a hasidic gathering, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz shared why he wrote the book. He explained that Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the *Tanya*, had poured his entire soul, his love and awe, his soul-wrenching oneness with God into that concise book, into pages that obscured his immense spirit so well. Through his commentary, Rabbi Steinsaltz strove to reveal to us this spirit, that powerful fire just barely contained by the words of the *Tanya*.

And he certainly succeeded. Yet he failed to mask his own burning spirit, his own love, awe, and closeness to God, as he had attempted to do his entire life.

The publication of this English edition of *The Steinsaltz Tanya* is the fulfillment of Rabbi Steinsaltz's vision to make the teachings of the *Tanya* accessible to every single individual. At the height of the preparations for this edition, our teacher Rabbi Adin Even-Israel passed away.

In this book, one learns how the life of the tzaddik lives on in this world, in those who learn his works. It is through those students who are open to receiving his teachings and are inspired to build upon his words that his light remains with us. We pray that this commentary of Rabbi Steinsaltz will introduce many generations of Jews to the world of the *Tanya* and to the path of authentic devotion to God.

May it serve to elevate his soul.

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For the Hebrew Tanya Vilna edition, open from the Hebrew side of the book.

Publisher's Preface

The insights and elucidations of this seminal commentary were adapted from weekly lectures on the *Tanya* that Rabbi Steinsaltz delivered to a small group of Jerusalemites from 1977 to 1980, as well as classes broadcast on the Israeli radio station Kol Yisrael. Those teachings were later transcribed, edited, and published as a commentary to the *Tanya* in Hebrew. The commentary was well received and has since been revised and reprinted.

This series, the Steinsaltz commentary on the *Tanya*, will ultimately consist of six volumes spanning the five sections that comprise the *Tanya*. The first section of the *Tanya*, *Likkutei Amarim* (A Compilation of Teachings), has been divided into two volumes. The third volume of the series contains two self-contained sections of the *Tanya*: *Sha'ar HaYihud VeHa'emuna* (The Gate of Unity and Faith) and *Iggeret HaTeshuva* (Letter on Repentance). The fourth and fifth sections of the *Tanya*, *Iggeret HaKodesh* (The Holy Epistle) and *Kuntres Aḥaron* (Last Tract), comprise volumes 4–6.

The Steinsaltz Tanya offers the original Hebrew *Tanya* text, an English translation of the *Tanya*, and a running commentary by Rabbi Steinsaltz. Care was taken that both the *Tanya* text and the commentary be true to the original, though it is important to bear in mind that the translation necessarily has to relinquish some of the pungency of the original discourses.

The Commentary

Rabbi Steinsaltz's commentary on the *Tanya* reverberates with authenticity, expressing the ideas and spirit of Jewish thought in a way that is simultaneously traditional and yet profoundly original. His

style passes freely from one topic to another and then returns to the original idea without belaboring it. He also employs a wide variety of modes of explanation, including philosophical logic, textual exegesis, and scientific illustration, as well as symbolism, story, and parable.

This is not a commentary that aims for the comfort of being spoon-fed the simple explanation of each line. Instead, one gains an appreciation of the profundity and brilliance of the *Tanya*, as well as the penetrating insights and genuine perspective that Rabbi Steinsaltz lends to it.

The commentary is comprised of two sections. The main body is a running elucidation of the *Tanya* text, one segment at a time. As a supplement, we have included a companion section of additional insights, which can be found in the gray boxes that run across the bottom of the pages. This supplemental material provides a broader context and a deeper look at the concepts presented in the main body of the commentary. Here the reader will find hasidic teachings, tangents from other disciplines, such as physics and mathematics, and analogies and hasidic stories.

At the end of each section there is an outline that summarizes the flow of ideas throughout the chapters.

The Hebrew *Tanya* Text

This volume presents the original Hebrew text of the *Tanya* in two formats. In accordance with the Chabad hasidic tradition, and by specific directive from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to the author, we have included the Hebrew text as it was printed in the Vilna edition in 1900, without vocalization or punctuation. This unembellished *Tanya* text, which can be found at the end of this book, connects and anchors the modern commentary with the authentic chain of hasidic teachings, originating with the author of the *Tanya* himself. In addition, it furnishes the reader the opportunity to reflect on the text as one uninterrupted unit, affording a person a broad perspective on the flow of ideas.

Second, to make the *Tanya* text more accessible to the contemporary reader, a vocalized and punctuated version of the Hebrew text is provided. This text is presented alongside the English translation of the *Tanya* and is divided into phrases according to the content of the

commentary. This version also furnishes sources for citations, and abbreviations and acronyms have been expanded.

Both versions of the *Tanya* text contain the *Moreh Shiur*, the annual calendar for daily study of the *Tanya*.

The English *Tanya* Text

One of the major contributions of this work is a groundbreaking English translation of the Hebrew *Tanya* text. The *Tanya* is a classic, canonic work, and its author invested deep meaning into the minutiae of its language and style. The outcome is an esoteric and dense text, which presents a formidable challenge when rendering the *Tanya* into contemporary English.

This rendition, in the tradition of previous classic Steinsaltz translations, combines rigorous fidelity to the nuances of the original text along with clear and contemporary English translation. Careful effort was invested to represent each word of the original Hebrew in the translation using bold font, while interlacing words in nonbold to clarify the meaning and flow of the text.

Certain expressions in the original, common to the style of rabbinic Hebrew, would have obscured the clarity of the English rendition. Such words, such as *behinat*, *yitbarakh*, *barukh hu*, and *hineh*, are not always rendered into English or represented in a different form. For example, *yitbarakh*, used as a term of reverence referring to God, has been rendered most often as “God’s.” Thus, instead of rendering עֵצְמוֹתָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ as “His essence, may He be blessed,” the phrase was rendered as “God’s essence.”

In addition, although the original text was written as a flowing discourse with no punctuation, we have composed the English translation according to conventional syntax, inserting transitions in non-bold where necessary.

The English translations of verses and passages from the *Tanakh* and Talmud cited in this work were taken from *The Steinsaltz Tanakh* and *The Koren Talmud Bavli*, the Steinsaltz English edition of the Talmud. In several instances, context dictated minor variations to those translations.

The English *Tanya* text is presented in segments that serve as

headings for each passage of commentary. The division of the text follows the content of the commentary. Therefore, each segment does not necessarily constitute a single self-contained thought. The reader may find it worthwhile to first read several English segments of *Tanya* at a time, skipping over the commentary, to digest the overall idea of the *Tanya* and then return to each segment to delve into the commentary itself.

Naturally, all these features – the translation, the punctuation, and the sources – are a reflection of Rabbi Steinsaltz's interpretation of the *Tanya*.

A Note on Gender

For the sake of convenience, this book was written using male pronouns to refer to individuals and not because it is a book for men only, which it is not. Neutral language was used wherever possible when it did not interfere with the accuracy or clarity of the content.

Acknowledgments

This commentary comprises an “oral Torah” that emerged from a series of weekly classes in Chabad Hasidism and, in a different fashion, from *Tanya* classes broadcast over *Kol Yisrael*, the Israeli State radio station. The participants in these *Tanya* classes added so much – through their questions, their comments, and even their very listening. For all the many ways they have enriched me and my classes, I am deeply grateful.

A project of this magnitude could not have been realized without the support of Debra and David Magerman. Thank you for your generous contribution to this edition of the *Tanya*.

I reserve a special thanks for my friend Rabbi Meir Hanegbi, the adapter and editor of this material. With immense dedication and extreme effort, he took all of this oral material and turned it into a book, adding many comments, explanations, source references, and an extensive bibliography. Due to his efforts, its end is certainly better than its beginning.

He merited to learn in order to teach, and to teach in order to actualize – and for this, may he be blessed with continued fortitude.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

Introduction

The author of the *Tanya*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was among the greatest Jewish personalities of his time: great in Torah, both in its exoteric or revealed aspect (that is, Talmud and *halakha*) and in its esoteric dimension. He was also learned in secular knowledge, a virtuoso of the Hebrew language, a master writer and editor, a born leader, and superb administrator, an ecstatic mystic, and a composer of music. In each of his creative fields, he wrote books of permanent value that have become classic works of hasidic thought, particularly Chabad Hasidism, for all generations.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman was born on 18 Elul 5505 (1745) in the town of Liozna in White Russia (now Belarus). His father was Rabbi Barukh, a descendant of the famed Maharal, Rabbi Loewe of Prague.

From his early childhood, Rabbi Shneur Zalman's genius and prodigious Torah knowledge were widely recognized. A few years after his marriage in 1760, he decided to study Torah at one of the great Torah centers. The two centers he considered were Vilna, home to the famed Gaon of Vilna, and Mezeritch, where the great Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber, successor to the Ba'al Shem Tov (founder of the hasidic movement), taught. Feeling that he knew a little about how to study Torah but virtually nothing about how to pray, he decided to go to Mezeritch.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman arrived in Mezeritch in 1764. Despite his student's youth, the Maggid soon counted him among his inner circle of disciples. The Maggid greatly appreciated his talents and Torah knowledge, giving the young man the task of compiling a new and updated *Shulhan Arukh*, the Code of Jewish Law. Rabbi Shneur Zalman labored at this task for many years, but tragically most of the work was destroyed by fire. Only a part of it – most of *Orah Hayyim* and a few

chapters from the other three sections – survived and was published after his death. The book, which is not a specifically hasidic work, is known as *Shulhan Arukh HaRav*. It is a halakhic masterpiece, adapting and condensing the gist of Torah law up to that time, and it serves as the basic halakhic source for hasidim in general and Chabad hasidim in particular. Were it not for the violent opposition to Hasidism that prevailed at the time, it would doubtless have earned a more central position in halakhic literature.

In 1767, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was appointed Maggid in his hometown of Liozna, and beginning in 1772, highly talented young men began to come to him for instruction in Torah and the service of God. Rabbi Shneur Zalman arranged these disciples in three *chadarim* (“rooms” or classes), instructing each according to his level. According to Chabad tradition, this is when Rabbi Shneur Zalman began to consolidate his unique Chabad philosophy and approach, and it is thus considered the founding year of Chabad Hasidism.

In 1774, following the death of the Maggid, the hasidic community accepted the central leadership of Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel of Vitebsk. But in 1777, under the pressure of persecution and excommunication by the opponents of Hasidism, which were directed mainly against the hasidim of White Russia, Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel and a large group of hasidim emigrated to the Land of Israel. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, who was initially in the group, was persuaded to return home and he became one of the leaders of the hasidic community in White Russia, together with Rabbi Yisrael of Plotsk and Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Lubavitch. In 1788, Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel, in a letter from the Land of Israel, appointed Rabbi Shneur Zalman as the sole leader of the hasidim in this region.

This was merely a confirmation of the de facto state of affairs, because Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s comprehensive educational endeavors, both written and oral, and his impressive success in many public debates with Hasidism’s opponents (including the famous disputation in Minsk in 1783) had made him the most important hasidic leader in White Russia. Moreover, by this time his teachings had also consolidated into a unique system within Hasidism, the system of “Chabad” (an acronym for *hokhma, bina, da’at* – wisdom, understanding, knowledge).

Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s influence continued to grow. Copies of

his writings on hasidic teachings circulated widely, and his published works, initially published anonymously, added considerably to the spread of the Chabad approach and to the author's reputation. If his *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* ("Laws of Torah Study," published anonymously in 1794) demonstrated his knowledge of *halakha* and of Torah in general, his *Tanya* (published in 1797) was a lucid and systematic articulation of the fundamentals of hasidic thought.

His influence spread not only throughout White Russia but increasingly also in Lithuania and even in Vilna itself, to the extent that several community leaders in this bastion of opposition to Hasidism were among his followers. This aroused the wrath of the *mitnagdim*, the opponents of Hasidism. They realized that their old recourse of excommunication would be ineffective, so they availed themselves of their last remaining weapon: informing against Rabbi Shneur Zalman to the Russian government, which had recently annexed White Russia and Poland. The chief rabbi of Pinsk brought a formal complaint to the Russian authorities, accusing a number of hasidic leaders, and in particular Rabbi Shneur Zalman, of various offenses, both religious and political: sending money to the sultan of Turkey (actually funds raised for the support of the hasidic community in the Holy Land, then under Turkish rule) and the creation of a new religious sect, which Russian law strictly forbade.

In 1798, as a result of these accusations, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was arrested and brought as a criminal offender to St. Petersburg. After a secret trial, whose details only fully came to light in recent years, he was exonerated of all charges and released from prison on the nineteenth of Kislev of that year. This day came to symbolize the public victory of Hasidism over its opponents and was established, in the lifetime of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, as a festival of redemption.

That day came to represent a watershed in the development of Hasidism: From that point, it grew stronger, accelerated its spread, and gained tens of thousands of new followers. Hasidim viewed the Russian authorities' verdict as, in its inner essence, the supernal verdict. The earthly court's decision to free Rabbi Shneur Zalman merely echoed the decision of the heavenly court, expressing the supernal vindication of Hasidism. Thus, Chabad Hasidim celebrate the nineteenth of Kislev as the New Year's Day for Hasidism to this day.

The nineteenth of Kislev also marks a new period in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's teachings and works. Before St. Petersburg, Rabbi Shneur Zalman did not convey his esoteric teachings openly and clearly, leaving much to allusion. After St. Petersburg, the trickling wellspring became the great river of Chabad Hasidism, because Rabbi Shneur Zalman then felt that there was no longer any divine impediment to the teaching of Hasidism, and the time had come to elaborate on it and disseminate it without inhibition.

Following further slanderous accusations, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was summoned to a second interrogation in St. Petersburg in 1800, and after a lengthy imprisonment, though under much easier conditions, he was finally released by command of the new czar, Alexander I. On his return from prison, he moved to the town of Liadi and thus came to be known as Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi.

After Rabbi Shneur Zalman had largely overcome the opposition to Hasidism from without, a bitter dispute broke out within the hasidic community, mainly over the intellectual nature of the Chabad system. The leader of the dispute was Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk, a disciple of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, who was later joined by Rabbi Barukh of Medzibozh, the Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson. This dispute caused Rabbi Shneur Zalman deep sorrow, but it did not affect his standing. Instead, it actually highlighted the uniqueness of his personality and his philosophy.

When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was among the fiercest opponents of the French conquest. He feared that French rule would grant emancipation to the Jews and accelerate assimilation, and he therefore supported Russia with all his power. As the French army advanced, he was forced to flee behind the Russian army to the interior of the country. He fell ill on the journey, and on 24 Tevet 5573 (1812), he died in the remote village of Piena. He was buried in the nearby town of Haditz.

The *Tanya*

Rabbi Shneur Zalman left behind a great legacy that formed the underpinnings of Hasidism, and particularly Chabad Hasidism: his halakhic masterwork *Shulhan Arukh HaRav* on one hand and his mystical

work of ethics, the *Tanya*, on the other. If it is at all possible to define a work such as the *Tanya*, then its best description lies in the words of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak of Lubavitch, who said, “*Tanya* is the ‘Written Torah’ of hasidim, and studying it is like studying *Humash*: Everyone studies it, from the greatest scholars to the most simple of folk; each, according to his level, understands what he understands, and no one understands it at all.”

At first glance, the *Tanya* seems to affect the style of an ordinary book of *mussar*, practical advice intended to direct people in the path of God’s service and of self-perfection. In truth, it takes an original approach to the fundamental elements of self-improvement, applying the principles of Hasidism to reveal the root causes of human failings and to devise comprehensive solutions. The *Tanya* seeks to demonstrate to every man or woman that knowledge of God is there for the taking, that spiritual growth to ever higher levels is real and immanent, if one is willing to engage in the struggle.

The *Tanya* is not only one of the fundamental works of Hasidism, but it is also one of the greatest books of moral teaching of all time. Although the author of the *Tanya* modestly describes himself as a “compiler,” this is a most original work, both in its basic premise as well as in the many ideas and insights it expresses parenthetically. And though the author repeatedly notes that the book is intended for a select audience, for “those who know me personally,” it strives to solve the dilemmas with a most broad and comprehensive approach – an approach that is not specific to a particular person, time, or outlook. The *Tanya* does not, in the main, address specific problems but delves into their root causes, seeking to distill the predicaments of humankind down to their most elementary maxims and to solve them in the most comprehensive way.

But these points, despite their centrality to the work, do not summarize the *Tanya*. This is a book in which the incidental ideas, as well as the supporting chapters surrounding the central theme, are no less important than the main topics. The more one studies this book, the more one discovers illuminating thoughts and ideas, a comprehensive outlook on life, insight into the structure of Jewish history, and moral guidance on countless issues. This short book encapsulates an entire philosophy and guide to life. As Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev expressed it, “How did he put such a great and awesome God into such a small book?”

לקוטי אמרים

Likkutei Amarim

A Compilation of Teachings

Preface to *Likkutei Amarim*

There are very few passages in this work that inspire spiritual excitement or an immediate feeling of transcendence. The ideas are intentionally presented in a deceptively simple way. One does not experience sudden flashes of inspiration, prompting him to exclaim, “Beautiful! Incredible!” One who studies the *Tanya* discovers the beauty of it only by deepening his understanding through repeated review. Only through sincere effort will one crack through the understated style to reveal the profound content and depth of emotion concealed therein.

Upon a second perusal, one uncovers more than he did in his first reading, and upon his third reading, more than the second. The power and beauty of the *Tanya* lies beneath the surface of a writing style that resembles that of Rambam: simple, with minimal usage of technical terms, limited only to instances that demand it, yet it is infused with a depth and intensity that waxes and wanes. One will not find lofty and effusive expressions overflowing with emotion, not because that emotion does not exist, but rather because the author of the *Tanya* restrains his fervor, allowing only a hint of it to emerge.

The *Tanya* is built, to a large degree, in a format that invites a person to put the ideas and messages it contains into practice. Only after applying the ideas found here can a person internalize them and integrate them into the very fabric of his soul. Then, upon further study, he will reap layers of added meaning the more he learns. As the Sages put it, “As for the rest, go and learn it.”

The author of the *Tanya* would say that he worked very hard, not just to convey the meaning of the ideas, but also to fine-tune their

precise wording. It is said that he sat and analyzed every single letter, considering whether to add or delete the conjunctive *vav*, whether or not to insert a comma. This precision is not necessarily apparent in the structure of the wording, but it demands of the reader a deeper analysis.

Due to the degree to which the ideas herein are condensed and packed with meaning, one who studies the *Tanya* will grapple with the subtleties of the wording and ponder both that which is said and that which is not said. The one who studies the *Tanya* in this way cannot help but develop an appreciation for the beautifully crafted, classic writing style that demands serious application before it will unveil its hidden dimensions to the reader.

Most *mussar* works focus on clarifying particular issues and the ways in which a person can achieve specific goals in specific areas. The advantage in such an individualized approach is that it deals with the specific questions that a person might ask himself, and the answers supplied are likewise specific and definitive. On the other hand, the book is limited to the specific problems it raises and is of actual help only to certain individuals. Others might be impressed by the book's profundity, yet they will always feel that it does not speak to them. It fails to answer their problems or take into account their specific personalities and circumstances.

The *Tanya*, by contrast, does not address specific problems but delves into their root causes, seeking to distill the predicaments of humankind down to their most elementary maxims and solve them in the most comprehensive way. The crux of the book is an in-depth summation of the workings of the inner soul and an analysis of good and evil as fundamental forces at play in the soul and the primary sources of its dissonance.

Although written with great restraint, the *Tanya* – and particularly its first section, *Likkutei Amarim* – energetically and dramatically depicts human life as an immense battle between good and evil that one endures throughout one's lifetime, a battle between the forces that drag the soul down and the forces that strive heavenward. In describing this battle, the author of the *Tanya* offers a completely new approach. The battle in a person's soul is actually not between good and evil, expressions the author rarely uses, except when he needs

to clarify a point by using the ordinary semantics of these terms, but between the two elements within the human soul: the divine soul and the animal soul.

The divine soul is the part of a person that aspires to the Divine, in all its connotations. The animal soul is the part that relates to a person's physical identity and his involvement in the material world. These are not merely alternative terms for "good" and "evil" or for "body" and "soul." They draw a far subtler distinction. The animal soul is not negative in essence, nor is it necessarily hedonistic. It can become refined and wise and achieve much in the life of the spirit yet remain animal.

The animal soul is the soul of a human being as a biological creature, as a specific level of development in the zoological system. Even in this sense, humans are superior to other creations in their ability to attain great heights in the realms of thought and feeling, yet still they could remain an animal among animals – if not for the other side to the human being. It is in the divine soul, in its aspiration to the Divine, that man's uniqueness lies. The divine soul yearns to cleave to the Divine and be subsumed by it, and only by this aspiration, by the constant struggle of the divine soul to transcend its own desires, even its very self, in order to attain identification with the divine light, does one achieve a true identity as a human being.

This is the inner struggle of the human soul, between the desires of the animal soul and the yearnings of the divine soul. Yet this is not a war to the death, in which a person tries to destroy and obliterate a part of the self. Since the animal soul is not fundamentally evil, the battle against it is essentially a battle of education. A person's task is to train the animal soul, to elevate it to a higher level of awareness and understanding, until it is unified, both in its objectives and in its aspirations, with the divine soul. In this way, one achieves full harmony of body and soul, of earthliness and transcendence.

The perpetual battle in the human soul, which stems from its dual nature, also has moral and pragmatic implications. The teachers of *mussar* have always recognized the almost vital need for a person to achieve total inner identification with his deeds and actions. The assumption is that a purely mechanical act has a low moral and spiritual value. Yet few individuals are capable of truly attaining such an inner identification. This leaves to most the choice of either giving up the

spiritual struggle or descending to hypocrisy and self-delusion. The author of the *Tanya*, by delving into the nature of the relationship between a person's two souls, finds an approach that is very different, even revolutionary. It readily acknowledges that not everyone is able to achieve complete victory for the divine soul over the animal – but not everyone is required to do so.

A state of war within the human soul, says the author of the *Tanya*, is not a negative thing. A person might achieve perfection with respect to his deeds, his speech, and even his thoughts without achieving complete perfection within the inner recesses of the soul. The author requires a person to achieve perfection in these “garments” of the soul, in his thoughts, speech, and actions, but not at his soul's essence.

Thus, the author of the *Tanya* removes the veil of hypocrisy that has cloaked many a soul as a result of the demand to be elevated beyond one's capacity. The recognition of the intrinsic duality of the soul enables a person to understand that his moral imperfection need in no way impede his aspiration and ability to fulfill his divinely ordained role. Once a person knows that his undesirable lusts and thoughts emanate from a fundamental source within himself that might not be within his power and duty to uproot, its presence within is not tragic, nor will it necessarily bring about an unsolvable inner crisis. On the contrary, a person can achieve perfection precisely through this knowledge. One can be righteous in all the particulars of his life and at the same time be engaged in the constant struggle within his soul.

The *Tanya* assigns to this spiritual person a new moral status, that of the *beinoni*, an intermediate level that renders a person neither righteous nor wicked in the strictest sense.

The *beinoni* is the hero of this book: It addresses him, discusses him, and carries his name (one of the titles the author gave the *Tanya* is *Sefer shel Beinonim*, “Book of *Beinonim*”). The *beinoni* is described in this work as “one who serves God,” whose entire life is a perpetual battle for the sake of the Divine, whose inner struggle is a hymn of praise to his Creator. The concept of the *beinoni* as an ideal to which every person should aspire. It opens the door to everyone, regardless of spiritual status, to be counted among those who aspire to true greatness – those who serve God in truth.

The Title Page

THE STUDY OF THE *TANYA* CUSTOMARILY BEGINS HERE, from the book's title page, because the author of the *Tanya* wrote it himself (though he calls himself the "compiler") and because it perfectly characterizes the essence of the book.

סֵפֶר לִקְוֵי אִמְרִים *Sefer Likkutei Amarim*

19 Kislev

חֵלֶק רִאשׁוֹן Part 1

Traditionally, the *Tanya* by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi consists of five parts. The first section is called *Likkutei Amarim*, "A Compilation of Teachings," or *Sefer shel Beinonim*, "The Book of *Beinonim*," as delineated in the text of the title page below. Yet still in the author's time, it became known simply as the *Tanya*, after the word that begins the book.¹

This section, *Likkutei Amarim*, which was published first, is the most central part of the book. Consisting of fifty-three chapters, it is the most complete section. According to Chabad tradition, the fifty-three chapters of *Likkutei Amarim*, along with the introduction, correspond to the fifty-four *parashot* in the Torah, supporting the claim that the *Tanya* is indeed the "Written Torah of Hasidism." ❧

הַנִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם סֵפֶר שֶׁל בֵּינוּנִים entitled *Sefer shel Beinonim*

THE SECTIONS OF THE *TANYA*

❧ The second section of the *Tanya*, *Hinukh Katan*, "Education of a Child," was *Sha'ar HaYihud VeHa'emuna*, also called originally meant to be equal in length to

1. See chap. 1 below.

This title, provided by the author of the *Tanya*, expresses the uniqueness of the book. The establishment of the concept of the *beinoni*, the intermediate-level individual, is undoubtedly its novel axis. While the idea of the *beinoni* is not new, the author of the *Tanya* gives the term an additional meaning that differs from the foundational position of most approaches in *mussar* (moral and ethical conduct).

The ideal personality portrayed in *mussar* works is that of the *tzaddik*, the righteous person, which is presented as an attainable goal. This book, on the other hand, was written for *beinonim*, for those who are neither *tzaddik* nor *rasha*, neither righteous nor wicked. The *Tanya*, then, relinquishes that ideal image, postulating that such a goal is in fact unattainable for most people and is not expected of them. Instead, the *beinoni* is presented as the ideal that every person can and must attain. ❧

מְלוֹקֵט מִפִּי סִפְרִים וּמִפִּי סוֹפְרִים
קְדוּשֵׁי עֲלִיּוֹן נִשְׁמָתָם עֵדוֹן, **Compiled from the works and teachings of the holy masters, whose souls are in the Garden of Eden,**

As was the practice of other authors who conducted themselves with modesty, the author of the *Tanya* does not state that he wrote this book but merely compiled it. Nevertheless, without a doubt, the *Tanya* is obviously not a compilation. Though he certainly has sources for every idea he presents, the author offers an original perspective and line of thinking, with very few quotations from other places. Those few that

the first part, comprising fifty-three chapters, but for various reasons the author of the *Tanya* did not complete it. Consisting of twelve chapters, *Sha'ar HaYihud VeHa'emuna* deals primarily with divine providence, a doctrine that teaches that God is within the world and that isolating even one aspect of the universe from the Divine, no matter how small, fundamentally negates the entire paradigm of God's existence.

The third part, *Iggeret HaTeshuva*, "Letter on Repentance," deals entirely with the

topic of repentance. It too is not complete, consisting, like *Sha'ar HaYihud VeHa'emuna*, of twelve chapters.

The fourth part, *Iggeret HaKodesh*, "The Holy Epistle," consists of a collection of letters. Most were not printed in their entirety in the book; only those parts that bear relevance to hasidim in general were included.

The fifth part, *Kuntres Aḥaron*, "Last Treatise," consists of a series of essays and supplements to topics addressed in the previous sections.

he does cite are presented in a novel way, adding an angle and approach that is uniquely his.

It is commonly accepted that the “works” mentioned here, besides the basic canonical texts (the *Tanakh*, Talmud, *Zohar*, *Shulhan Arukh*, and writings of the Arizal), refer to the works of the Maharal of Prague, the author’s direct paternal ancestor by seven generations, *Shenei Luhot HaBerit* by Rabbi Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz, and *Reshit Hōkhma* by Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas.

The “masters” refer primarily to the author’s rabbis and mentors: the Maggid of Mezeritch, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s foremost mentor; Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel of Vitebsk, the Maggid’s disciple and successor; and the Maggid’s son, Rabbi Avraham, famously known as Rabbi Avraham HaMalakh (Rabbi Avraham the Angel), who was both a peer and

THE BEINONI

☞ The concept of the *beinoni* acquires unique significance here. He is not just an average person, someone who is not totally righteous yet not entirely evil. His level is not simply one of compromise or a blend of good and wicked. Rather, it is a unique quality in and of itself.

All the works of *mussar* that discuss the *beinoni* see it as a temporary stage that one needs to move beyond, a phase of spiritual entanglement that will stabilize in time. Yet this book defines the essence of the *beinoni* as perpetual: Every day of his life a person engages in the spiritual struggle for his self-actualization on the journey toward holiness, never reaching the final resolution of his soul’s challenges. The *beinoni* transcends the level of average men and even seems like a complete tzaddik relative to others, yet within he fights a constant battle, enduring the perpetual pain of imperfection.

Although the *beinoni* has not reached the level of tzaddik because he cannot attain a constant state of holiness and control over his evil inclination, he certain-

ly merits authentic closeness with God. When he achieves that union, that is his ultimate truth, his authentic reality. And if he falls from that level of closeness, that too is his ultimate truth.

In contrast to the tzaddik, who maintains an equilibrium, a constant state of holiness, the *beinoni* finds himself perpetually off balance. In a certain sense, the overall goal of the *Tanya* is to show the *beinoni* how to maintain his equilibrium, how to remain on the level where he must still grapple with his evil inclination and restrain himself from sinning in action, speech, and thought.

This characterization of the *beinoni* occupies the central focus of the entire book and the theological infrastructure that is built on it. It is the central cornerstone from which the book emerges and to which it returns. This does not mean it is an easier book to understand, but this work undoubtedly differs drastically from other works of *mussar* by portraying attainable, practical goals.

disciple of the author. It is told that the Maggid instructed the two to make a trade: Rabbi Shneur Zalman would teach Rabbi Avraham Talmud and *halakha* for two hours every day in exchange for receiving two hours of tutelage in the wisdom of Kabbala.² Due to his unique relationship with the “Angel,” Rabbi Shneur Zalman felt that he had a deep, loving connection – almost familial – with Rabbi Avraham’s father, the great Maggid. He used to say that he attained the inner dimension of the Torah of Hasidism from the Maggid and his son, meaning that he received it from the Maggid like a son from his father.

Some count the Ba’al Shem Tov among the masters mentioned here. Although Rabbi Shneur Zalman did not learn from him in person, he considered him his spiritual grandfather and felt as if he had learned Torah from him, not through the intermediary of *sefarim*, books, but directly, as if the Ba’al Shem Tov was one of his *sofrim*, masters, and teachers.

מְיוֹסֵד עַל פֶּסוּק: “כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר
מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְבְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ” (דברים
ל, יד),
based on the verse “Rather, the
matter is very near to you, in
your mouth and in your heart,
to perform it” (Deut. 30:14),

This verse serves as the premise for the entire book. Far more than a decorative catch phrase, it is the central motif woven throughout the work, from page to page, from one chapter to the next.

This verse expresses two essential ideas. First, that which is incumbent on man is attainable, and second, that “the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart.” The key message of the book lies in its optimism, in the premise that man can not only practice the methods described therein but can even draw close to God in the process and transform himself, through his words and thoughts, evoking emotions and experiences that allow him to blaze a new spiritual path.

לְבַאֵר הַיֵּטֵב אֵיךְ הוּא קְרוֹב מְאֹד, to thoroughly clarify how this
matter is indeed very near,

2. See *Beit Rebbe*, vol. 1, chap. 2; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5708, p. 177.

The author of the *Tanya* will proceed to explain how the word of God, and God Himself, are truly very close to every individual. He will explore how it is possible to attain lofty spiritual levels and to elevate oneself so that one may cleave to the Divine through the particular avenue of divine service that he outlines in this book.

בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲרוּכָה וְקְצֵרָה, through a long yet short path,

These three words are perhaps the most condensed description of the author of the *Tanya*'s entire approach. They are borrowed from the famous story in the Talmud in which Rabbi Yehoshua ben Ḥananya said, "In all my days, no person ever defeated me except for a woman, a young boy, and a young girl."³ He goes on to relate how he encountered a young boy at a crossroads and asked him how to get to the city. The boy answered, "This path is short yet long, and that path is long yet short." Rabbi Yehoshua chose the short, long path and found that though it was short it did not actually lead into the city. It led to the city's outskirts, to a place surrounded by gardens and orchards that blocked the trails leading to the city. He had to return and choose the long, short way.

The shorter yet longer path seems like a shortcut, but it is riddled with impediments and ultimately prevents passage. Conversely, the longer yet shorter way is more tiring and complicated, but ultimately it proves to be the safer path that leads to the desired destination. The path of divine service that the author of the *Tanya* presents here is the "long yet short path." ❧

בְּעִזְרַת ה' יִתְבַּרְךְ, with the help of God

By using this common phrase, the author of the *Tanya* did not intend only that he would explain the ideas herein with God's help, but also

THE LONG YET SHORT PATH

❧ Theoretically, there are shorter paths through which one can jump beyond the known boundaries of normalcy and quickly cover immense distances through spiritual shortcuts. The problem with these shortcuts is that they are unreliable. Some

3. *Eiruvin* 53b.

that the goals put forth in this work can be attained with God's help. Although the path that is delineated is long and demands serious effort and investment of time, one encounters God's help to assist him. Even this path does not consist solely of one's own toil and suffering from below, but offers glimmerings of hope from above and windows of divine assistance along the way.

harbor the highest conceivable level of danger. Some are totally theoretical and, for all intents and purposes, impassable.

A person seeking enlightenment may kindle the spiritual equivalent of a pile of straw in his eagerness for illumination. Though it ignites instantaneously, it is quickly extinguished and he remains as he was – on the same level, in the same place. The path presented by the author of the *Tanya* is the “long” way, a path that does not guarantee immediate spiritual heights.

This is not a path where one may leap from one level to the next, skipping from one idea to another. It is not a way through which an individual becomes catapulted from a simple person to one who is lofty.

It is instead a path that demands serious work, practice, and training, with very few revelatory experiences. One must invest focused effort with his cognitive attributes, with his wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, in order to build an awareness and the proper emotional framework. This path works from the ground up, not relying on inspiration from above. It is considered long on the one hand, while short on the other, because at the end of the day it is a thoroughly dependable system with a solid base.

Though it is attainable and entirely possible to achieve, the shortest path is indeed the longer one, and one should be prepared to invest effort and time to achieve it.

Approbations

הַסְּכָמַת הָרַב הַחֲסִיד הַמְּפֹרָס אִישׁ
אֱלֹהֵי קְדוּשׁ יֵאָמֵר לוֹ מוֹדְנֵנו הָרַב רַבִּי
מִשׁוּלָם זֹסִיל מֵאַנְפּוֹלִי:

Approbation of the famous
rabbi and hasid, a Godly man
of saintly renown, our master
and teacher Rabbi Meshulam
Zusil of Anipoli:

הִנֵּה בְּרֵאוֹתַי אֶת הַכְּתָבִים שֶׁל הָרַב
הָאִי גָאוֹן אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים קְדוּשׁ וְטָהוֹר
אֶסְפְּקֶלְדֵיָא הַמְּאִידָה וְטוֹב אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וְאֲשֶׁר הַפְּלִיא ה' חֲסִדוֹ וְנָתַן בְּלִבּוֹ
הַטָּהוֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל אֱלֹהֵי לְהַרְאוֹת
עִם ה' דְּרָכָיו הַקְּדוּשִׁים. וְרִצּוֹנוֹ הִיָּה
שְׁלֵא לְהַעֲלוֹת אֶת הַכְּתָבִים הֵהֵם
לְבֵית הַדְּפוּס מִחֲמַת שְׂאִין דְּרַפּוֹ בְּכָךְ.
רַק מִחֲמַת הַתְּפִשְׁטוֹת הַקּוֹנְטְרָסִים הֵהֵם
בְּקָרֵב כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַעֲתִקוֹת רַבּוֹת מִיָּדֵי
סוֹפְרִים מְשׁוּנְמִים וּמִחֲמַת רִיבּוֹי הַעֲתִקוֹת
שׁוֹנוֹת רַבּוֹ הַטְּעוּיֹת סוֹפֵר בְּמֵאֹד. וְהוֹכֵרַח
לְהַבִּיא הַקּוֹנְטְרָסִים הֵהֵם לְבֵית הַדְּפוּס.

I have seen the writings of this
rabbi and luminary, a man
of God, saintly and pure, a
leading light, and I assert that
he has done well. God has
been incredibly kind and has
inspired his pure heart to do
all this and to show God's peo-
ple His holy ways. The author
initially intended to not have
these writings published, for it
is not his way. But he reconsid-
ered his position on account of
the widespread dissemination
of many copies of these pam-
phlets among the entire Jew-
ish people by various scribes,
and as a result of the copious
errors among the many copies,
the author was compelled to
have these pamphlets printed.

וְהַעִיר ה' אֶת רוּחַ הַשְּׁוֹתֵפִים
הַמְלַמֵּד הַמְכַבֵּד הַרְבֵּי הַמוֹפְלָג

God has thus inspired the two business partners – the outstanding, distinguished scholar, our teacher

הַוְתִּיק מִזְרְנוּ הָרַב רַבִּי שְׁלֹם
שְׁכָנָא בֶּן מִזְרְנוּ הָרַב רַבִּי נֹחַ
וְהַמְלַמֵּד הַמְכַבֵּד הַרְבֵּי הַמוֹפְלָג
הַוְתִּיק מִזְרְנוּ הָרַב רַבִּי מֹרְדֵכַי
בֶּן מִזְרְנוּ הָרַב רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל הַלֵּוִי
לְהַבִּיא הַקּוֹנְטְרָסִים הַהֵם לְבֵית
הַדְּפוּס בְּסֻלְאָוִיטָא וּלְפַעֲלָא
טָבָא אַמְרֵתִי יִישַׁר חֵילָא אֲךָ עָלוּ
בְּלַבָּם מַגֹּזר מִסְבִּיב מִן הַדְּפוּסִים
אֲשֶׁר רַבּוּ שְׁדַרְכָּן לְהַיִּיק וּלְקַלְקַל
הַמְאֹשְׁרִים אִי לֹאֵת גְּמִרְנוּ
בְּלִבֵּינוּ לִיתֵן הַסְּכָמָה לְבַל יְרִים
אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ וְאֵת רַגְלוֹ לְגִרוֹם
לְהַמְדַּפֵּסִים הַנּוֹכְרִים לְעֵיל שׁוּם
הַיִּיק חֵם וְשְׁלוֹם בְּהַשְׁגַּת גְּבוּל
בְּשׁוּם אֹפֶן. וְאִסּוּר לְשׁוּם אָדָם
לְדַפּוֹס הַסֵּפֶר הַנּוֹכְרִים לְעֵיל בְּלִתִּי
יְדִיעַת הַמְדַּפֵּסִים הַנּוֹכְרִים לְעֵיל
עַד מִשְׁךְ חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים רִעּוּפִים
מִיּוֹם דְּלִמְטָה.

and master Rabbi Shalom Shakhna, son of our teacher and master Rabbi Noah, and the outstanding, distinguished scholar, our teacher and master Rabbi Mordekhai, son of our teacher and master Rabbi Shmuel HaLevi – to publish these pamphlets in Slavita. I congratulate them on this good deed. Yet their hearts were filled with apprehension with regard to the printing houses that have proliferated, which tend to cause damage and ruin the reputable ones. In light of this, we have decided to grant our approval so that no one may make any move to cause the aforementioned printers even the slightest amount of damage, God forbid, by infringing upon their exclusive rights in any manner. It is forbidden for anyone to print the aforementioned book without the consent of the aforementioned printers for a period of five consecutive years from the date given below.

וְשׁוֹמְעֵי לְדַבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים יִבָּא
עָלֵינוּ בְּרַבְתָּ טוֹב. הַכֹּל דְּבָרֵי
הַדּוֹרֵשׁ זֹאת לְכָבוֹד הַתּוֹרָה
הַיּוֹם יוֹם ג' שְׁנֵיכָפֵל בּוֹ כִּי טוֹב
פְּרַשְׁתָּ תְּבֵא שְׁנַת פְּדוּתֵינוּ לְפָרֵט
קָטָן.

Those who adhere to these words of mine will be blessed with good. These are the words of one who demands this for the honor of the Torah today, Tuesday, which is doubly blessed with good, of the week in which *Parashat Ki Tavo* is read, in the year 5556 (1796).

הַקְטָן מִשׁוּלָם זֹסִיל מֵאַנְפּוֹלִי The lowly Meshulam Zusil of Anipoli

הַסְכַּמַת הַרַב הַחֲסִיד הַמְפּוֹרָסִים אִישׁ אֱלֹהֵי קְדוּשׁ יֵאמֵר לוֹ מוֹרְנוּ הַרַב רַבִּי יְהוּדָא לֵיב הַכֹּהֵן: **Approbation of the famous rabbi and hasid, a Godly man of saintly renown, our master and teacher Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaKohen:**

חֲכָמַת אָדָם תִּאִיר פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּרֵאוֹתַי יְדֵי קֹדֶשׁ הַמְחִבֵּר הַרַב הַגָּאוֹן אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים קְדוּשׁ וְטָהוֹר חֲסִיד וְעֵנִי אֲשֶׁר מִכְּבֹד נִגְלָה מִסְתָּרָיו יוֹשֵׁב בְּשֵׁבֶת תַּחֲכֻמוֹנֵי אֶצֶל אַדְוִינֵנו מוֹרֵינוּ וְרַבֵּינוּ גָּאוֹן עוֹלָם וְדֹלָה מִיָּם מִבְּאֵר מִיָּם חַיִּים וְכַעַת יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַגְלוֹת דְּבָרֵי קְדוּשׁוֹ הַמְּחֻבֵּר לְהֵבִיא לְבֵית הַדְּפוּס לְלַמֵּד לְעַם ה' דְּרָבֵי קְדוּשׁ בְּאֲשֶׁר כָּל אֶחָד יַחֲזֶה בְּפִנְיָמוֹת דְּבָרָיו וְהַמְפּוֹרָסִים אֵין צְרִיךְ רְאִיָּה רַק מִחֲשֵׁשׁ קְלָקוּל הַדְּבָר שְׂלֵא יִגְרוּם הַיִּזְק לְמַדְפִּיסִים בְּאֵתִי לִיתֵן תּוֹקֵף וְאַזְהָרָה לְבָל יִרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ וְרָגְלוֹ לְדְפוּס עַד מִשְׁךְ חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים מִיּוֹם דְּלִמְטָה. **A man's wisdom illuminates the face of the earth. This is evident as I peruse the holy work of the author, the rabbi and luminary, a man of God, saintly and pure, pious and humble, whose hidden greatness was revealed long ago when he sat in the council of the wise, by our master, teacher, and rabbi, a luminary of the world, the Maggid of Mezeritch, and drew waters of wisdom from the wellspring. Now let the Jewish people rejoice as the author's holy words, which have been collated in preparation for printing, are to be revealed in order to teach the nation of God the ways of holiness, which each individual will see for themselves by studying the meaning inherent in the author's words. This point need not be belabored, as that which is obvious requires no proof, but it is only out of concern that something may go awry and cause harm to the printers that I have written this approbation and hereby demand and warn that no one should make any move to print this book for a period of five years from the date given below.**

וְשׁוֹמְעֵי לְדְבָרֵי אֵלֶּהָ יְבוֹא עֲלֵיו
 בְּרַכַּת טוֹב. הַכֹּל דְּבָרֵי הַמְדַבֵּר
 זֹאת לְכָבוֹד הַתּוֹרָה הַיּוֹם יוֹם ג'
 פְּרִשַׁת תְּבֵא תַקְנִיו לְפָרֶט קָטָן.

Those who adhere to these words of mine will be blessed with good. These are the words of one who speaks thus for the honor of the Torah, today, Tuesday, which is doubly blessed with good, of the week in which *Parashat Ki Tavo* is read, in the year 5556 (1796).

יְהוּדָה לֵיב הַכֹּהֵן. Yehuda Leib HaKohen

These two approbations, which are learned by many and are even included in the daily *Tanya* learning schedule instituted by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson, were written by two colleagues of the author of the *Tanya*, disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch. Though they were not the most famous of the Maggid's students, the author of the *Tanya* asked these colleagues in particular to endorse his book.

20 Kislev
(leap year)

הַסְכַּמְת הַרַבָּנִים שְׂיַחֲיוּ בְּנֵי הַגְּאוֹן
 הַמְחַבֵּר זְכוֹרוֹנו לְבִרְכָה נוֹחוֹ עֵדָן.

Approbation of the rabbis, may they live long, the sons of the eminent author, of blessed memory, whose soul is in the Garden of Eden:

הַיּוֹת שְׁהוֹסַפְּם אֶצְלֵנוּ לִיתֵן רְשׁוֹת
 וְהִרְמְנָא לְהַעֲלוֹת עַל מַכְבֵּשׁ
 הַדְּפוּס לְזִכְרוֹנוֹ לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתוּב
 דְּבָרֵי יוֹשֵׁר וְאִמְת דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹקִים
 חַיִּים שֶׁל אֲדוֹנֵנוּ אָבִינוּ מוֹרְנוּ
 וְרַבֵּנוּ זְכוֹרוֹנו לְבִרְכָה כְּתוּבִים
 בְּכַתֵּב יָדו הַקְּדוּשָׁה בְּעַצְמוֹ
 וּלְשׁוֹנו הַקְּדוּשׁ שֶׁכָּל דְּבָרָיו כְּגַחְלֵי
 אֵשׁ בּוֹעֵרוֹת יִלְהִיבוּ הַלְּבָבוֹת
 לְקַרְבָּן לְאַבְיֵהוּן שְׁבַשְׁמִים. וּבְשֵׁם
 אֲגַרְת הַקֹּדֶשׁ נִקְרָאוּ שְׂרוּפִים
 הֵיוּ אֲגַרְת שְׁלוּחַ מֵאֵת כְּבוֹד

We have hereby agreed to grant permission and authorization, as a remembrance for the children of Israel, to publish these words written with integrity and truth, words of the living God, by our master, father, teacher, and rabbi, of blessed memory, penned by his own holy hand and in his holy language, whose every word is like burning, fiery coals, igniting the hearts of the Jewish people to bring them close to their Father in Heaven. These writings, which will be appended in this

קדשתו להורות לעם ה' הדרך
ילכו בה והמעשה אשר יעשו.

printing to the first three sections of the *Tanya*, are titled *Iggeret HaKodesh* (The Holy Epistle), since most of the letters contained therein were sent by his holy honor, our father, to instruct the nation of God regarding the proper path they should walk and the mode of conduct to which they should adhere.

ומחמת שבכמה מקומות הציב
לו ציונים בספר לקוטי אמרים
שלו ודברי תורה עניים במקום
אחד ועשירים במקום אחר
ומה גם בשביל דבר שנתחדש
בו קונטרס אחרון על איזה
פרקים אשר כתב בעת חיבורו
הספר לקוטי אמרים פלפול
ועיון עמוק על מאמרי זהר ועין
חיים ופרי עין חיים שנראים
בסותרים זה את זה וברוח
מבינתו מישבם כל דיבור על
אופניו שכתב בלקוטי אמרים.

In several places in *Iggeret HaKodesh*, our father referred to his book *Likkutei Amarim*, and since words of Torah are scarce in one place while plentiful in another, complementary sources are necessary to gain a complete picture of the subject. Moreover, these writings contain new material, a last treatise known as *Kuntres Aharon* (Last Treatise), on certain chapters, which he penned while writing the book *Likkutei Amarim*. This last treatise represents a profound analysis and inquiry pertaining to passages in the *Zohar*, *Etz Hayyim*, and *Pri Etz Hayyim* that seem contradictory. With his understanding spirit, our father reconciles each statement in its context, based on what he wrote in *Likkutei Amarim*.

ראו ראינו שראוי ונכון לתפרם
עם ספר לקוטי אמרים ואגרת
התשובה של כבוד קדשת
אדוננו אבינו מורנו ורבינו
זכרנו לברכה.

We have therefore deemed it fit and proper to attach *Iggeret HaKodesh* and *Kuntres Aharon* as addendums to this book, *Likkutei Amarim* and *Iggeret HaTeshuva*, written by his holy honor, our master, father, teacher, and rabbi, of blessed memory.

אִי לְזֹאת בָּאנוּ לְהַטִּיל גּוֹדֵא רַבָּה
וְגִזְרַת נַח"שׁ דְּרַבְּנֵי דְלִית לָהּ
אֶסְוֹתָא שְׁלֵא יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ
לְהַדְפִּים כְּתַבְנִיתָם אוּ זֶה בְּלֵא זֶה
מִשְׁךְ חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים מִיּוֹם דְּלִמְטָה.

In view of this, we hereby impose a prohibition and a decree of excommunication of rabbinic status, for which its violation has no remedy: that no one may make a move to print these writings in their present form, or one without the other, for a period of five years from the date given below.

בְּרַם כְּגֹזֵן דָּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹדוּעֵי
שְׁבַעוֹנוֹתֵינוּ הָרַבִּים סָפוּ תַמוֹ
כְּתִבֵי יָדוֹ הַקְּדוּשָׁה בְּעֶצְמוֹ אֲשֶׁר
הָיוּ בְּדִקְדוּקָא גְדוֹל לֹא חִסֵּד וְלֹא
יִתֵּר אוֹת אַחַת וְלֹא נִשְׁאַר כִּי
אִם זֶה הַמַּעַט מֵהַרְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר
נִלְקְטוּ אֶחָד לְאֶחָד מֵהַעֲתָקוֹת
הַמְּפוֹזְרִים אֲצֵל הַתְּלָמִידִים
וְאִם הַמֵּצֵא תִּמְצֵא אֵיזֶה טְעוֹת
שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי יִבִּין יִמְצֵא הַטְּעוֹת
דְּמוּכָח מִטְּעוֹת סוֹפֵד וְהַפְּוֹנָה
תְּהִיָּה בְּרוּרָה:

However, this must be made known: Unfortunately, our father's manuscripts, written by his own holy hand with great precision, without one extraneous or omitted letter, have been lost. There remain only but these few writings out of many, which were collected one by one from copies scattered among our father's disciples. In the event that any error whatsoever is found, as this is inevitable, the obvious mistake should be attributed to a scribal error, but the meaning will be clear.

הַיּוֹם יוֹם ה' כ"ב אֲיִיר תַקע"ד
לְפָרֵט קָטָן

Thursday, 22 Iyar 5574 (1814)

נֵאוּם

Signed

דוֹב בֶּעַר בֶּן אֲדוֹנֵי אָבִי מוֹרְנוּ
וְרַבְּנֵנוּ הַגָּאוֹן הַחֲסִיד קְדוֹשׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל מְרַנָּא וְרַבְּנָא שְׁנֵיאוֹד
זְלָמָן זְכוֹרָנוּ לְבִרְכָה נִשְׁמָתוֹ בְּגַנְיֵי
מְרוֹמִים.

Dovber, son of my master, father, teacher, and rabbi, the eminent and pious saint of Israel, our master and teacher, Shneur Zalman, of blessed memory, whose soul is in the hidden chambers of Heaven.

וּנְאוּם Signed

חַיִּים אַבְרָהָם בֶּן אֲדוֹנֵי אָבִי מוֹרְנוּ וְרַבְּנוּ הַגָּאוֹן הַחֲסִיד מְרַנָּא וְרַבְּנָא שְׁנֵי אֲוֹר זְלִמָן זְכָר יְצִדִיק לְבָרָכָה נְשַׁמְתוּ בְּגִנְי מְרוֹמִים. Hāyyim Avraham, son of my master, father, teacher, and rabbi, our eminent and pious master and teacher, Shneur Zalman, may the memory of the righteous be blessed, whose soul is in the hidden chambers of Heaven.

וּנְאוּם Signed

מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֲדוֹנֵי אָבִי מוֹרְנוּ וְרַבְּנוּ הַגָּאוֹן הַחֲסִיד שְׁנֵי אֲוֹר זְלִמָן זְכָרוֹנוּ לְבָרָכָה נְשַׁמְתוּ בְּגִנְי מְרוֹמִים. Moshe, son of my master, father, teacher, and rabbi, the eminent and pious Shneur Zalman, of blessed memory, whose soul is in the hidden chambers of Heaven.

The author of the *Tanya*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, is not mentioned by name in the approbations to the original edition, because initially the book was published anonymously so that he would not promote his own fame and also so that the work would be judged on its own merits. The author of the *Tanya* suspected that his involvement in the conflict between the hasidim and their opponents would prevent certain camps from reading it. If printed anonymously, all streams would be more open to learning it.

And so it was. Many who studied the early editions praised the book effusively without knowing the identity of its author.

Compiler's Introduction

THIS INTRODUCTION CONTAINS TWO PARTS. THE FIRST cautions against relying just on written works of *mussar* to improve one's service of God. This is why hasidim must travel to the Rebbe and not suffice with studying his written works to benefit from his teachings. The second part explains the reason why, despite this warning, the author of the *Tanya* wrote this type of book.

וְהִיא אֲגֻרַת הַשְּׁלוּחָה לְכָל לְלוֹת
אֲנָשֵׁי שְׁלוּמֵינוּ יִשְׁמְרֵם צִדְקָם
וְגֹאֲלֵם:

The following is a letter sent to all the members of our community of hasidim, may God, their Rock and Redeemer, protect them:

20 Kislev

21 Kislev
(leap year)

This introduction was taken from an open letter addressed to all hasidim, not just one specific community or person. But though the author of the *Tanya* is addressing a readership outside his immediate circle, he is certainly also directing these words inward, since this work provoked, to a certain degree, even his own hasidic colleagues. The complaint was not just against what they considered to be an overly rational approach, but against the very act of committing the ideas herein to writing in a formulaic way.

The hasidic movement thrived via the direct, personal relationship between Rebbe and hasid, and writing down any teachings seemed to breach this unique connection. The written word contains a lifeless element that is incapable of truly healing the ailments of the soul. Teaching prepared Torah, and furthermore, writing it down, was therefore considered an act of petrification.

In this vein, early hasidim interpreted the verse “And you shall inquire [*vedarashta*] diligently, and behold, it is true, the matter is

correct, this abomination was performed in Israel” (Deut. 17:4) as saying: When the teaching [*derasha*] is good, even containing words of truth, but “the matter” was prepared in advance (the word *nakhon*, “correct,” from the verse and *hakhana*, “preparation,” share the same root), then “an abomination was performed in Israel.”

Due to this dilemma, the Ba’al Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezeritch, as well many other hasidic leaders in the earlier generations, avoided writing entirely. They felt that the written word did not serve as an effective medium for transmitting hasidic teachings from one soul to another. Writing may succeed in communicating other topics but not Hasidism.

This introduction comes to clarify that the author of the *Tanya* did not approach the writing of this book lightly. He had a clear awareness of the limitations and dangers entailed in constructing the concepts of hasidic *mussar* into one unified edifice. He even responds to some of these inherent obstacles throughout the work, as will be explained below. ❧

אֱלֵיכֶם אִישִׁים אֶקְרָא, שְׁמְעוּ אֵלַי
רוֹדְפֵי צְדָק מִבְּקֵשֵׁי ה', וְיִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיכֶם
אֱלֹקִים לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד קָטָן כָּל אַנְשֵׁי
שְׁלוֹמֵנו דְּמְדִינָתֵינוּ וְסֻמוּכֹת שְׂלָה,
אִישׁ עַל מְקוֹמוֹ יְבוֹא לְשָׁלוֹם וְחַיִּים
עַד הָעוֹלָם נִצַּח סְלָה וְעַד, אָמֵן בֵּין
יְהִי רָצוֹן.

To you, men, I call! Heed me, pursuers of righteousness, seekers of God, and may God listen to you, both great and small, all the members of our community of hasidim in our country and in the surrounding regions. May each man in his place attain peace and eternal life! Amen, may this be His will.

TRANSCRIBING HASIDIC TEACHINGS

❧ The story is told that the Ba’al Shem Tov saw a demon holding a book in a dream. The Ba’al Shem Tov asked, “What book are you holding?”

The demon answered, “This is the book that you authored.”

The next day, the Ba’al Shem Tov gathered his disciples and demanded, “Who is writing Torah in my name?”

One of the students admitted that he had collected some of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s teachings and written them down. The Ba’al Shem Tov asked him to show him the writings. He studied them and said, “I never said one word written here!”

As the author of the *Tanya* will clarify below, this book is geared toward particular people. Unsure of whether the book will be as impactful for those outside the demographic that he outlines, he addresses “all the members of our community [of hasidim] in our country and in the surrounding regions” – that is, the hasidim of White Russia and its environs, a group that, at this stage, was only vaguely identified as Chabad hasidim.

הִנֵּה מוֹדַעַת זֹאת כִּי מִדְּגֻלַּת בְּפוּמֵי
דְּאֵינְשֵׁי בְּכָל אֲנָשֵׁי שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ לֵאמֹד
כִּי אֵינָה דוֹמָה שְׁמִיעַת דְּבָרֵי מוֹסֵר
לְרֵאֵייה וְקִרְיָאָה בְּסִפְרִים,

It is well known that throughout our community of hasidim people are accustomed to saying that hearing words of moral guidance is not the same as seeing and reading them in books.

This hasidic saying is a play on the talmudic statement “Hearing should not be greater than seeing” (*Rosh HaShana* 25b), conveying the opposite message from that of the Talmud. When it comes to awakening the heart to service of God, it is hearing that is superior to seeing – that is, to reading books. One should not suffice solely with studying the works of tzaddikim and leaders of past generations, but rather a person must journey to the living sage in his time to hear those words directly.

שֶׁהַקּוֹרֵא קוֹרֵא לְפִי דְרָכוֹ וְדַעַתּוֹ
וְלְפִי הַשְּׂגָת וְתַפְסִיט שְׂכָלוֹ בְּאִשְׁד
הוּא שָׂם.

For a reader reads a book according to his inclination and mindset and in accordance with his intellect’s ability to comprehend and grasp the concepts therein at that moment.

No book, even the greatest and holiest among them, is capable of adapting itself to its reader. The reader himself determines how he reads and what he understands. As the author of the *Tanya* points out, every reader is limited by two essential restrictions.

First, he reads “according to his inclination and mindset.” No person reads passively; he registers the subject matter according to his understanding and interpretation. What he gleans passes through the

lens of his spiritual tendencies, mood, and status at the moment that he is reading the book. Two people, reading the same work, experience it uniquely. They may read the same line, yet they will be affected in totally different ways. Every person has his personal predisposition, outlook, and unique life experience, which can distort his understanding of what he sees. This conceptual and emotional distortion is impossible to ignore.

The second limitation confines the reader to “his intellect’s ability to comprehend and grasp [the concepts therein].” Even if he aligns his soul with the true meaning of the words he is reading, he remains incapable of absorbing its message in the optimal way if he lacks the intellectual aptitude to comprehend it.

וְאִם שִׁכְלוּ וְדַעְתוֹ מְבוּלָבְלִים, If one’s intellect or mind is confused,

The inability to “comprehend and grasp [the concepts therein]” does not only indicate a lack of cognitive aptitude. A person can also be in a state of confusion. There are two aspects to this befuddlement: that of the intellect and that of the mind. A befuddled intellect entails confusion and distortion in one’s ability to think clearly. A confused mind implies confused ideas, warped theories, and a distorted world outlook. This stems from a person’s failure to understand himself. He does not know what he is seeking and therefore cannot determine which path to take.

וּבְחִשְׁיָה יִתְהַלְכוּ בְּעִבּוֹדַת ה', and he proceeds in darkness in the service of God,

Even a wise, educated, and otherwise sharp individual may be confused when it comes to matters of divine service because connection to God does not just demand intellectual understanding. It also touches on that which is the most transcendent and lofty while penetrating to the most subtle stirrings of the soul.

The risk of erring and deceiving oneself in these matters, which are so complex and nuanced, is high. The slightest distortion in one’s soul or mind propels a person into total darkness. These matters demand significant work and immense divine assistance until they unleash even a glimmer of light.

בְּקוֹשֵׁי יָכוֹל לְרְאוֹת אֶת הָאוֹר בְּיָמֵינוּ
 טוֹב הַגָּנוּז בְּסִפְרֵי־סֵפֶר, אֵף כִּי מֵתוֹק
 הָאוֹר לְעֵינַיִם וּמִרְפָּא לְנַפְשׁוֹ.
 it will be difficult to perceive the
 “light that was good” hidden within
 the books, though the light is sweet
 to the eyes and a remedy for the
 soul.

Although the *Tanya* contains few quotations, its liberal use of biblical phrases and adages of the Sages serves to make connections and to add additional layers of meaning. Here the author of the *Tanya* seamlessly weaves in the verse “God saw the light that it was good” (Gen. 1:4) and alludes to a statement of the Midrash that divulges that God hid away the light that He created during the six days of Creation – a light that He declares as “good” – for the righteous.¹ The Ba’al Shem Tov teaches that God hid this light within the Torah.² This implies that every holy book contains a powerful light, the light of Creation, the light of God, within its pages. But since one who studies a holy book sees its content through the lens of his understanding and awareness, he himself may occlude his perception of that delightful, divine light.

No matter how objectively sacred a topic, committing it to writing makes it susceptible to the whims of the reader, who may warp its message in one way or another. As a result, he may not be moved by it because he is missing its hidden sweetness. He is unaware of its capacity to serve as a “remedy for the soul.” He does not understand its healing power, which is sought out by spiritual seekers so they may take refuge in its pages.

The problem lies in the transmission of a written, abstract topic to personal application. While intellectual comprehension can be problematic as well, it poses less of an issue. The dilemma lies more in palpably relating to the subject and actually implementing the ideas in the particulars of one’s life.

The reader of a book finds himself necessarily confined to the limitations of his intrinsic subjectivity. Blind to his own deficiencies, man is incapable of recognizing the cures for his ailment. How can he find the way if he does not know where he erred? Learning directly from one’s

1. *Bereshit Rabba* 3:6; *Shemot Rabba* 35:1.

2. See *Ba’al Shem Tov al HaTorah, Parashat Bereshit* 27, 45.

rabbi allows the teacher to tailor the subject matter to the particular spiritual needs of his student at that moment in time. Furthermore, the seeker can query and clarify misunderstandings until he reaches a thorough apprehension.

By contrast, when a person reads from a book, he could be totally unaware that he misunderstands the subject matter and that through his mistake he is straying from the correct path. He risks remaining as he was, while the illumination contained in the book does not endow him with the benefit and transformation that it could have engendered.

יְבַר מִן דֵּינָא, Besides this limitation,

Even if one has minimized his intrinsic bias with regard to the subject matter, and he has the capacity to understand it, making him a worthy vessel to be illuminated, the hidden light itself has a certain inherent limitation that prevents it from being transmitted to him.

**הִנֵּה סִפְרֵי הַיְדָאָה הַבְּנוּיִים books that cultivate fear of God based on
עַל פִּי שִׁכְלֵי אָנוּשִׁי human intellect**

Many *mussar* works are philosophical in nature, consisting mainly of human thought and logic. Though indisputably crucial, even a great work such as *Hovot HaLevavot* is built to a large degree on the intellect and mindset of the author.

**בְּיִדְדָאֵי אִינְן שׁוֹיִן לְכָל נַפְשׁ, are certainly not equally appropriate for
כִּי אִין כָּל הַשְּׂכָלִים וְהַדְּעוֹת every individual, for not all intellects
שׁוֹת, וְאִין שִׁכְלֵי אָדָם זֶה and minds are identical. That which pro-
מִתְפַּעֵל וּמִתְעוֹרֵר מִמֶּה foundly affects and inspires one individ-
שִׁמְתִּפְעֵל וּמִתְעוֹרֵר שִׁכְלֵי ual's intellect does not affect and inspire
חֲבִירוֹ, the intellect of another,**

Theoretically, every intellect is rational and therefore capable of rational comprehension, and anything that is logical can be apprehended through logic. However, the difference between people lies, not in their raw cognitive faculties, but rather in the bridge between the concept

and the person. Ideas affect different people in different ways. An idea that may speak very deeply to the mind and heart of one person may not move another at all. What may inspire one person to the highest level of excitement and spiritual transcendence may not engender a significant response in another.

The questions posed in a book of *mussar*, as great as it may be in its own right, are not necessarily those that a person from a different time or culture might ask. The answers offered therein, even if true, may not speak to the reader and so will fail to awaken his soul. He will walk away without any notable inspiration to grow because of what he read.

This is not a denial of the holiness of these works but rather notes their inherent limitation. A book that is written on the basis of human apprehension speaks to its author and to those who have some resonance with it, while there will always be those who are unaffected by it. ❧

וְכִמּוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל גִּבְיֵי
בְּרַבְתַּת חֲכָם הָרָזִים עַל שְׁשִׁים
רִיבּוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, שְׂאִין יְדַעוּתֵיהֶם
דּוֹמוֹת זֶז לְזֶז וְכו' (ברכות נח, א),
as our Rabbis stated with regard
to the blessing of *hakham harazim*,
“blessed is He who knows all secrets,”
which is recited upon seeing six hun-
dred thousand Jews at once, “One
recites this blessing because he sees a
whole nation whose minds are unlike
each other...” (*Berakhot* 58a),

MUSSAR FROM ASTRONOMY

❧ In Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, there is a section of *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* (chap. 4) that could be referred to as a “book that cultivates fear of God based on human intellect.” There Rambam teaches an astronomy lesson and concludes, “When a person contemplates these matters, becoming familiar with all the creations...his love for God increases. His soul will thirst and his flesh will yearn to love God, blessed be He” (*Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 4:12).

Some people (including people like Einstein and Kant), the more they see and know the wonders of the created universe, the more their souls are stirred. Yet there are many who learn astronomy, but their flesh does not yearn to love God. While these topics may evoke fear and love in the heart of the author, not every reader experiences that same spiritual inspiration.

This blessing expresses praise to God, who created an immense number of different people, and awe that He alone is *hakham harazim*, “He who knows all secrets,” who knows intimately the consciousness of every single individual. Among six hundred thousand people, no two are identical. Six hundred thousand people, six hundred thousand different opinions, approaches, and ways of functioning in the world.³ A book written with human intellect cannot adapt to every single one of the six hundred thousand Jewish souls. It can, perhaps, adapt to a limited number of people in a particular place and time.

וּכְמוֹ שֶׁכָּתַב הַרְמְבַּיִן ז”ל and as Ramban, of blessed memory,
בְּמִלְחַמוֹת שָׁם wrote there in *Milhamot Hashem*

In his work *Milhamot Hashem*, Ramban elucidates a novel angle of this blessing based on a story brought there in the Talmud.⁴ The story is told that Rav Hanina, son of Rav Ika, recited this blessing upon seeing Rav Pappa and Rav Huna, son of Rabbi Yehoshua. Apparently he deemed it appropriate to also recite this blessing at the sight of an accomplished sage who contains within him all opinions. Though Ramban does not include this circumstance in his conclusive halakhic parameters for the recitation of this blessing, this idea still grants one “a window into the foundations of wisdom,” as Ramban puts it.

בְּפִירוֹשׁ הַסְּפָרִי גִבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ regarding the *Sifri’s* explanation of
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בוֹ: “אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ the verse describing Joshua as “a man
בוֹ” (במדבר כו, יח), “שֶׁיָּכוֹל in whom there is spirit” (Num. 27:18):
לְהִלּוֹךְ נֶגֶד רוּחוֹ שֶׁל כָּל אֶחָד “Joshua was able to attune himself to the
וְאֶחָד” וכו’. spirit of each and every individual...”

Moses had requested, “May the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation” (Num. 27:16), that is, as leader of the children of Israel. God responded in the affirmative and commanded Moses to appoint Joshua, characterizing him as “a man in

3. Six hundred thousand is the archetypal number of the Jewish nation as a collective. See below, where the author of the *Tanya* also refers to six hundred thousand root souls of Israel.

4. *Berakhot* 58b.

whom there is spirit.” According to the *Sifri*, this crucial prerequisite for leadership meant the capacity to consider the *ruah*, the spirit or opinion, of each of his subjects.

A leader must understand his subordinates, grasp the inner workings of their souls, and comprehend the outlook of each and every person. This defines true leadership: a person capable of considering the spirit of six hundred thousand individual souls of Israel.

By contrast, it is impossible to commit an idea to writing in a way that will resonate with each and every single individual. A live teacher can align himself to the spirit of the listener and counterbalance any initial incompatibility. A rabbi who teaches the concepts of Torah and *mussar* correctly, but does not adapt himself to the student, fails to fulfill his role. He must sense the spirit of the listener and align himself accordingly. Through familiarizing himself with the listener's basic assumptions, challenges of comprehension, and modes of expression, the teacher can speak in a way that will be absorbed and heard. It follows that speaking to two people is immeasurably harder than speaking to one, and all the more so speaking to a group or writing a book. A true leader must have the gift of speaking in the language of every individual so that each will truly hear the message the leader wants to impart. ☞

A TRUE LEADER

☞ Solomon Maimon relates an interesting story (and since he was a heretic through and through, his testimony is certainly reliable). He went to see the Maggid of Mezeritch and observed the Maggid receiving his guests. The Maggid sat at the head of the table and called on each guest by name and city. He then instructed the guest to say the first verse that came to mind. After each guest offered his biblical verse, the Maggid thought for a moment and then delivered a sermon woven from each of those verses. Incredibly, every person felt that the Maggid was addressing him directly, focusing on his verse, and

addressing his personal situation with his particular life challenges.

The crucial point here lies not in his knowing the names of the guests, but rather in his ability to speak in a way that every person heard exactly what he needed to hear.

The phenomenon of a leader who can speak to fifty or a thousand people yet resonate with each one, imparting that which specifically relates to him, is impossible to achieve with a book. No book can bridge the gap between vastly different eras in time, place, and culture. Even a great sage who understands the depth of the

אֵלֶּא אֶפִּילוּ בְּסִפְרֵי הַיְדָאָה אֲשֶׁר
 יְסוּדוּתָם בְּהַרְרֵי קוֹדֶשׁ, מִדְּרָשֵׁי
 חֲכָמֵינוּ ז"ל אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ ה' דִּבֶּר
 בָּם וּמְלָתוֹ עַל לְשׁוֹנָם.

Even those books that cultivate fear of God whose foundations are rooted in the holy mountains, that is, they are based on the midrashic writings of our Sages, through whom the spirit of God spoke and His word was on their tongues, are not equally appropriate for every individual.

The problem of human diversity arises not only in works written through the confines of the author's human comprehension, but also those that were written with divine illumination. We believe that the words of our Sages are not just words of deep wisdom, but they were actually inspired by some degree of prophetic intuition. The Divine spoke through their mouths and can be found in their words. This applies not only to the early sages but also to later sages.

It is said in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov that every holy book up to and including the *Maharsha* was written with divine intuition.⁵ Even if one cannot understand the deep meaning behind every single word, he can nevertheless trust that the words of Torah sages, even in recent generations, come from a holy source.

When a person is aligned with the Torah and his intentions are pure, the spirit of God speaks through him. Even if the decisive halakhic ruling is not in accordance with the opinion of a certain sage, and the world does not accept his practice as custom, still "these and those [opinions] are the words of the living God." The sage is endowed with the power and illumination of the words uttered to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Yet even those works that include the words of such Torah sages may not resonate with every individual.

concepts is writing from his personal perspective with people who share the same time period, place, and worldview. Others

studying his work may feel like foreigners to those concepts conveyed in his book and will be unable to relate to them.

5. *Keter Shem Tov*, *Hosafot* 217; *Ba'al Shem Tov al HaTorah*, *Parashat Shoftim* 4.

וְאוֹרֵי־יְתָא וְקוֹדֶשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא
 בּוֹלָא חַד וְכָל שְׁשִׁים רְבּוּא נְשָׁמוֹת
 כְּלָלוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפְרִטֵיהֶם וּפְרִטֵי
 פְּרִטֵיהֶם,

It is true that the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all one, and all six hundred thousand root souls of the collective of Israel, as well as the souls' derivatives and their derivatives' derivatives,

Just as God is eternal and all-encompassing, the Torah is eternal and includes within it the spirit of every Jewish soul.

Six hundred thousand, the number of Jews who left Egypt, constitutes the archetypical number of the Jewish nation as a collective. It is the number of the root souls of Israel. These root souls are basic identities that divide into an infinite number of derivative souls, each with its unique qualities.⁶ Therefore, although there are only six hundred thousand souls in Israel, the divine promise that the Jewish people will be “so many they cannot be counted” (Gen. 32:12) can still be fulfilled. Yet the multitude of souls that exist in the nation are not new souls but rather are microcosmic shards of the root souls.

עַד נִיצוּץ קָל שְׁבַקְלִים וּפְחוּתֵי
 הָעֶרֶךְ שְׁבַע־עֶמִינּוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,

even the spark that vivifies the most unworthy and the least estimable among our nation, the children of Israel,

These six hundred thousand root souls encompass the entire collective of the Jewish people, from its greatest leader to the unlearned individual who lacks any spiritual assets, neither Torah wisdom nor fear of God nor the commandments.

בּוֹלְהוּ מִתְקַשְׂרָאן בְּאוֹרֵי־יְתָא
 וְאוֹרֵי־יְתָא הִיא הַמְקַשֶּׁרֶת אוֹתָן
 לְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,

are all connected to the Torah, and the Torah is what connects them to the Holy One, blessed be He,

Every aspect of each of the six hundred thousand souls is connected to the Torah. Some are aware of that connection, and some even dedicate every waking hour and conscious thought to the study of Torah. Yet

6. See chap. 37 below.

the emphasis here, conveying that everyone shares a connection with the Torah, serves to highlight that even a person who does not study any Torah, and even someone who is not even interested in Torah, is bound to it nevertheless.

The Torah serves as a path of connection with God, and so every person, no matter what, has a bond with the Torah.

פְּנוּדַע בְּיָהֳרַ הַקְּרוֹשׁ (חלק ג עג, א). as is known from the holy *Zohar* (3:73a).

The *Zohar* states, “Three dimensions are bound to each other: God, the Torah, and Israel.” The Torah is God’s Torah and clearly bound to Him. Therefore, it is an intrinsically holy entity. The Torah is also inseparable from the essence of the Jewish people, bound to each Jew, no matter what. Torah is the medium, the intermediary, through which every single soul of Israel connects to God.

The Torah speaks to every individual soul and obligates it to serve God. The words of the Torah, whether those of the Written Torah or the words of the Sages in the Oral Torah, or anything stemming from them, are not an expression of the individual personality of the author, but rather contain wisdom that draws from the all-inclusive source of the Jewish souls themselves. Every person can thus unearth his association with those holy words and resonate with them.

A written book that channels the power of the Torah, whose foundation lies in the words of the Sages, should theoretically be equally meaningful to all, since all the souls of Israel are bound to the Torah. The implication of this is that not one Jew, not even “the most unworthy and the least estimable,” should be able to claim that the Torah is not for him or that the Torah does not speak to him.

הֲרִיזָה דְּרַךְ פְּלִלוֹת לְכָל־לוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל. Nevertheless, **this bond between the Torah and Israel applies in a general way to Israel as a collective.**

The Torah as a whole is bound to the Jewish people as a collective. The 613 Torah commandments are 613 general categories that include all

the commandments that are relevant to the entirety of Israel. This sum total does not pertain to every individual; it is actually impossible for a single person to perform every mitzva. Some commandments pertain to *kohanim*, or priests, while others only to non-*kohanim*. Some mitzvot are incumbent only upon men, while others apply only to women. And some apply only to the king.

While the Torah in its entirety speaks to the essence of the Jewish people, and it resides deep within each and every Jew, the individual is connected to only a portion of the Torah. In light of this, we request in our prayers, “Grant us our portion in Torah”⁷ – guide us to the part of Torah that pertains particularly to us.

וְאַף שְׁנִיתָנָה הַתּוֹרָה לַיְדֵרֶשׁ
בְּכֹלל וּפְרָט Even though the Torah is meant to
be expounded both on a general and
specific level,

This is not a reference to one of the thirteen methods of deriving *halakhot* from the Torah. Rather, it is used in the figurative sense. It means that every aspect of Torah not only bears meaning to a collective group but also serves as a personalized message to each individual.

וּפְרָטֵי פְרָטוֹת לְכֹל נַפְשׁ פְּרָטִית
מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל הַמּוֹשְׁרֵת בָּהּ, from which can be further derived the
most individualized meaning that
resonates with each particular Jewish
soul rooted in the Torah,

The soul of every Jew is bound to the Torah. He draws from the Torah and receives essential vitality from it. The Torah speaks to him in the most intimate, personal way, uniquely coalescing to relate to his exact disposition and situation.

הֲרֵי אֵין כָּל אָדָם זֹכֵה לְהִיּוֹת
מְבִיר מְקוֹמוֹ הַפְּרָטִי שְׁבִתוֹרָה. not everyone is privileged to recog-
nize his specific place in the Torah.

In truth, the Torah communicates to each of us all the time, through every occurrence, through every experience, through every vicissitude

7. Shabbat *Amida*.

of life. But not every person merits studying Torah through this lens, picking up on the messages it whispers to his heart, to the inner recesses of his unique self. ❧

וְהָיָה אִף בְּהִלְכוֹת אִיסוּר וְהִיתָר
הַנְּגִלוֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ, מְצָאנוּ דְרָאִינוּ
מִחֲלוֹקֵת תַּנְאִים וְאַמּוֹרָאִים מִן
הַקְּצֵה אֶל הַקְּצֵה מִמֵּשׁ,

Even with regard to *halakhot* delimiting that which is prohibited and permitted, which have been revealed to us and to our children, we find and see disputes among the *tanna'im* and *amora'im*, the talmudic Sages, literally ranging from one end of the spectrum to the other.

This applies not only to elusive spiritual matters that are difficult to express and grasp, but even to concrete matters, which are easy to define and determine. Even then, disputes can arise. There is no difference whether the debate involves details or general principles, whether foundations of faith or the specifics of Jewish law. Disputes emerge in both, “literally ranging from opposite ends of the spectrum.”

For example, according to the opinion of Beit Shammai, it is a mitzva to perform a levirate marriage with one’s daughter’s co-wife, while according to Beit Hillel, performing a levirate marriage in this case is forbidden and warrants the punishment of *karet*, premature death and excision from the World to Come.

ONE’S TORAH PORTION

❧ Every person needs to know which is his relevant portion of Torah, what he needs to do right now at this unique moment, but not every person is aware of this. After the death of Rabbi Moshe Kordevero (famously known as the Ramak), Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulhan Arukh*, went to study Kabbala from the Arizal, but he would fall asleep as soon as the Arizal began speaking. Finally the Arizal told him that Lurianic Kabbala was not Rabbi Karo’s portion in Torah. Similarly, the Arizal told Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh to engage in homiletics and not Kabbala, and as a result Rab-

bi Alsheikh wrote *Torat Moshe*, a masterpiece of Torah homiletics.

The prayer “Grant us our portion in Torah,” then, can be understood not just as a request to acquire a portion of the Torah, but as a plea to know our particular portion of the Torah. A person can and must study Torah, but if he immerses himself in Torah that is not his (although he is still fulfilling the commandment to study Torah), he does not receive the same spiritual benefit as he would if he would delve into his portion.

This illustrates how two sages can approach the same measurable, explicable Torah issue and arrive at conclusions that not only differ from each other but diametrically oppose one another.

וַיֵּאָלוּ וַיֵּאָלוּ דְבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים,
 לְשׁוֹן רַבִּים, עַל שֵׁם מְקוֹדֵי הַחַיִּים
 לְנִשְׁמוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל,
 Yet **both these and those** opinions are
the words of God, the bestower of life.
 The Hebrew word for life, *ḥayyim*, is
 expressed in the plural form, alluding
 to the source of life for the souls of
 Israel,

The Sages use this axiom, “These and those [opinions] are the words of God...” (*Eiruvim* 13b), regarding the differing positions of Hillel and Shammai. The word *ḥayyim* here does not serve as an adjective describing God as the living God but rather as a transitive verb: God who gives life, God as the source of life. This is why *ḥayyim* is in the plural form: to denote that God endows a plurality and diversity of life. Each soul receives a unique influx of life and portion of the Torah different from every other, each one receiving its fitting endowment.

הַנְּחָלְקוֹת דָּרֵךְ כָּלֵל לְשֵׁלֶשָׁה
 קְוִוּוֹ: יְמִין וּשְׂמֹאל וְאֶמְצַע, שְׁהֵם
 חֶסֶד וְגִבּוּרָה וְכוּ'.
 which are divided into three broad
 arrays: right, left, and center, corre-
 sponding to the attributes of *Hesed*
 (Kindness), *Gevura* (Restraint), and
Tiferet (Beauty).

The ten *sefirot*, the divine attributes through which God created the world and sustains it, can be grouped into three arrays. The one on the right includes *Hokhma* (Wisdom), *Hesed*, and *Netzah* (Dominance). On the left is *Bina* (Understanding), *Gevura*, and *Hod* (Splendor), while the middle array includes *Da'at* (Knowledge), *Tiferet*, *Yesod* (Foundation), and *Malkhut* (Kingship).

Each array of *sefirot* shares commonalities embodied by one characteristic *sefira*. The right array is characterized by the *sefira* of *Hesed*, the left by the *sefira* of *Gevura*, and the one in the middle by *Tiferet*. *Hesed*, the attribute of Kindness, embodies the right hand that draws close,

Gevura, Restraint, the left hand that pushes away, and *Tiferet*, Beauty, embodies the middle way, the synthesis of *Hesed* and *Gevura*.

וְנִשְׁמוֹת שֶׁשָּׂרִישָׁן מִמִּדַּת חֶסֶד,
הַנְּהַגְתָּן גַּם בֵּין לְהַטּוֹת בְּלִפְי חֶסֶד
לְהַקֵּל בּוֹ, **The tendency of souls rooted in the
attribute of *Hesed*, Kindness, is to
incline toward kindness, ruling leni-
ently in matters of *halakha* and so on,**

The root of a person's soul influences the way he functions throughout the course of his life, the way he processes phenomena, and the decisions he makes. This principle is at play in the realm of Torah as well. Here the author of the *Tanya* explains that the tendency of a sage to rule more strictly or more leniently stems from the root of his soul. If his soul is rooted in *Gevura*, in constriction and limitation, he tends toward strictness. If the source of his soul lies in *Hesed*, expansiveness and openness, then he will tend to be lenient. ❧ ❧

בְּנוֹדָע. **as is well known.**

Anyone who has studied the Talmud and *halakha* knows that the sheer quantity of opinions and controversies regarding revealed matters is huge and that the differences between some halakhic reasonings are stark.

THE VERDICT OF THE OX

❧ This principle comes to the fore in the example of a rabbi who, according to his legal understanding, rules that a particular chicken is unfit to eat and thereby causes the owner loss, monetary or otherwise. This position aligns with the attribute of *Gevura*, of judgment and the energy of concealment and constriction, the opposite of *Hesed*.

Below, in chapter 7, the author of the *Tanya* discusses the concepts of the prohibited and the permissible in another, more esoteric light. When a rabbi permits something, he in essence extracts it from the dimension of impurity and places it in the realm of holiness, infusing it with the potential to become sanctified. Hence

the term *mutar*, permitted, which literally means to release.

By contrast, when a rabbi prohibits something, he binds it to the realm of impurity and decrees upon it eternal death, as it were. Hence the word *assur*, prohibited, literally means bound.

The story is told of a rabbi who rendered a lenient legal decision regarding the kosher status of a slaughtered animal in opposition to the ruling of Rabbi Shabtai HaKohen, famously known as the Shakh. When asked how he could disagree with such a great authority, he answered, “When I stand before the supernal court in the World of Truth, I prefer to stand against the Shakh than the ox.”

וְכָל שֶׁנֶּן יִקְלֵ וְחֹמֶר בְּ"הִנְסֵתָרוֹת
 לָהּ אֵלֶיהֶינוּ" (דברים כט, כח).

Surely, all the more so will there be different interpretations concerning matters that are referred to as “the concealed aspects, which are for the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:28),

As the author of the *Tanya* pointed out above, regarding clear, rational issues, whose factors are exposed for all to see, we find differences of opinion due to varying worldviews and methods of legal arbitration. All the more so with regard to the subtleties of the soul, “the concealed aspects, which are for the Lord our God,” one finds that every person is unique and multifaceted. It is virtually impossible to debate these issues by way of generalities.

דְּאִינוֹן דְּחִילוֹ וְדְחִימוֹ דְּבְמוֹחָא
 וְלִבָּא דְּכָל חַד וְחַד לְפִי שִׁיעוּדָא
 דְּיִלְיָהּ, לְפִי מַה דְּמִשְׁעֵר בְּלִיבָיָה
 כְּמוֹ שְׁכָתוֹב בְּזֵהר הַקְּדוֹשׁ (חלק
 א קג, א) עַל פְּסוּק "נֹדַע בְּשַׁעְרִים
 בְּעֵלָה" וְגו' (משלי לא, כג).

namely, fear and love of God, which are latent in the mind and heart of each and every individual, each commensurate with his own capacity [*shiur*], according to his heart's capacity to conceive God, as the holy *Zohar* (1:103a) comments regarding the verse “Her husband, that is, God, is renowned at the gates [*she'arim*]...” (Prov. 31:23).

LENIENCY IN THE SCHOOL OF SHAMMAI

☞ The truth is that people are not products of a single array, but rather are syntheses of several. No person is completely *Hesed*, nor entirely *Gevura*, but is made up of an assortment of attributes: *Hesed* in the context of *Gevura*, for example, or *Gevura* in the context of *Hesed*. Although Beit Shammai is generally more stringent and Beit Hillel more lenient, one finds some rulings in which Beit Shammai is lenient while others rely on the stringencies of

Beit Hillel. Sages known as very stringent will occasionally present a lenient view, even when others arrive at stringent conclusions.

The salient point here is that even in matters that demand rational consideration, the soul causes one's inclination to shift from one extreme to the other. One person may reason in one way, while another person reasons very differently, influenced by the root of his soul.

The extent to which one feels love and awe of God hinges on how much he knows God. God is great, awesome, or loved depending on the person's own conception. Impossible to explain or learn, this matter depends on intimate, personal, inexpressible awareness.

One hasidic master expounds on the words of the verse "I know the Lord is great" (Ps. 135:5), with an emphasis on the words "I know": "Only I know how great God is to me, and no other person can grasp that. I am no better or worse than others; I am simply unique. Therefore, the awareness in my heart of God's greatness – only I know."⁸

Matters of a revealed nature are communicable from one person to another. They are disputable and debatable. By contrast, it is impossible to express to another person how one imagines and senses the greatness of God in his heart. The same is true with regard to the Torah. The way in which each person comprehends the Torah is totally unique, like his utterly unique soul-root, like his singular personal reality.

In summary, the author of the *Tanya* has explained in the first part of this introduction why it is impossible to comprehend the Torah from books. Even if it truly expresses the word of God, a book is incapable of adjusting to the unique spiritual alignment of the reader. A person can immerse himself in studying holy books, knowing their content very well and understanding thoroughly how others responded to them, yet if they are not in line with his soul-root, they may not be pertinent to his unique way of serving God. Rather, a person must seek out direct contact with a living teacher, someone with whom he can connect, and not be satisfied with books alone.

After the author of the *Tanya* has explained at length why one should not write books of *mussar*, he goes on to explain why he nevertheless wrote this book.

²¹ Kislev

²² Kislev
(leap year)

אַךְ בְּיִדְעֵי וּמַכִּירֵי קָאָמִינָא **However, I am directing my words
to those who know me and are
acquainted with me,**

As discussed above, the underlying limitation of any book is that the author engages primarily in self-reflection. He cannot relate to the reader because he does not know him. For this reason, the author of

8. See *Likkutei Moharan* 1:72, s.v. "ki yesh kama be'hinot."

the *Tanya* here states that he is addressing those he knows. This book is not intended for the public at large but rather targets specific people: those who already sought private counsel from him and bared their souls to him, sharing their secrets with him.

Yet Chabad hasidim maintain that these words, “those who know me and are acquainted with me,” include every person throughout all the generations who studies and will study the *Tanya*. Each one can find within it the answers to his personal questions.⁹ ❧

הם כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵאַנְשֵׁי שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ
 שֶׁבְּמִדְּיֹנֹתֵינוּ וּסְמוּכוֹת שְׁלֵהּ. אֲשֶׁר הִיא
 הַדְּבֹר שֶׁל חִיבָה מְצוּי בֵּינֵנוּ וְגִילּוֹ לְפָנָי
 כָּל תְּעֻלוֹמוֹת לְפָנָי וּמוֹחֶם בְּעִבּוֹדַת ה'

namely, each and every one of the members of our community of hasidim in our country and its surrounding regions, with whom it was

“THOSE WHO KNOW ME”

❧ That the author of the *Tanya* is addressing only followers whom he knew personally obviously cannot be taken literally. His whole prerogative in writing this book was to reach those who would not come to learn his teachings directly from him. One could posit that the author of the *Tanya* knew with prophetic intuition all the people who would ever study his book and thus geared his words toward each and every one of them. In other words, since the author of the *Tanya* did not direct his words to some theoretical audience from the outset, but rather to specific people, addressing real-life issues and questions that people had actually asked him, the *Tanya* relates to those specific circumstances, those issues and questions, and those particular people. It never departs into the realm of the purely theoretical but remains rooted in reality. Though this manner of writing may come across as

less organized and diverges into particulars, the risks outlined in the first half of this introduction are minute.

Moreover, when the author of the *Tanya* associated with those he knew, he forged a connection with them that permeated the inner essence of their souls. That place of unification is also the place of unity with all the souls of the people of Israel. Through this deep connection with his followers when they were face-to-face, the author of the *Tanya* could access the essence of every person who would ever open the *Tanya* and resonate with him, no matter when he would live. That being said, the degree to which a reader resonates with the ideas and teachings that can be found in the *Tanya* still depends on him, as explained above. However, the potential for a direct experience of receiving from the author remains embedded within its pages.

9. See *Likkutei Biurim LaTanya*; Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneerson, *Torat Shalom, Sefer HaSihot*, p. 71.

הַתְּלוּיָהּ בְּלֵב, אֵלֵיהֶם תִּטּוֹף מִלְתִּי
וְלִשׁוֹנִי עֵט סוֹפֵר בְּקוֹנְטְרִיסִים אֵלֵיו
הַנִּקְרָאִים בְּשֵׁם לְקוּטֵי אַמְרִים,

common to exchange affectionate conversations and who divulged to me all the innermost recesses of their hearts and minds pertaining to the service of God, which is contingent on the heart. It is to them that my words pour forth, my tongue serving as a pen in the hands of a scribe, in these pamphlets titled *Likkutei Amarim*.

The author of the *Tanya* addresses those hasidim with whom he had a deep, inner connection. They poured out their hearts to him and told him, not their mundane problems,¹⁰ but rather their internal spiritual struggles, the obstacles on their journey toward heartfelt divine service, and their efforts to achieve a real connection with God.

מְלוֹקָטִים מִפִּי סִפְרִים וּמִפִּי סוֹפְרִים
קְדוֹשֵׁי עֲלוּיוֹן נִשְׁמָתָם עֲדָן הַמְּפוֹרָסִים
אֲצִילֵנוּ, וְקִצְתַּת מֵהֶם גְּרַמְזִין לְחַכְמֵינוּ
בְּאַגְרוֹת הַקְּדוֹשׁ מִרְבוּתֵינוּ שְׁבִאֲרָץ
הַקְּדוֹשׁ תִּבְנֶה וְתִבְנֶה בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ
אָמֵן. וְקִצְתָּם שְׂמֵעָתִי מִפִּיהֶם הַקְּדוֹשׁ
בְּהֵיוֹתָם פֹּה עִמָּנוּ.

These writings were compiled from the works and teachings of the holy masters, whose souls are in the Garden of Eden, who are well known to us. The wise will find allusions to some of these teachings in the holy letters sent to us from our rabbis in the Holy Land, may it be swiftly built and established in our days, amen. I heard some of these teachings from their holy mouths while they were here with us.

The author of the *Tanya* now revisits the idea put forth in the title page above, emphasizing that while the *Tanya* aims to reach certain people

10. This was a common practice that the author of the *Tanya* strongly critiqued. See *Iggeret HaKodesh*, epistle 22.

whom he knew, the concepts are nonetheless based on the teachings of his teachers, the leaders of Hasidism.

וְכֹלֶם, הֵן תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל שְׁאֵלוֹת רַבּוֹת אֲשֶׁר שׁוֹאֲלִין בְּעֵצָה כָּל אַנְשֵׁי שְׁלוֹמֵנו דְּמְדִינְתֵינוּ תָּמִיד כָּל אֶחָד לְפִי עֶרְבוֹ, All the teachings in this work are responses to the many questions that the members of our community of hasidim in our country continually posed in search of advice, each one commensurate with his stature,

The *Tanya* is essentially a book of frequently asked questions and corresponding answers that various people asked according to their spiritual challenges and struggles in forging a pathway toward God.

The quantity of questions that the author of the *Tanya* received during his leadership was countless. Among hasidim, there were thousands who asked, each with his particular life situation. The question of a person who has already achieved a certain spiritual level and refined his soul to some degree does not compare to that of someone who is just beginning to embark on the struggle toward true self-awareness and perception of God's light.

לְשִׁית עֵצוֹת בְּנַפְשָׁם בְּעִבּוֹדַת ה', in order to give them counsel regarding the service of God.

The path of divine service, on which every person must toil, is a tortuous road riddled with obstacles. This is true not only in the realm of practical *halakha*, but primarily in the dimension of authentic spiritual growth, because divine service is in essence a labor of the heart. How should one react to his challenges? What should he do with his spiritual angst? From where can he draw spiritual energy to continue serving God, day in and day out, and to constantly intensify and deepen his connection?

An immensely crucial part of the role of a hasidic leader, a Rebbe, was to counsel people in relation to such questions, to be with them in their struggles, to listen and to guide them in their spiritual quests.

לְהִיּוֹת כִּי אֵין הַזְּמַן גְּרַמָּא עוֹד לְהַשִּׁיב לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד עַל שְׁאֵלוֹתוֹ בְּפִרְטוֹת, Since time no longer allows me to provide an answer to each individual's specific question,

Initially, when the number of hasidim was still small, every person was able to talk to the Rebbe privately, present his question at length and in detail, and receive a tailor-made, personal answer. When the numbers of hasidim increased exponentially, it became impossible to designate to each the necessary private discussion time.

וְגַם הַשְּׂכַחָה מְצוּיָה, and also since forgetfulness is common,

One's private audience was packed with meaning. Every word was important; every point, each subtle way of phrasing, was loaded with life-changing significance. Yet a large degree of the meaning behind the words lay beyond the comprehension of the student, becoming decipherable only later, sometimes years later. The hasid may have disregarded details that at the time did not seem relevant and failed to pay attention to all the peripheral messages being communicated to him.

Therefore, even when a person would receive personal advice, he often could not register the multifaceted breadth and scope of it.

עַל כֵּן רָשַׁמְתִּי כָּל הַתְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל כָּל הַשְּׂאֵלוֹת I therefore recorded all the responses to all the questions

Ostensibly, these words imply that the *Tanya* is simply a collection of answers, an assortment of notes answering questions asked at different times by various people. Yet, as one can see, the structure of the *Tanya* does not resemble a collection of answers to questions at all. It is far more than a work that weaves disparate ideas together into a unified literary arrangement.

The *Tanya* works on two different planes. First, it is structured as a classic work of *mussar*. It presents and develops in-depth questions about abstract issues that arise regarding the service of God and touches on everything related to man's struggles in the world and with himself as he strives to cultivate love and fear of God. This motif, however, serves as an outward template that conceals the second plane: the *Tanya's* internal structure, which constitutes answers to actual questions by specific people.

In view of this, the author of the *Tanya* explains that the intended

benefit of the book is not to serve as an all-inclusive work of abstract thought that one person authored from his inner resources (often as an expression of himself), but rather as a nexus of specific, extremely sensitive, personal questions asked by many people. Since the questions are countless, the answers must be formulated in a general format so that they will resonate with the masses. ❧

לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְאוֹת לְהִיּוֹת לְכָל
אֶחָד וְאֶחָד לְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינָיו וְלֹא
יִדְחֹק עוֹד לִיבְנֵים לְדַבֵּר עִמִּי
בִּיחִידוֹת, כִּי בְהֵן יִמְצָא מְרֻגָע
לְנַפְשׁוֹ וְעֵצָה נְכוֹנָה לְכָל דְּבַר
הַקְּשָׁה עָלָיו בְּעִבּוּדַת ה'.

so that this work may serve as a **keepsake and sign to be remembered in each one's mind. One will no longer need to push to come and speak with me in a private audience, since in these teachings one will find tranquility for his soul and sound advice for any difficulty one may encounter in his service of God.**

To study the *Tanya* as an answer to a question is to discover its power. But if one has not clarified the question, or is not bothered by it at all, he will not understand, let alone relate, to the answer. This deficiency is its benefit: The *Tanya* is more than a book; it is the Rebbe's private audience with each of his hasidim.¹¹

THE TANYA'S APPROACH

❧ The aim of this book far transcends an attempt to develop a theory, philosophy, theology, or even ethics. More than that, it addresses particular challenges in the service of God. The *Tanya* is not aimed toward the public, addressing problems in general and in the abstract as they apply to people in general like other *mussar* works. Rather, it consists of responses to living, palpable

issues. Not the writer's issues – the reader's. The reader can find the answer to his particular dilemma because it is there; he need only search for it. He may find it in a sentence, or in a cluster of sentences, in one place or in several places, in what is said and sometimes in what is not said, and, occasionally, in the particular style chosen to present a concept.

11. Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneerson, *Torat Shalom, Sefer HaSifhot*, p. 56.

וְנִכּוֹן יְהִי־לִבּוֹ בְּטוֹחַ בַּה' גּוֹמֵר
בְּעֵדֵינוּ. His heart will then be steadfast, trust-
ing in God, who completes our work
for us.

Upon careful examination of these words, one finds more than just flowery well-wishes. They guide the reader to bolster his heart to be confident not just in God, but in “God who completes [our work] for us.”

The meaning behind these words is related to the talmudic statement “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven” (*Berakhot* 33b). In everything that relates to divine service, one must not rely upon the help of Heaven. One may expect divine assistance or additional enlightenment, but one must not expect that God will actually do the work for him. If we begin, if we make the effort, we can anticipate that at most God will complete it for us.

Until this point, the author of the *Tanya* has explained why he wrote this book: It was written as a substitute for a private audience with the Rebbe. The reader should see it as a beginning and continuation of a personal discussion to uncover his own questions and discover the answers hidden within.

But since the questions and answers are not always apparent, and the book imparts content that is not simple to understand, the reader may frequently find it difficult to personally connect with the matters discussed. The author of the *Tanya* therefore adds the following paragraph.

וּמִי שֶׁיִּדְעָתוֹ קְצָרָה לְהַבִּין דְּבַר
עֲצָה מִתּוֹךְ קוֹנְטְרִיסִים אֱלוֹ, As for one whose intellect is too lim-
ited to derive a word of counsel from
these pamphlets,

If the *Tanya* were arranged as a list of questions and answers, it would perhaps be easier for a person to retrieve the personal advice he needs. Yet that would necessitate going into the details of the problems to the extent that the answers would be too personal and particularized, effective only for that particular person and for only one of his issues. In order that these matters will be meaningful for a wide array of people and various circumstances, the book is arranged in a different format.

Many people ask the same question in different ways, yet they need to receive the same answer. The common denominator of the book, then, is answers, not questions. The all-inclusive structure of the book is comprehensive answers, while each reader holds his time-sensitive, situation-based question in his soul. The problem arises in the bridge between the burning question in the reader's heart at that very moment and the written answer that the reader must discover for himself. Not every person can find that connection.

**יִפְרֹשׁ שִׁיחָתוֹ לְפָנֵי הַגְּדוֹלִים
שְׁבַעֲרוּ וְהֵם יְבוֹנְנוּהוּ.** **he should discuss his spiritual quandaries with the sages of his city, who will grant the questioner the ability to understand the answers on his own.**

To overcome this problem, the author suggests that a person who feels that the *Tanya* does not directly address his issues should discuss his issues with the hasidic leaders in his city. They will give him the understanding to grasp the answer to his questions on his own.

**וְאַלֵּיהֶם בְּקִשְׁתִּי שְׁלֵא לְשׁוֹם יָד
לְפָה, לְהַתְנַיֵּג בְּעִנְיָה וְשִׁפְלוּת
שֶׁל שְׂקָר חֵם וְשָׁלוֹם.** **I implore these sages to not remain silent on the pretense of false humility and self-deprecation, God forbid.**

If a person comprehends something, yet in the name of modesty he says, "Who am I to explain this to others?" his response is actually a show of false humility. A person needs to cultivate humility. Every *mussar* work praises this characteristic. But a person who knows the answer to a question but does not offer it because he reasons that responding will seem like arrogance is not displaying true humility because he is acting in contradiction to the truth. Humility must not be an impediment that prevents a person from expressing his gifts.

True humility lies in self-evaluation, in assessing how much one has succeeded in manifesting his highest self. At the same time, someone who understands an issue must explain it, not as a right to showcase his superiority, but rather as an obligation.

וְכַנֹּדֵעַ עֲזַנֵּשׁ הַמֵּר עַל מוֹנֵעַ בֶּרֶךְ, **The bitter punishment for one who is competent to teach others yet withholds “grain,” that is, Torah knowledge, is well known,**

The Sages state that anyone who withholds a *halakha* from being studied by a student, even fetuses in their mother’s womb curse him, as it says, “The withholder of grain, the nation will curse him” (Prov. 11:26).¹² Meaning, he who withholds the goodness, or the “grain” of the Torah, from those ready to receive it will suffer the bitter consequences.

וְגֹדֵל הַשְּׂכָר, מִמֵּאֲמַר רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז”ל (תְּמוּרָה טז, א) עַל פְּסוּק (משלי כט, יג): “מֵאִיר עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם ה’.” **and so is the immense reward for granting such knowledge, as we learn from the teaching of our Rabbis (Temura 16a) regarding the verse “The Lord enlightens the eyes of both of them” (Prov. 29:13).**

Extensive reward is granted to a person when he dedicates his life to teaching those whose knowledge is inferior to his. The *Tanya* cites the Sages’ teaching that when a student goes to his teacher and says to him, “Teach me Torah,” and the teacher agrees to teach him, then “the Lord enlightens the eyes of both of them.” In other words, God not only helps the student understand what he wants to know but also enlightens the teacher further as payment for enlightening the student.

כִּי יֵאִיר ה’ פָּנָיו אֲלֵיהֶם אוֹר פָּנָיו מֶלֶךְ חַיִּים. וּמַחֲיָה חַיִּים יִזְכְּנוּ וַיַּחֲיֵנוּ לְיָמִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְגו’ כִּי כוֹלֵם יִדְעוּ אוֹתוֹ וְגו’ כִּי מְלֹאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת ה’ אָמֵן בֶּן יְהִי רַצוֹן. **God will shine His countenance toward them with the light of the countenance of the King who bestows life. May He who bestows life grant us life and let us merit seeing days in which man will no longer teach his neighbor nor each man his brother, saying, “Know God,” for all of them will know Me..., for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God. Amen, may it be His will.**

12. *Sanhedrin* 91b.

The author of the *Tanya* concludes with a wondrous tapestry of quotes from *Tanakh* that complement the topics he addressed in this introduction.¹³ After explaining the need to write this book, he concludes with heartfelt yearning that the final redemption should arrive, when God will reveal Himself completely to every individual, each in his own unique way. Then people will no longer need to learn from one another or to write books about how to serve God.

והנה אחר שנתפשטו הקונטרסים
הנזכרים לעיל בקרב כל אנשי
שלומנו הנזכרים לעיל, בהעתקות
רבות מידי סופרים שונים ומשונים,
הנה על ידי ריבוי ההעתקות
שונות רבו כמו רבו הטעויות
סופרים במאוד מאוד. ולזאת
נדבה רוחם של אנשים אפרתים
הנקובים הנזכרים לעיל מעבר לדרך
לטרוח בגופם ומאודם להביא את
קונטרסים הנזכרים לעיל לבית
הדפוס, מנוקים מכל סג וטעות
סופר ומוגהים היטב. ואמינא
לפעלא טבא וישיר חילא,

After many copies of the aforementioned pamphlets were distributed among all our aforementioned members of our community of hasidim by various and diverse copyists, these many copies have become rife with an exceedingly immense number of textual errors. In light of this, the distinguished men mentioned above by Reb Meshulam Zusil on the previous page generously dedicated themselves personally and financially to having these aforementioned pamphlets printed after having been cleared of any distortion or copyists' errors and properly proofread. I congratulate them on this good deed.

ולזהיות כי מקרא מלא דבר
הכתוב: "ארור מסג גבול רעהו"
(דברים כז, יז), וארור בו קללה בו
נדוי חס ושלום וכו', על בן ביהודה
ועוד לקרא קאתינא למשדי גודא
רבא על כל המדפסים שלא
להדפוס קונטרסים הנזכרים

Since there is already an explicit verse that states, "Cursed [*arur*] is one who moves his neighbor's boundary" (Deut. 27:17), and the term *arur* contains "an element of ostracism within it and an element of curse within it..." (*Shevuot* 36a), God forbid, I therefore merely come in the same way the

13. Num. 6:25; Prov. 16:15; Jer. 31:33; Isa. 11:9.

לְעֵיל לֹא עַל יְדֵי עֵצְמָן וְלֹא עַל
 יְדֵי גִירָא דִּילְהוֹן בְּלִתֵּי רְשׁוּת
 הַנְּזַבְרִים הַנְּזַבְרִים לְעֵיל מִשְׁךְ
 חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים מִיּוֹם כְּלוֹת הַדְּפּוּס.
 וְלִשְׂמֵעִים יוֹנְעִים וְתַבּוּאָה עֲלֵיהֶם
 בְּרַבְתָּ טוֹב.

custom of Judea is cited to **bolster a scriptural prohibition** (based on *Kiddushin* 6a) to impose a strict prohibition on all printers that neither they, nor their agents, may print the aforementioned pamphlets without permission from the publishers specified above for a period of five years from the completion of this printing. For those who adhere to this warning, it will be pleasant, and a blessing of goodness will come upon them.

כֹּה דְבַרֵּי הַמְּלִקֵט לְקוּטֵי אַמְרִים
 הַנְּזַבְרִים לְעֵיל.

This concludes the introductory remarks of the compiler of the aforementioned *Likkutei Amarim*.

These closing words refer not to the writing of the book but rather to its printing. The author of the *Tanya* explains that producing hand-copied versions caused a multitude of mistakes and therefore gave permission to print the book, granting copyright to the publishers so that they would not incur losses through other printings. Thousands of copies of the book were printed, and another edition was even printed shortly after.

In summary, the *Tanya* is essentially a response. Though written in a general way, within an extremely sophisticated structure, it is nonetheless a response to the problems and questions of the individual.

Herein lies the challenge of the book and the difficulty in understanding it. One must study it time and time again to disclose the insight it intends to transmit. Every individual must toil to accurately hone in on the articulation of his own question so that he may arrive at his personal answer.

This introduction serves, in many respects, as a general introduction to other books that have been written in this way, as an oral Torah that has taken on written form. This preserves the feeling of live, personal, intimate discussion between the Rebbe and his followers, as palpable as interpersonal contact.