

Introduction to the Zohar

The Wisdom of Truth



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Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ashlag

INTRODUCTION TO THE
ZOHAR
THE WISDOM OF TRUTH

TRANSLATED BY

Yoel Finkelman

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Maggid Books

Introduction to the Zohar: The Wisdom of Truth

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“The Zohar will bring them out of exile in mercy” (Zohar, Naso)
יהו ספר הזוהר יפקון ביה מן גלותא ברחמי (זוהר, נשא)

Dedicated in honor of our dear spouses, children, and families.

*With awe and respect to our teachers, who
brought us on this important journey.*

*In appreciation of Sefaria, who connected us to Koren
and who continue to share Torah with the world.*

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Foreword

Benji Levy

In the beginning, the infinite light of God was all that existed. Everything was, by definition, perfect. Except it wasn't for God, for an element of the ultimate perfection always strives for more.¹ God wanted to give, which required a recipient with needs and deficiencies. Therefore, He had to make space for imperfection so that He could bestow goodness.² It seems counterintuitive for those who seek wholeness and holiness, but it is this deficiency that animates the possibility of life itself. There are terrible side effects of this philosophical approach, such as tragedy and loss. And yet, the soul-searching born at these difficult moments can allow us to build something new.³ Just as bending one's knees allows one

1. See for example R. Kook, *Shemoneh Kevatzim* 8:43.
2. For this understanding of *tzimtzum* as revealing hidden deficiency, see, for example, R. Azriel of Gerona's *Esser Sefirot BaDerekh She'ala VeTeshuva*; the accompanying preface printed in R. Moshe Schatz's *Tarshish Shoham VeYishpeh* (Jerusalem, 2023); the Arizal's explanation of *tzimtzum* in R. Hayim Vital, *Etz Hayim* 1:1; *Mevo Shearim* 1:1:1; the writings of the *Leshem Shevo VeAhlama: Hakdamot UShearim* (Jerusalem: Barzani), *shaar heh*, ch. 1, p. 82; *Sefer HaKlalim* (Barzani), *klal yud*, ch. 1, p. 113. This idea is fully developed in the writings of R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the Ramhal), who serves as a foundation for the teachings of R. Ashlag; see, for example, *Klaḥ Pitḥei Hokhma* (Jerusalem: Spinner edition, 2012), *petah* 24. *Klalim Rishonim* (Spinner edition), *klal* 1–4.
3. The notion of descent for the sake of an ascent (*yerida letzorekh aliya*) is central in many places across the writings of Kabbala and *Hasidut*; see for example *Keter Shem Tov* (New York: Kehot, 2004), nos. 26, 96, and 136. This is true not only from

to jump higher, the descent into darkness can allow for a new and even higher ascent that was previously unattainable. This truth reverberates across the expanse of Jewish history.

While it seems that absence is the opposite of growth, approaching this element of imperfection in the right way can actually drive growth. The first human being was created with desires, deficiencies, and dependencies, yet these were to be filled towards a wholeness beyond oneself.⁴ Adam and Eve were exiled out of the Garden of Eden, and at the same time this catalyzed their mission to illuminate the world. The matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel, experienced the hopelessness of infertility and came to cherish the profundity of possibility and life itself.⁵ A single family unit was enslaved in Egypt and emerged as the Israelite nation – returning to its homeland and building a society founded on compassion and care for those in need. The holy Temples were destroyed, and it was from these ruins that the grandeur and potency of the Oral Law came forth.⁶ R. Shimon bar Yoḥai was forced into the darkness of a cave,⁷ and emerged with the book of splendor and illumination, the Zohar.

As students of history, we can see the tremendous strength that can be incubated from within the crucible of struggle. The attainment of this strength takes place through the descent, a process that often brings one face to face with apparent emptiness. This sense of emptiness, however, is not a flaw but rather a feature of how and why God created the world.⁸ While this happens on a macro level across the universe, “each

a psychological standpoint, but can be understood as fundamentally a part of the world’s makeup; for example, whereby the purification of the vessels occurs through their shattering, see R. Chaim Vital, *Etz Ḥayim* (Barzani) 11:5; cf. R. Shlomo Elyashiv’s *Leshem Shevo VeAhlama: Drushei Olam HaTohu* (Barzani, 2004) in *Maamar Klali*, pp. 9–16.

4. See R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Drush HaKivui* printed in *Otzrot HaRamḥal* (Spinner edition, 2002), p. 246.
5. See *Yevamot* 64a.
6. The direct association between the destruction of the Temples, the disappearance of prophecy, and the development of the Oral Law is a theme developed by R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin throughout his many writings; see for example *Resisei Layla* (Jerusalem: Machon Har Bracha, 2004), pp. 11–21, 99, 266–271.
7. See *Shabbat* 33b.
8. For R. Ashlag, the “desire-to-receive” is rooted in the *tzimtzum* not by virtue of a lack

person is a world unto themselves.”⁹ Taking an honest look at our own vulnerability, it is not difficult to uncover the common thread of loss and hardship, and at the same time, to identify the way that it can give birth to hope and strength.¹⁰

And so, as the World Wars and the Holocaust thrust society into doubt and turmoil, a new spiritual revolution was brewing.¹¹ R. Yehuda Leib Halevy Ashlag had a vision to build a ladder (*sulam*) that would elevate beyond confusion and allow us to connect with and become more than our limited persona. He saw a future where the Zohar, the teachings of the Arizal, and other fundamental mystical sources could be a guide toward the ideal sense of self, the ideal family, and even the ideal society. Through his radical spiritual promise, even our impure and broken parts could be transformed into tools for revealing God’s plan and perfection.

R. Ashlag understood that it was precisely at this moment in history that this eternal mission became more urgent than ever: “Now I feel with all six hundred and thirteen parts of my being, that all the promises of the Zohar regarding the revelation of this wisdom at the end of days, even for the youth, were said regarding this generation.”¹² The innermost teachings, *Pnimitiyut HaTorah*, were entrusted to a select few for two thousand years, until our generation, when more expansive access was

of God’s presence in the world, but by the tangible presence of lack in the world. See for example *Pri Hakham: Siḥot Kodesh* (Bnei Brak, 1997), pp. 64–70.

9. Sanhedrin 37a.

10. R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz and others explain that each person descends down into this world to rectify a *nitzotz*, a particular point of deficiency which is the root of all their subjective experience. See for example *Mei Shiloah, Parashat Bereshit* (Bnei Brak: Meishor, 1995), pp. 12–16. This is also a significant theme in the writings of R. Ashlag; see for example *Pri Hakham: Siḥot Kodesh*, pp. 23–40.

11. For a very similar response to uncertainty and chaos, see R. Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook’s introduction to *Reish Milin* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 2006), written while he was stuck outside the Land of Israel as a result of the First World War. R. Kook explains that when the world is operating in order, then the spiritual, sensitive soul can draw its sustenance from the external parts of things. When darkness and concealment emerge, however, the sensitive soul must descend inwards to find a new source of sustenance. The soul is called inwards to find the comfort it needs.

12. *Hakdama LeHokhmat HaKabbala*, printed in *Hakdamot HaSulam* (Bnei Brak: Makhon Ohr HaSulam, 5782), p. 249.

granted in order to heal our fragmented world.¹³ He saw the Holocaust and its associated darkness as so cataclysmic that it necessitated healing through the teachings of the inner dimension, hitherto unrevealed to this extent, and explained that the proper response to radical evil was revealing radical goodness, and *Pnimitiyut HaTorah* could chart a path.¹⁴

R. Ashlag, among others, identified our generation as the one that can merit the end of conflict and history as we know it, heralding the messianic redemption.¹⁵ One key stepping stone lay in the fact that “the Zohar will bring them out of exile in mercy.”¹⁶ This redemption was not just for the world that contains each person, but for each person’s world. The study of the Zohar empowers an individual to extract themselves, “like an ark floating within the waters of a flood, a city of refuge for one being chased.”¹⁷ This book – his introduction to the Zohar – is thus an expression of his life mission: to hasten the redemption. That means bridging from one space to another, from the reality that *is*, to the

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13. The ban against revealing the secrets of Torah to the masses was all but cast to the side in times of severe concealment, when the only thing potent enough to save the Jewish people was the inner teachings. See R. Yaakov Tzemach’s introduction to *Sefer Etz Hayim* where he discusses how this revelation is rooted in the existential need for meaning and comfort. It is this framework that gives us an insight into the various points throughout history when new levels of insight were revealed in an almost paradigm-shifting way, a theme clearly outlined in the writings of R. Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein of Zidichov; see his *Sur MeRah VeAseh Tov* (Jerusalem: Makhon Emet, 2013), pp. 78–82, as well as the commentary of R. Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, the *Bnei Yissacher*, printed there. R. Ashlag’s perspective on the urgency of revelation may be connected to the arguments made clearly by Ramhal in his *Adir BaMarom* (Jerusalem: Makhon HaRamhal, 2018), pp. 38–39, regarding the suspension of the normative restrictions placed on revealing this wisdom.
 14. For an astounding formulation of this, see R. Binyamin Sinkofsky, *Nishmat Yisrael, Ktavim Hadashim MiBaal Yad Binyamin*, compiled by Yaakov Klein (Jerusalem: Makhon Nishmat Yisrael, 5784), p. 107.
 15. *Maamrei Baal HaSulam: Helek Bet* (Bnei Brak, 2021), no. 231. See as well the remarkable comments of the *Leshem Shevo VeAhlama* regarding our generation’s being ripe for the revelation of the inner wisdom, in *Leshem Sefer HaBiurim* (Barzani, 2004), p. 38; *Leshem Sefer HaDeah* (Barzani, 2002), p. 157.
 16. Zohar, 3:90a; see R. Daniel Frisch’s *Shaarei HaZohar* (Jerusalem, 2005), ch. 4, for a full array of sources describing the connection between the Zohar and redemption.
 17. R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto’s *Adir BaMarom*, pp. 22–24.

reality that *ought* to be. It means striving to become a ladder, “standing firmly on the ground with his head reaching the heavens.”¹⁸

This great vision of R. Ashlag took time for the world to process, and its influence continues to take shape as more and more people internalize its meaning and message. According to the tradition held by R. Ashlag’s students, his task was to ultimately complete the spiritual project of the saintly individuals of the past.¹⁹ His legacy was not to shy away from paradox, but to show the wholeness which is too often concealed beneath conflict and confusion. In this sense, he is a ladder between the worlds of giving and receiving, mystics and rationalists, Hasidim and their Lithuanian counterparts, heavens and earth.

As the inaugural book of this new initiative called Share, we see this work not just as an introduction to the Zohar, but an introduction to a new expression of this goal. Just as R. Ashlag didn’t only introduce the Zohar through this work but wrote a full commentary and translation, among other important teachings, Share will continue to publish, produce, and support other important works in different formats and through experiences, innovative opportunities for growth, and partnerships with others advancing this mission.

We are truly grateful for this unique opportunity. Thank you Hashem. And thank you to Hashem’s partners, the visionaries and supporters, donors and friends, who drive the Share mission. Of course, this includes the amazing professional staff at Share, and in particular two of our Share scholars – R. Jeremy Tibbetts and R. Joey Rosenfeld – who were study partners and teachers in developing this foreword and much of our early educational work.

We are proud that this is the first time this type of literature is published, first digitally and then in print. For that we are grateful to our dear friends Sam Moed, Daniel Septimus, and the entire Sefaria team

18. Genesis 28:12.

19. See R. Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern’s approbation to *Otiyot DiLibi* (Bnei Brak, 2012), p. 4; see as well his introduction to *Nishmat Yisrael, Ktavim Hādashim MiBaal Yad Binyamin*, pp. 3–11. See the comments of R. Ashlag in his Introduction to *Panim Meirot UMasbirot*, printed in *Hakdamot LeHokhmat HaEmet* (Telzstone: Ohr Barukh Shalom, 2009), pp. 113–114, where he describes his spiritual mission as beginning where the path of the Baal Shem Tov ends, to draw down this path even further.

Introduction to the Zohar

for making this and so many important works available to the masses. We are of course grateful to Matthew and Yehoshua Miller, true partners in every sense, who together with their tremendous team, R. Reuven Ziegler, R. David Silverstein, Tzvi Goldstein, Meira Mintz, Avichai Gamdani, Ita Olesker, Rina Ben Gal, and Tani Bayer, published this and are committed to publishing the widest range of classical Jewish texts to the highest levels of accuracy, authenticity, and design. Thank you to R. Dr. Zvi Leshem for his insightful introduction, Dr. Yoel Finkelman for his erudite translation, and, of course, R. Ashlag for revealing these illuminations.

Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy is the CEO of Share

Preface

Zvi Leshem

The hasidic kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Warsaw, 1885 – Tel Aviv, 1954), who made *aliya* to Jerusalem in 1921, was undoubtedly one of the greatest and most influential kabbalists of the twentieth century. Raised in a hasidic family in Warsaw, as a young man, Rabbi Ashlag came in contact with numerous hasidic masters, most notably Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach of Belz, whom he met when he was eighteen. Steeped in talmudic and kabbalistic knowledge from his youth, Rabbi Ashlag was ordained at age nineteen and served as a *dayan* on the Warsaw *beit din*. A dramatic turn in his life came in 1918, when he met a businessman who was also a profound but secret kabbalist. Rabbi Ashlag studied with him on and off for a few months until, after a night of study pertaining to the mystical interpretations of the *mikve*, the teacher passed away, having forbidden Rabbi Ashlag to reveal his identity.

Arriving in Eretz Yisrael a few years later, Rabbi Ashlag gathered around him a few close disciples with whom he would study Kabbala every night from 1:00 a.m. until 9:00 in the morning. He moved numerous times, beginning in Jerusalem's Old City, where he argued with the veteran Sephardi kabbalists of Yeshivat Beit El yeshiva (see below), and later moving to the Givat Shaul neighborhood of Jerusalem, where he served as the official neighborhood rabbi. He also spent time in Warsaw, London, Tel Aviv, and Bnei Brak, eventually settling in Tel Aviv for the last years of his life.

Rabbi Ashlag was a prolific writer, with his most notable publications being the multi-volume *Talmud Eser Sefirot* on the Lurianic writings (1937) and his magnum opus, the *HaSulam* (“The Ladder”) Hebrew translation of and commentary on the Zohar (1945–1954), from which he received the appellation *Baal HaSulam* (“Master of the Ladder”). After his death, he was succeeded by his son Rabbi Baruch Shalom as *Admor* of what essentially became a small hasidic sect, which continues to this day.

The Ashlagian project should be viewed in the context of a much wider picture of the move from esotericism to exotericism and the popularization of Kabbala in the last century, in which both Rabbi Ashlag and his friend, Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, played major roles. In the decades following Rabbi Ashlag’s death, his disciples, and especially their students, split into various factions, ranging from *haredi* on the right to the completely universalistic New Age “Kabbalah Centre” on the left. The latter has done much to publicize Rabbi Ashlag and his writings (especially in English and other translations) well beyond the Orthodox Jewish world that was his own spiritual milieu.

Rabbi Ashlag viewed himself as a Lurianic purist in his kabbalistic approach. In one passage, he claimed that he had “merited the soul of the holy Ari” and had received a prophetic revelation saying, “I have chosen you to be the *tzaddik* and sage for this generation in order that the crises of humanity may be healed with a lasting salvation.” In a letter he penned to a disciple in 1927, he wrote, “There is nothing new here [in my teachings] at all, because everything that I wrote is already written in the writings of the Ari – this, actually is the truth... I did not add anything at all to the writings of the Ari. My intention is simply to remove stumbling blocks from those who are limping and blind.”

What certainly appears to be novel in the Ashlagian system is his emphasis on the need of the individual to radically transform himself from egoism (“the desire to receive”) to altruism (“the desire to give”). This point is related to his above-mentioned dispute with the kabbalists of Yeshivat Beit El in Jerusalem. His protestations notwithstanding, Rabbi Ashlag was an innovator. Rabbi Ashlag viewed the Lurianic kabbalists of Beit El as having no interest in understanding the texts they mastered and declaimed by heart. The main difference, as Rabbi Ashlag

perceived it, was between the Jerusalem school's focus on textual mastery of the Lurianic corpus and his own attempt to uncover the inner meaning of the texts and how to apply them to one's spiritual life. Rabbi Ashlag felt that he arrived at the inner practical application of these texts. In his own description of the confrontation with the kabbalistic masters he found in Jerusalem, he wrote:

When I met with the people, I clearly saw their spiritual poverty, their ignorance and their foolish ways.... Here there is no clear voice in the wisdom of the Kabbala.... They just see Kabbala as a collection of words and names with no parable and its solution, only literal words.

Then I met the more famous of them. These are men who spent years learning the Zohar and the writings of the Ari to the extent that they are able to recite the books of the Ari to a wondrous degree, and they are known as holy men. I asked them if they had learned with a teacher, one who had attained the inner meaning of these matters. But they replied, "God forbid! There are no inner meanings! Only the words as they are written were handed down to us...." At this point, I poured out my anger on them, because I had no more patience to be in their company.

One can, of course, question his evaluation of his opponents' approach. Beit El, at least from the time of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi (the Rashash, 1720–1777), also had a very rich ritualistic approach to prayer, focusing on the Lurianic *kavanot* that the Rashash explained and elaborated upon. The Baal Shem Tov's brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon Kitover, arriving in Jerusalem in the 1740s, became part of Beit El, despite his hasidic approach to Kabbala and ecstatic spiritual life. Nonetheless, this is apparently not what Rabbi Ashlag perceived in his encounter with the kabbalists of Beit El. He continued on his own and revealed his own approach, in which the inner meaning of Kabbala is to train oneself in selfless altruism.

One might also argue that there is no need for such a radical dichotomy in relating to the Lurianic corpus. That is, a *peshat* approach to the texts could still lead to practical applications, and in fact it would

seem that this was the case in Beit El, although the applications were apparently not in the direction that Rabbi Ashlag believed in.

It is worth noting that Rabbi Ashlag's philosophical positions may have had political overtones as well. Rumor has it that the British authorities once closed down his printing press, citing his "Communist sympathies." Perhaps not surprisingly, his brother-in-law and close disciple, Rabbi Yehuda Zvi Brandwein, served as the rabbi for the Histadrut national labor union.

All of which brings us to the *Introduction to the Zohar*. When Rabbi Ashlag published the first edition of the *Sulam* translation of and commentary on the Zohar in 1945, the first volume included three different introductions of sorts, the "Introduction" (הקדמה), the "Preface" (מבוא), and the "Opening" (פתיחה), the latter having been penned around 1942 and published in a condensed form to avoid repetition. They have subsequently been republished, although not in every printing of the *Sulam*. Most recently, they appeared in a Hebrew book, "*Hakdamot HaSulam* – Introductions of the Sulam."¹ The "Introduction" is the most basic of the three, and it also deals with the importance of the study of Kabbala and the Zohar. The "Preface" delves more deeply into Zoharic concepts, and the "Opening" even more so.

The "Introduction," ably rendered into English here by Yoel Finkelstein, consists of seventy-one sections, with titles added to groups of sections by later editors. Among the topics discussed in this wide-ranging essay are the nature of the world and of human beings, the aforementioned egoistic "desire to receive" and the need to transform it into the altruistic "desire to give" (or "to influence"), the way the soul is altered during this transformation, and the soul-body relationship. Rabbi Ashlag refutes the views of "the philosophers" on these matters and explains how the kabbalistic worldview disagrees with them. He also enumerates classic kabbalistic concepts, such as the five levels of the soul, the four levels of creation (inanimate, vegetation, animal, and human), and the five "worlds" and their relation to the ten *Sefirot*, divine attributes. He stresses the importance of the study of Kabbala for all Jews and explains

1. Bnei Brak, 2019.

this as the motivation for authoring his *Talmud Eser Sefirot* on the Lurianic corpus and the *Sulam* on the Zohar.

Rabbi Ashlag explained the title of his work:

I titled this commentary “The Ladder [*HaSulam*],” for my commentary functions like a ladder. If an attic is full of treasure, you need only a ladder to ascend, and then all of the good in the world is available to you. The ladder is not the goal in itself. If you rest on the rungs of the ladder, you will never reach the attic or achieve your goal. The same is true of my commentary on the Zohar. Words are not adequate to fully explain these infinitely deep matters. Yet, I was able in my commentary to provide a path, an introduction, for all people so that they can ascend and understand the depths of the book of Zohar itself. That is the real goal of my commentary.²

Elsewhere, Rabbi Ashlag reiterates the traditional view that the Zohar was authored by the *Tanna* R. Shimon bar Yoḥai and the importance of understanding the “physical” allegories in the Zohar in a non-literal manner. Rabbi Ashlag was of the opinion that since we are approaching the Messianic Redemption, permission to reveal formerly esoteric knowledge to the masses has been granted. In this regard, he writes: “By being involved in studying the Zohar and the wisdom of [kabbalistic] truth, a person can bring about the end of the exile and the complete redemption.”³ Alluding to the recent *Shoah* (Rabbi Ashlag began working on his commentary in 1943, and the first volume appeared in 1945), he states that “the redemption of Israel and its level depends upon the study of the Zohar and the internal aspects of Torah; hence, all of the destruction and the descent of Israel in our generation (may God protect us from them). Israel’s success depends on the study of the Zohar and the internal aspects of Torah.”⁴

2. Chapter 58.

3. Chapter 68.

4. Chapter 69.

Introduction to the Zohar

In light of the above, Rabbi Ashlag's "Introduction" is a crucial text for several reasons. First, it is a clear restatement of basic kabbalistic principles for the reader who wishes to engage with the "inner Torah." Second, it provides us with a method for approaching the Zohar, and especially for utilizing the extremely helpful *Sulam* commentary. Last, and perhaps most uniquely, it gives us a clear window into the spiritual world of Rabbi Ashlag himself and the historical-spiritual context in which he attempted, with much success, to propagate his message. And if, along the way, we also manage to transform, at least partially, our "desire to receive" into the "desire to give," he will have empowered us to make the world just a bit of a better place.

Rabbi Dr. Zvi Leshem directed the Gershom Scholem Collection for Kabbalah and Hasidism at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem until his retirement in 2024.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We note that the chapter titles, chapter summaries, headings, and summary chart on page 69 are editorial additions and do not appear in the Rabbi Ashlag's original work.

Introduction to the Zohar The Wisdom of Truth

הקדמות לחכמת האמת - ספר הזוהר

הקדמה

שאלות וחקירות

א'

רצוני בהקדמה זו לברר איזה דברים פשוטים לכאורה, כלומר אשר ידי הכל ממשמשות בהם והרבה דיו נשפכה בכדי לבררם, ובכל זאת עדיין לא הגענו בהם לידי ידיעה ברורה ומספקת.

שאלה א': מה מהותנו.

שאלה ב': מה תפקידנו בשלשלת המציאות הארוכה, שאנו טבעות קטנות הימנה.

שאלה ג': הנה כשאנו מסתכלים על עצמנו, אנו מרגישים את עצמנו מקולקלים ושפלים עד שאין כמונו לגנות – וכשאנו מסתכלים על הפועל שעשה אותנו, הרי אנו מחויבים להימצא ברום המעלות שאין כמוהו לשבת. כי הכרח הוא שמפועל השלם תצאנה פעולות שלמות.

שאלה ד': לפי שהשכל מחייב, הלא הוא ית' הטוב ומטיב שאין למעלה הימנו ית', ואיך ברא מלכתחילה כל כך הרבה בריות שתתענינה

Introduction

Questions and Inquiries

Rabbi Ashlag begins his introduction to the Zohar by asking a series of fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of God, the universe, and humanity. Ultimately, he believes that a picture of creation informed by Kabbala is the best framework to make sense of the questions and paradoxes that appear in the world.

1

In this introduction [to Kabbala], I would like to clarify certain ideas that might seem simple. People mention ideas, and much ink has been spilled explaining those ideas, but people do not clearly and properly understand them.

My questions are:

- What is our [human] essence?
- What is our role in this great chain of being, of which each of us is but a small link?
- When we examine ourselves, we feel that we are defective and low. There is little more despicable than we are. When we examine the Maker who made us, we ought to be superior and perfect, as a perfect Maker ought to make perfect things.
- Logic dictates that God is the Great Benefactor, and none are greater than Him. Why has He created so many creatures

ותתייסרנה בכל ימי היותן, והלא מדרך הטוב להטיב, ועל כל פנים לא להרע כל כך.

שאלה ה': איך אפשר שמהנצחי שאין לו ראשית ואין לו תכלית, תמשכנה בריות הוות וכלות ונפסדות.

ב'

ובכדי לברר כל זה בשלמות צריכים אנו להקדים איזה חקירות. ולא ח"ו במקום האסור, דהיינו בעצמותו של הבורא ית', אשר 'לית מחשבה תפיסא בו כלל וכלל' ואין לנו משום זה שום מחשבה והגה בו ית' – אלא במקום שהחקירה היא מצוה, דהיינו החקירה במעשיו ית', כמצוה לנו בתורה (דבה"א' כח, ט): "דע את אלהי אביך ועבדהו", וכן אומר בשיר היחוד (ליום חמישי): "ממעשיך הכרנך".

והנה חקירה הא' היא: איך יצויר לנו שהבריא תהיה מחודשת, שפירושו דבר חדש שלא היה כלול בו ית' מטרם שבראו, בה בעת שברור לכל בעל עיון שאין לך דבר שלא יהיה כלול בו ית', וכן השכל הפשוט מחייב, כי כלום יש לך נותן מה שאין בו.

חקירה הב': אם תמצא לומר שמבחינת כל יכלתו ודאי הוא שיכול לברוא יש מאין, דהיינו דבר חדש שאין לו שום מציאות בו ית'. נשאלת השאלה, מה היא מציאות הזו שיתכן להחליט עליה שאין לה שום מקום בו ית' אלא היא מחודשת.

חקירה הג': במה שאמרו המקובלים שנשמתו של אדם היא חלק אלוה ממעל, באופן שאין הפרש בינו ית' לבין הנשמה, אלא שהוא ית' 'כל' והנשמה 'חלק'. והמשילו זה לאבן הנחצבת מההר, שאין הפרש בין האבן לבין ההר אלא שזה 'כל' וזו 'חלק'. לפי זה יש לחקור, הא תינתן אבן הנחלקת מההר, שהיא נפרדת מההר על ידי גרון המוכן לכך ונפרד על ידו 'החלק'.

who suffer and experience lack during their existence? Good desires to bestow good, and certainly not to generate so much suffering.

- How is it possible that from the Eternal, which has no beginning nor end, will emanate creatures that come into being, cease to be, and are lowly?

2

To adequately explain all of this, we must initially make certain inquiries. [These inquiries are] not regarding forbidden things, such as God's essence, of which we have no knowledge whatsoever and about which we can neither think nor say anything. Instead, [we should inquire] about those matters that we are commanded to study: namely, God's actions. As the Torah commands: "Know the God of your father and serve Him" (I Chr. 28:9), and as it is also stated in *Shir HaYiḥud* (for Thursday): "You [God] are known through Your actions."

The first inquiry is: How can we imagine a genuinely new creation, something created that was not already contained within God prior to Creation? After all, it is clear to anyone who investigates that there is nothing that is not already included within Him. Furthermore, it is evident that nothing can produce what is not already contained within it.

The second inquiry is: Let us grant that, as an omnipotent being, God can create *ex nihilo*, i.e., something completely new that is not already contained in any way in God. Still, we must ask: What exactly is that "something" that God could choose to create without it being already contained within Him, but is instead entirely new?

The third inquiry is: The kabbalists say that the soul of man is a part of God above, such that there is no distinction between God and the soul. God is the "whole" and the soul is "part." This is comparable to a stone hewn from a mountain, in that the only difference between the stone and the mountain is that the stone is a "part" of the "whole" mountain. We imagine a stone quarried from a mountain by an axe built for that purpose, such that the "part" is

מה'כל, אבל איך יצויר זה בו ית' וית', שיפריד חלק מן עצמותו ית' עד שיצא מעצמותו ית' ויהיה 'חלק' נבדל הימנו, דהיינו לנשמה, עד שיתכן להבינה רק כחלק מעצמותו ית'.

ג'

חקירה הד': כיון שמרכבת הסטרא אחרא והקליפות רחוקה מקדושתו ית' מהקצה אל הקצה עד שלא תצויר הרחקה כזאת – איך אפשר שתתמשך ותתהוו מהקדושה ית'. ולא עוד אלא שקדושתו ית' תקיים אותה.

חקירה הה': ענן תחיית המתים. כיון שהגוף הוא דבר בזוי כל כך, עד שתכף מעת לידתו נידון למיתה וקבורה, ולא עוד אלא שאמרו בזהר (עי' זוהר תרומה אותיות רפד, תנו) שמטרים שהגוף נרקב כולו לא תוכל הנשמה לעלות למקומה לגן עדן, כל עוד שיש איזה שיור הימנו – אם כן מהו החיוב שיחזור ויקום לתחיית המתים, וכי לא יוכל הקב"ה לענג את הנשמות בלעדו. ויותר תמוה מה שאמרו חז"ל, שעתידיים המתים לקום ולהחיות במומם, כדי שלא יאמרו אחר הוא, ואח"ז ירפא את המומים שלהם (וזהר אמור אות נא). ויש להבין, מה אכפת לו להקב"ה שיאמרו אחר הוא, עד שבשביל זה הוא יחזור ויברא את המום שבהם ויוצרך לרפאותם.

חקירה הו': במה שאמרו ז"ל אשר האדם הוא מרכז כל המציאות, שכל העולמות העליונים ועולם הזה הגשמי וכל מלואם, לא נבראו אלא בשבילו (וזהר תוריע אות קיג), וחייבו את האדם להאמין שבשבילו נברא העולם (סנהדרין לו, א) – שלכאורה קשה להבין שבשביל האדם הקטן הזה שאינו תופס ערך של שיערה בערך מציאות העולם הזה, ומכל-שכן בערך כל העולמות העליונים שאין קץ להם ולרוממותם, טרח הקב"ה לברוא כל אלו בשבילו. וכן למה לו לאדם כל זה.

separated from the “whole.” But how is that possible in the case of God? How can a “part” be separated from Him? How can we think of the soul only as a part of God’s essence?

3

The fourth inquiry is: The *sitra ahra* [the “Other Side,” the forces of evil] and the *kelipot* [“husks,” a kabbalistic expression for negative aspects of reality] are unimaginably distant from God’s sanctity. How, then, could these emerge and come into being out of God’s sanctity? Could it be that God’s sanctity actually exists within them?!

The fifth inquiry relates to the resurrection of the dead. The body is contemptible, and from the moment of birth it is already destined for death and burial. The Zohar even states (*Teruma* 284, 457) that the soul cannot rise to its place in the Garden of Eden before the body has completely decomposed, leaving no trace. If so, what is the purpose of the [bodily] resurrection? Could God not delight the soul without the body? There is a greater question. The Sages state that the dead will be resurrected with their bodily defects, so that no one will say that he is a different person. Afterward, God will heal those bodily defects (*Zohar, Emor* 51). Why does God care that someone might say that the [resurrected] person is someone else?! Why does God need to recreate people’s defects and then heal them?

The sixth inquiry is: The Zohar (*Tazria* 40) states that man is the center of reality and that all of the upper worlds as well as all of this material world and all it contains were created for the sake of man. The Talmud states (*Sanhedrin* 37a) that a person must believe that the world was created for him. It seems difficult to understand that all of creation is for the sake of insignificant man, who is less than a hairsbreadth compared to the whole of existence. This becomes even more difficult to understand when man is compared to the infinite and lofty upper worlds. Why would God bother to create all of them for man? And what does man need with all of this?!

פרק א' הרצון לקבל

תכלית הבריאה

ד'

ובכדי להבין כל אלו השאלות והחקירות, תחבולה האחת היא להסתכל בסוף המעשה, כלומר בתכלית הבריאה. כי אי אפשר להבין שום דבר באמצע מלאכתו אלא מסופו. וזה ברור הוא שאין לך פועל בלי תכלית. כי רק מי שאינו שפוי בדעתו תמצאהו פועל בלי תכלית.

וידוע אני שיש מתחכמים פורקי עול תורה ומצוות, שאומרים שהבורא ית' ברא את כל המציאות ועזב אותה לנפשה, כי מחמת האפסיות שבאלו הבריות, אינו מתאים לבורא ית' לרוב רוממותו להשגיח על דרכיהן הפעוטות והמגונות. אכן לא מדעת דברו זאת. כי לא יתכן להחליט על שפלותנו ואפסותנו, מטרם שנחליט שאנחנו עשינו את עצמנו ואת כל אלו הטבעים המקולקלים והמגונים שבנו. אבל בה בעת שאנו מחליטים אשר הבורא ית', השלם בכל השלמות, הוא בעל המלאכה שברא ותיכן את גופותנו, על כל מיני נטיות הטובות והמגונות שבהם – הרי מתחת

Part 1

The Desire to Receive

Humans appear to be lowly and materialistic. In fact, however, they are the loftiest of creatures, the very purpose of creation. God longs to provide greatness and pleasure to His creatures, but greatness and pleasure stem from overcoming weaknesses and challenges of repair. Hence, humans were created with a lowly body and materialistic drives – the desire to receive – such that those could be overcome through a process of purification.

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

4

One strategy for answering these questions is to begin with the end – namely, the end [i.e., purpose] of creation. After all, one cannot understand anything from the middle, only from its end. Clearly, every action has a purpose, since only an insane person acts purposelessly.

I know that there are thinkers – those who reject the yoke of Torah and mitzvot – who say that the Creator created reality and then abandoned it due to the insignificance of creatures. It is inappropriate for the Creator to have providence over their insignificant and distasteful actions. This is foolish. This would be a reasonable conclusion if we [humans] had created ourselves along with all of the distasteful and defective aspects of our nature. But we have concluded that God, the most perfect of beings, is the craftsman who created and designed our bodies – with all of their positive and defective traits. A distasteful and

יד הפועל השלם לא תצא לעולם פעולה בויה ומקולקלת, וכל פעולה מעידה על טיב פועלה, ומה אשמתו של בגד מקולקל אם איזה חייט לא יוצלח תפר אותו? עי' כגון זה במסכת תענית (כ, א): מעשה שבא ר' אלעזר בר"ש וכו', נודמן לו אדם אחד שהיה מכוער ביותר וכו'. אמר לו, כמה מכוער אותו האיש וכו'. אמר לו, לך ואמור לאומן שעשאני: כמה מכוער כלי זה שעשית וכו', עש"ה.

הרי שמתחכמים האלו לומר שמסיבת שפלותנו ואפסותנו אין מתאים לו ית' להשגיח עלינו ועזב אותנו, הם אינם אלא מכרזים על חוסר דעתם בלבד. ודמה לך אם היית פוגש איזה אדם שימציא לו לברוא בריות מלכתחילה בכדי שתתענינה ותתייסרנה בכל ימי חייהם, כמונו, ולא עוד אלא להשליך אותן אחר גיוז מבלי שירצה אפילו להשגיח בהן כדי לעזור מעט – כמה היית מגנה ומזלזל בו. והיתכן להעלות על הדעת כזה על מחויב המציאות ית' וית'.

ה'

ולפיכך השכל הבריא מחייב אותנו להבין את ההיפך מהנראה בשטחיות, ולהחליט שאנו באמת בריות טובות ונעלות ביותר עד שאין קץ לחשיבותנו, דהיינו ממש באופן הראוי והמתאים לבעל המלאכה שעשה אותנו. כי כל משהו חסרון שתמצא להרהר על גופותנו, הנה אחר כל מיני תירוצים שאתה מתרץ לך, הוא נופל רק על הבורא ית' שברא אותנו ואת כל הטבעים שבנו. שהרי ברור

defective product will never emerge from a perfect builder. Every product attests to the nature of its maker. It is not the fault of a ratty item of clothing that it was prepared by an unqualified tailor. The Talmud makes this point (Taanit 20a):

An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon... happened upon an exceedingly ugly person, who said to him, "Greetings to you, my rabbi," but Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him, "Worthless [*reika*] person, how ugly is that man. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you?" The man said to him, "I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: 'How ugly is the vessel you made!'" When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned and insulted this man merely on account of his appearance, he descended from his donkey and prostrated himself before him, and he said to the man: "I have sinned against you; forgive me."

These "thinkers" claim that it is inappropriate for God to have providence over us and that He has abandoned us due to our lowliness and nothingness. This indicates only their own lack of understanding. Imagine meeting a person who suggests creating beings who are destined to suffer and experience pain for all of their lives, much as we do. Moreover, that person plans to forsake them, with no intention of offering his providence over them or assisting them in any way. We would certainly condemn and scorn such a person. Can we imagine saying such a thing about the necessary, existent God?!

5

Therefore, a clear-thinking individual must realize that the truth is the opposite of what appears on the surface. He must conclude that we are good and that we are the loftiest of creatures. We are of infinite significance. We are worthy of the Craftsman who made us. Any flaws in our bodies – whatever explanations we might offer for them – ultimately stem from the Creator who created us with all of our human nature. After

ש'הוא עשנו ולא אנחנו, גם ידע כל אלו התהלוכות אשר תמשכנה לצאת מכל אלו הטבעים והנטיית הרעות שנטע בנו.

אלא הוא הדבר אשר אמרנו, שצריכים אנו להסתכל על סוף המעשה ואז נוכל להבין הכל. ומשל בפי העולם: אל תראה דבר לשוטה באמצע מלאכתו.

י'

וכבר הורנו חז"ל (עי' ע"ח שער הכללים פ"א בתחילתו), שלא ברא הקב"ה את העולם אלא בכדי לְהַנִּית לנבראיו. וכאן אנו צריכים להשים את עינינו וכל מחשבותינו, כי הוא סוף הכוונה והמעשה של בריאת העולם. ויש להתבונן, כיון שמחשבת הבריאה היתה בכדי להנות לנבראיו, הרי הכרח הוא שברא בנשמות מידת רצון גדולה עד מאד לקבל את אשר חשב ליתן להן. שהרי מידת גדלו של כל תענוג וכל הנאה מדודה במידת גדלו של הרצון לקבל אותו. עד שכל שהרצון לקבלו גדול יותר, הנה בשיעור הזה מידת התענוג גדולה ביותר, וכל שהרצון לקבלו פחות יותר, הרי באותה המידה נפחת שיעור התענוג מהקבלה. הרי שמחשבת הבריאה בעצמה מחייבת בהכרח לברוא בנשמות רצון לקבל בשיעור מופרז ביותר, המתאים למידת התענוג הגדול שכל יכלתו חשב לענג את הנשמות. כי התענוג הגדול והרצון לקבל הגדול עולים בקנה אחד.

הבריאה המחודשת

ז'

ואחר שידענו זה, כבר הגענו להבין חקירה הב' עד סופה בבירור מוחלט. כי חקרנו לדעת מה היא המציאות שאפשר להחליט עליה בבירור שאינה מצויה ואינה נכללת בעצמותו ית', עד שנאמר שהיא בריאה מחודשת יש מאין.

ועתה שידענו בבירור שמחשבת הבריאה שהיא בכדי להנות לנבראיו, בראה בהכרח מידת רצון לקבל ממנו ית' את כל הנועם והטוב הזה שחשב

all, it is clear that “He made us, and we did not” (Ps. 100:3). He knows all of the consequences of our human nature and our bad tendencies, which He created within us.

Thus, what we stated before must be true: We must look at the purpose and end of creation in order to understand everything. As the saying goes: “Do not show anything to a fool while it is in the middle of being constructed.”

6

The Sages (see [R. Haim Vital's] *Etz Hayyim, Shaar HaKellalim* at the beginning of the first chapter) already explained that God created the world only in order to benefit His creatures. We must pay attention and focus on this, for it is the end and purpose of the creation of the world. [People] must understand that since the purpose of creation is to benefit creatures, it must be that [God] created in our souls a great desire to receive that which He intended to provide to them. After all, the greater the desire to receive a benefit, the greater the pleasure one derives from that benefit. One who has a greater desire to receive will have a proportionally greater pleasure from it, and one who has a lesser desire to receive will have a proportionally lesser pleasure from it. Hence, the intention behind creation requires creating souls with an enormous and exaggerated desire [for that pleasure], for that accords with the great pleasure with which the Almighty intended to pleasure the souls. Pleasure and the desire to receive are proportionate to one another.

RENEWED CREATION

7

Given the above, we can answer the second inquiry properly and clearly. We wanted to identify that reality about which it can be said that it does not exist and is not contained in God's essence, such that we can say that it was created “something from nothing,” *ex nihilo*.

Now that we know that the intention behind creation was to give pleasure to His creatures, He must have created a “desire to receive” from God all of the pleasure and good that He intended for them. This

בעדם. הנה הרצון לקבל הזה, ודאי שלא היה כלול בעצמותו ית' מטרם שבראו בנשמות, כי ממי יקבל? הרי שברא דבר מחודש שאינו בו ית'.
ויחד עם זה מובן על פי מחשבת הבריאה, שלא היה צריך כלל לברוא משהו יותר מהרצון לקבל הזה. שהרי בריאה מחודשת הזו, כבר מספקת לו ית' למלאות כל מחשבת הבריאה שחשב עלינו להנות אותנו. אבל כל המילוי שבמחשבת הבריאה, דהיינו כל מיני הטבות שחשב בעדנו, כבר הן נמשכות בהמשכה ישרה מעצמותו ית', ואין לו ענין לברוא אותן מחדש בעת שכבר הן נמשכות יש מיש אל הרצון לקבל הגדול שבנשמות. והנה נתברר לנו בהחלט, שכל החומר כולו, מתחילתו עד סופו, שבבריאה המחודשת – הוא רק 'הרצון לקבל'.

הנשמות – חלק אלקי ממעל

ח'

ומכאן באנו גם לסוף דעתם של המקובלים שהבאנו בחקירה הג'. שתמהנו עליהם, איך אפשר לומר על הנשמות שהן חלק אלקי ממעל, בהשוואה אל האבן שנחצבה מההר שאין הפרש ביניהם אלא שזה 'חלק' וזה 'כל'. ותמהנו, תינתן האבן שנפרדה מההר, שנעשית חלק ממנו על ידי גרזן מוכן לכך, אבל בעצמותו ית' איך יתכן לומר כך, ובמה נחלקו הנשמות מעצמותו ית' ויצאו מכלל בורא ית' להיות נבראים.

ובהמתבאר מובן הדבר היטב. כי כמו שהגרזן מחתך ומבדיל בדבר גשמי לחלקו לשנים, כן שינוי הצורה מבדיל ברוחני לחלקו לשנים. למשל, כשב' אנשים אוהבים זה את זה, תאמר שהם דבקים זה בזה כגוף אחד. ולהיפך כשהם שונאים זה את זה, תאמר שהם רחוקים איש מרעהו כרחוק מזרח ממערב. ואין כאן ענין של קרבת מקום או ריחוק מקום, אלא הכוונה היא על השתוות הצורה: שבהיותם שווים בצורתם איש לרעהו, שאוהב כל מה שחברו אוהב ושונא כל

desire to receive could not have been contained in God's essence prior to the creation of [human] souls, for from whom could He have received [given that there was nothing other than God]? He then created something new that had not been part of Him.

Given this, there was no need to create anything other than that desire to receive in order to achieve the goal of creation. This new creation [of a desire to receive] itself supplied to God all that was needed to fulfill the goal of creation, which He had planned in order to benefit us. All of the content of the plan of creation – that is, all of the good He intended for us – would flow directly from God's essence, and He would not have to create them anew, since they would flow from pre-existing reality to the great desire to receive [that is already in] souls. It follows absolutely that all of material existence, from beginning to end, in this unique creation is [really] nothing other than “the desire to receive.”

THE SOULS – PART OF GOD ABOVE

8

This explains the position of the kabbalists discussed in inquiry number three. We asked: How can we speak of the souls as part of God above? We compared this to a stone quarried from a mountain, regarding which there is no distinction between them. Instead, this [the stones] are “part” of that “whole” [the mountain]. We then asked: When the stone separates from the mountain, it is separated only due to acts that are designed to separate it. But we cannot say such a thing about God's essence! How did the souls separate from the essence of God, becoming creatures distinct from the Creator?

We can now understand this precisely. Just as an axe splits and divides a physical object into two parts, a change in form [essence] separates a spiritual thing into two. For example, when two people love one another, one can say that they are connected to each another as one body. When they hate each another, one can say that they are as distant from each other as west is from east. This is not a description of their physical closeness or distance, but a similarity in their forms. Since the two of them are similar in form to one another – each loves

מה שחברו שונא וכדומה – נמצאים אוהבים זה את זה ודבוקים זה בזה. ואם יש ביניהם איזה שינוי צורה, דהיינו שאוהב דבר־מה אע"פ שחברו שונא הדבר וכדומה, הרי בשיעור שינוי הצורה הזה הם שנאים ורחוקים זה מזה. ואם למשל הם בהפכיות הצורה, דהיינו כל מה שזה אוהב נמצא שונא לחברו, וכל מה שזה שונא נמצא אוהב לחברו – הרי אז רחוקים זה מזה כרחוק מזרח ממערב, דהיינו מקצה אל הקצה.

ט'

והנך מוצא שברוחניות פועל שינוי הצורה כמו הגרזן המפריד בין הגשמיים, וכן שיעור ההרחקה הוא כפי שיעור הפכיות הצורה. ומכאן תשכיל, כיון שנטבע בנשמות הרצון לקבל הנאתו כמ"ל, אישר הוכחנו בעליל שצורה זו אינה נמצאת כלל בהבורא ית', כי ח"ו ממי יקבל – הרי שינוי צורה הזה שהשיגו הנשמות, פועל להפריד מעצמותו ית' כדמיון הגרזן החוצב האבן מן ההר. באופן שע"י שינוי הצורה הזה יצאו הנשמות מכלל בורא ונבדלו הימנו להיות נבדלים. אמנם כל מה שמשגיגות הנשמות מאורו ית', הרי הוא נמשך יש מיש מעצמותו ית'.

אם כן נמצא, שמבחינת אורו ית' שמקבלות תוך הכלי שבהן, שהוא הרצון לקבל, אין הפרש כלל ביניהן לעצמותו ית', שהרי הוא מקובל להן יש מיש ישר מעצמותו ית'. וכל ההפרש שבין הנשמות לעצמותו ית' אינו יותר אלא במה שהנשמות הן חלק מעצמותו ית', דהיינו ששיעור האור שקבלו תוך הכלי שהוא הרצון לקבל כבר הוא חלק נבדל מאלקי, בהיותו נשוא תוך שינוי הצורה של הרצון לקבל, ששינוי צורה זה עשה אותו לחלק, שעל ידו יצאו מבחי' כל' ונעשו לבחינת 'חלק'. הרי שאין ביניהם אלא שזה 'כל' וזה 'חלק', כאבן הנחצבת מההר. והתבונן היטב, כי אי אפשר להאריך יותר במקום גבוה כזה.

what the other one loves and hates what the other one hates, etc. – they love one another and cleave to one another. If their form changes, such that one loves what the other hates or the like, they will become proportionally distant from one another, to the point of hatred. If they are opposites in form – such that whatever one likes, the other hates, and vice versa – then they are extremely distant from one another, as far as east is from west.

9

Differences in form act spiritually much as the axe acts physically to separate things. The distance [between the two spiritual things] will be proportional to the difference in form. Understand, as discussed, that souls are imbued with a desire to receive pleasure, which, as we demonstrated, does not exist at all within the Creator. Heaven forbid! From whom could God receive?! This change in form that the souls acquire serves to separate them from God's essence, much as the axe separates a stone from the mountain. This change in form detaches the souls from God, and they become creatures separate from Him. Still, anything that the souls acquire from God's light flows from a pre-existing reality, from God's essence.

If so, it follows that from the perspective of the divine light received by the vessel – which is the desire to receive – there is absolutely no difference between the soul and God's essence, as it [the divine light] flows from the pre-existing reality of God's essence directly to the souls. The entire difference between the soul and God's essence is that the soul is only a part of God's essence. The limited amount of divine light received by the vessel, the desire to receive, becomes a separate entity from the Divine due to this change of form. Through it [this change in form], the light transformed from being in the category of "All" to being in the category of "part." Thus, the only difference between them is that one is "all" and the other is "part," like a stone that is quarried from the mountain. Study this carefully, since I cannot expound more about such lofty things.

טעם התהוות מערכת הטומאה והקליפות

”

ועתה נפתח לנו הפתח להבין החקירה הד'. איך אפשר שיתהווה מקדושתו ית' ענין מרכבת הטומאה והקליפות, אחר שהיא רחוקה מקדושתו ית' מקצה אל הקצה. ואיך יתכן שיפרנס אותה ויקיימה.

אכן יש להבין מקודם ענין מציאות מהות הטומאה והקליפות מה היא. ותדע שהרצון לקבל הגדול הזה, שאמרנו שהוא עצם מהותן של הנשמות מבחינת עצם בריאתן, כי על כן הן מוכנות לקבל כל המילוי שבמחשבת הבריאה – הוא לא נשאר בצורתו זו בנשמות. כי אם היה נשאר בהן, היו מוכרחות להישאר תמיד בפרודא (פירוד) ממנו ית', כי שינוי הצורה שבהן היה מפרידן ממנו ית'.

ובכדי לתקן דבר הפירוד הזה המונח על הכלי של הנשמות, ברא ית' את כל העולמות כולם והבדילם לב' מערכות. בסוד הכתוב (קהלת ז, יד): "זה לעומת זה עשה אלהים". שהן ד' עולמות אבי"ע (אצילות בריאה יצירה עשיה) דקדושה, ולעומתן ד' עולמות אבי"ע דטומאה. והטביע את הרצון להשפיע במערכת אבי"ע דקדושה, והסיר מהם את הרצון לקבל לעצמו (כמ"ש בפתחה לחכמת הקבלה אותיות יד-יט עש"ה) ונתן אותן במערכת העולמות אבי"ע דטומאה, ונמצאו בגללו נפרדים מהבורא ית' ומכל העולמות דקדושה.

ומטעם זה מכוונות הקליפות בשם מתים, כמ"ש "זבחי מתים". וכן הרשעים הנמשכים אחריהם, כמ"ש חז"ל (ברכות יח, ב): "הרשעים בחייהם נקראים מתים". כי הרצון לקבל המוטבע בהם [שהוא] בהפכיות הצורה מקדושתו ית', מפרידן מחיי החיים והן רחוקות ממנו ית' מקצה אל הקצה. כי הוא ית' אין לו שום ענין של קבלה אלא רק להשפיע לבד, והקליפות אין להן שום ענין של השפעה רק לקבל לעצמן להנאותן בלבד, ואין הפכיות גדולה מזו. וכבר ידעת שהמרחק הרוחני מתחיל בשינוי צורה במשהו, ומסתיים בהפכיות הצורה שהיא סוף המרחק בדיטא האחרונה.

THE REASON THE SYSTEM OF IMPURITY AND THE “HUSKS” COME INTO BEING

10

We are now in a position to answer query four. How can the system [lit. chariot] of impurity and the husks emerge from the sanctity of God, since they are so radically distant from God’s sanctity? How can God maintain and nourish them?

We must first understand the true essence of impurity and husks. Know that the desire to receive – which, as we said, is the essence of the souls as they were created, since that enables them to receive all of the fullness planned for creation – does not remain as it was [originally] in the souls. Had it [the desire to receive] remained the same, they [the souls] would always remain separate from God, since their change in form separates them from God.

In order to repair the separation [from God] that is present in the vessel of the souls, God created all of the worlds and divided them into two systems, as the verse states: “God made both, one opposite the other” (Eccl. 7:14). These are the four holy worlds of *ABYA* (*Atzilut* [Emanation], *Beria* [Creation], *Yetzira* [Formation], and *Asiya* [Action]), as well as their counterparts – four impure *ABYA* worlds. God established a desire to give in the holy system of *ABYA*, and He removed from them a selfish desire to receive (as I will explain in chapters 14–19 below). He placed that [desire to receive] in the impure *ABYA* worlds, which separated them from God and from the worlds of sanctity.

This is why the husks are referred to as “dead,” as the verse describes: “sacrifices of the dead” (Ps. 106:28). Similarly, evildoers are attracted to them [the husks], as the Sages state: “The wicked, [even] during their lives, are called dead” (Berakhot 18b). This is because their inherent desire to receive, which is the opposite of the form that stems from God’s sanctity, separates them from the Life-Force of the Living; they exist at opposite poles from God. For God has no desire to receive, but only to give to others. And the husks contain no element of giving, but only receiving for their own pleasure. These are extreme opposites. It is known that spiritual distance starts with a small difference in form and ends with a form that is radically opposite, at an extreme distance, on another level entirely.

י"א

ונשתלשלו העולמות עד למציאות עולם הזה הגשמי, דהיינו למקום שתהיה בו מציאות גוף ונשמה, וכן זמן קלקול ותיקון. כי הגוף, שהוא הרצון לקבל לעצמו, נמשך משורשו שבמחשבת הבריאה כנ"ל, ועובר דרך המערכה של העולמות דטומאה, כמ"ש (איוב יא, יב): "עֵיר פָּרָא אָדָם יוֹלֵד", ונשאר משועבד תחת המערכה ההיא עד י"ג שנה. והוא זמן הקלקול.

ועל ידי עסק המצוות מ"ג שנים ואילך, שעוסק על מנת להשפיע נחת רוח ליוצרו, הוא מתחיל לטהר הרצון לקבל לעצמו המוטבע בו ומהפכו לאט לאט על מנת להשפיע. שבוזה הולך וממשיך נפש קדושה משורשה במחשבת הבריאה, והיא עוברת דרך המערכה של העולמות דקדושה והיא מתלבשת בגוף. והוא הזמן של התיקון.

וכן מוסיף והולך לקנות ולהשיג מדרגות דקדושה ממחשבת הבריאה שבא"ס ב"ה (אין סוף ברוך הוא), עד שהן מסייעות לו להאדם להפוך את הרצון לקבל לעצמו שבו, שיהיה כולו בבחינת מקבל על מנת להשפיע נחת רוח ליוצרו ולא כלל לתועלת עצמו. שבוזה קונה האדם השוואת הצורה ליוצרו. כי קבלה על מנת להשפיע נחשבת ליצורת השפעה טהורה (כמ"ש במסכת קדושין (דף ג, א) שבאדם חשוב, נתנה היא ואמר הוא, הרי זו מקודשת. כי קבלתו שהיא על מנת להנות לנותנת לו, נחשבת להשפעה ונתנה גמורה אליה, עש"ה), ואז קונה דבקות גמורה בו ית'. כי דבקות הרוחני אינה אלא השוואת הצורה (כמ"ש חז"ל (ע"פ סוטה יד, א): "ואיך אפשר להדבק בו? אלא הדבק במידותיו", ע"ש). שבוזה נעשה האדם ראוי לקבל כל הטוב והנועם והרוך שבמחשבת הבריאה.

11

The worlds developed [*nishtalshehu*] until this material world came into being, a place that contains both body and soul, and a time wherein both corruption and repair are possible. The body, which is the desire to receive, derived from its roots in God's plan for creation, as discussed earlier. But it [the body] passed through the worlds of impurity, as Job states: "A wild ass gives birth to a human" (Job 11:12). [The words "wild ass" refer to the worlds of impurity.] It [the body] remains enslaved under that system until age thirteen. That is the period of corruption.

After age thirteen, a person's performance of mitzvot – performed with the intention to give satisfaction to his Maker – begins purifying the selfish desire to receive that had been imprinted in him. [Performance of mitzvot] gradually turns [that selfish desire] into a desire to give. This gradually draws [*mamshikh*] the holy soul from its roots in the plan of creation. It [the holy soul] traverses the entire system of sanctified worlds and becomes en clothed in the body. That is the time of repair.

From then on, he continually acquires and reaches levels of sanctity that are part of the plan of creation and are present in the *Ein Sof* [the Infinite]. These [levels of sanctity] assist the person in transforming the selfish desire to receive that is embedded in him into a desire to give, to the point that he becomes one who receives only in order to give satisfaction to his Maker rather than to benefit himself. In this way, a person equates his own form to [that of] his Maker. For receiving for the sake of giving to others is considered the purest form of giving. (This is related to what is stated in Kiddushin 7a: If a woman gives a gift to an important man, she receives benefit from the fact that he consents to accept a gift from her. That benefit is adequate to be considered the exchange that is legally required for them to be married. The fact that he accepts the gift in order for her to benefit from the fact that she gave it to him is considered a complete gift to her.) The person then achieves a complete bond with God. For a spiritual bond is nothing other than an equating of form. To paraphrase a statement of the Sages: "How can one cleave to God? Rather, cleave to His attributes" (based on Sota 14a). That is how a person can become worthy to receive all of the good, pleasantness, and softness that was in the plan of creation.

י"ב

והנה נתבאר היטב דבר התיקון של הרצון לקבל המוטבע בנשמות מצד מחשבת הבריאה. כי הכין הבורא ית' בשבילן ב' מערכות הנ"ל, זה לעומת זה, שעל ידיהן עוברות הנשמות ומתחלקות לב' בחינות, גוף ונפש, המתלבשים זה בזה. וע"י תורה ומצוות נמצאים בסופם שיהפכו צורת הרצון לקבל כמו צורת הרצון להשפיע. אז יכולים לקבל כל הטוב שבמחשבת הבריאה – ויחד עם זה זוכים לדבקות חזקה בו ית', מפאת שזכו ע"י העבודה בתורה ומצוות להשוואת הצורה ליוצרם. שזה נבחן לגמר התיקון. ואז כיון שלא יהיה עוד שום צורך לסטרא אחרא הטמאה, היא תתבער מן הארץ ויבולע המוות לנצח. וכל העבודה בתורה ומצוות שניתנה לכלל העולם במשך שְׁיִתָּא אֱלֹפִי שְׁנֵי דְהָיוּ עֲלָמָא (ששת אלפים שנה שהעולם קיים), וכן לכל פרט במשך שבעים שנות חייו – אינה אלא להביאם לגמר התיקון של השוואת הצורה האמורה.

גם נתבאר היטב, ענין התהוות ויציאת מערכת הקליפות והטומאה מקדושתו ית'. שהיה מוכרח זה כדי להמשיך על ידה בריאת הגופים, שאח"כ יתקנו אותן [את הרצון לקבל] ע"י תורה ומצוות. ואם לא היו נמשכים לנו הגופים ברצון לקבל שבהם המקולקל ע"י מערכת הטומאה, אז לא היה אפשר לנו לתקנו לעולם. כי אין אדם מתקן מה שאין בו.

12

We now understand that the desire to receive, which is embedded in the soul due to the plan of creation, requires repair. For God has created the two systems [the system of purity and the system of impurity, the *sitra aħra*], one opposite the other, through which the souls pass. Through them, they are separated into two aspects, the body and the soul, which become intertwined [*mitlabshot*, lit. enclothed in one another]. Through Torah and mitzvot, the desire to receive is eventually transformed into a desire to give. Then [after that transformation], the souls can receive all of the good that is in the plan of creation, and they also become worthy of a stronger bond with God, since the service of Torah and mitzvot transform the form [of the soul] into that of the Creator. This is the last stage of repair. Then there will be no need for the impure “Other Side,” which will be eliminated from the earth, and death shall be swallowed up forever. All of the service of Torah and mitzvot – which was granted to the entire world during the six thousand years of the world’s existence, and to each individual for the seventy years of his life – is for the purpose of bringing about that final stage of repair, in which people’s forms become equated [with that of God], as discussed.

This also explains how the system of husks and impurity emanate from God’s sanctity. They are a necessary precursor to the creation of bodies, which can then be repaired (along with the desire to receive) through Torah and mitzvot. If bodies with a defective desire to receive had not emanated from the system of impurity, we would be unable to repair them, since a person cannot repair what he does not possess.