
אגרת הקודש
THE STEINSALTZ TANYA

Iggeret HaKodesh

VOLUME IV



Steinsaltz
Center



MAGGID

THE MAGERMAN EDITION

THE STEINSALTZ
TANYA

IGGERET HAKODESH
1-17

COMMENTARY & TRANSLATION BY
RABBI ADIN EVEN-ISRAEL STEINSALTZ

Steinsaltz Center
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Dedicated to
my wife, **Debra,**
and my children,
Elijah, Zachary, Sydney, and Lexie.

May this new translation of the Tanya,
along with the commentary from Rabbi Steinsaltz (z"l),
bring us closer to hasidic teaching and
help us connect with the mystical meaning
behind the Torah.

*May all the children of Israel use
the Tanya's knowledge and wisdom
to work together to hasten the coming of Mashiah.*

DAVID M. MAGERMAN



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 חברתה 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' לאיש"ט
שולמית בת זהרה שתחי' לאיש"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)

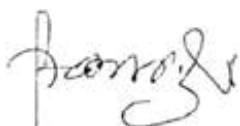
In the merit of

MOSHE LEIB BEN ZISEL
SHULAMIT BAT ZOHARA

A blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson, dated 21 Av 5721 (August 3, 1961), viewing with favor Rabbi Steinsaltz's project of writing a short commentary, with longer explanations, on the *Tanya* in a style accessible to the contemporary reader:

(ושאלות ותשובות – כהמצורף למכתבו) בענייני
המובאים בתניא, כן ביאור קצר או גם ארוך, ובסגנונו,
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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אגרת הקודש

Iggeret HaKodesh

The Holy Epistle

Preface to *Iggeret HaKodesh*

Iggeret HaKodesh, or “The Holy Epistle,” is the fourth section of the *Tanya*. It is not a treatise in the usual sense of the word, with a beginning, middle, and end. Rather, it is a collection of epistles that the author of the *Tanya* addressed to groups of his hasidim on various occasions regarding a variety of topics.¹ Each epistle was written as an independent unit without reference to the others. Nevertheless, it is clear that they have been thoughtfully arranged, not chronologically but thematically. Wherever possible, these thematic connections are noted in the introductions to the epistles.

The common denominator between these epistles is that they are letters from a Rebbe to his hasidim. As such, they open with verses from the Torah or sayings from the Sages, as well as various hasidic teachings, and then proceed to discuss a specific topic – the purpose for which the letter was written.² These teachings are significant in that they represent Torah teachings that the author of the *Tanya* wrote himself in his own words. Moreover, the teachings are applied to particular circumstances in the life of the hasidim.

Since the author of the *Tanya* wrote these epistles in his own hand,

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1. It would seem that this section should have been more aptly titled *Iggerot HaKodesh*, “Holy Epistles,” in the plural. Perhaps it was given its present title to align with the title of the previous section, *Iggeret HaTeshuva*.
 2. At times, if the author of the *Tanya* had a message for his hasidim that he did not wish to publicize, he did not write it down but transmitted it orally through the emissary who delivered these epistles. See *Sefer HaKen* by Rabbi Hayyim Lieberman.

they are considered sacrosanct, an essential part of his Torah teachings. In light of this, in 1814 *Iggeret HaKodesh* was published by his sons as an inseparable part of the *Tanya*, which is more broadly considered a foundational hasidic work.

In preparing these epistles for publication, salutations, valedictions, dates, and place names were generally excluded unless these details were essential to understanding the letter's main message.³ Despite these elisions, the unique character of each epistle has been preserved, both with regard to the intended recipients, indicating whether they were part of the inner circle of the author's hasidim or a broader group, and with regard to the content. This might comprise the elucidation of deep concepts in hasidic thought, an impassioned plea to give charity, or a request that the hasidim take on a certain mode of conduct required of them at that time.

The topics under discussion cover a broad spectrum, encompassing all areas of Jewish life: Torah study, prayer, and mitzvot. Some epistles relate to specific issues affecting the lives of the hasidim, such as those impacting their relationship with their Rebbe or those involving their opponents. Some speak of special occasions, such as the author of the *Tanya's* release from prison on 19 Kislev or the passing away of a tzaddik. But the topic that recurs most often is the mitzva of giving charity.

The Jewish community, and the hasidic community in particular, was impoverished, and the giving of charity was vital to its survival. This was especially the case for those who had emigrated to the Land of Israel, whom the hasidim living outside the Holy Land had undertaken to support. But precisely because of the widespread poverty, this was a mitzva that was extremely difficult to fulfill. The author of the *Tanya* demanded of his hasidim substantial donations, and not just from discretionary funds but from income they needed for their own survival. To this end, the epistles state that giving charity is not only about helping a person in need, but rather it has a profound impact on the benefactor, even more than on the recipient.

Moreover, since these epistles were written by a Rebbe, and a Rebbe

3. The epistles were arranged by the author of the *Tanya's* sons, who apparently lacked access to the author's original letters but rather were able to obtain only copies. See the approbation to the Shklov edition of the *Tanya* (1814).

does not occupy himself only with his followers' material well-being but also with their spiritual well-being, the letters explain how giving charity, and performing charitable acts in general, constitutes the innermost and most precious expression of a person's essence. This awakens God's benevolence at the loftiest levels so that He bestows on the giver of charity a life of both material and spiritual prosperity.

Epistle 1

ALTHOUGH THIS LETTER, THE FIRST IN THIS COMPILATION known as *Iggeret HaKodesh*, opens by referring to a particular event, it addresses general topics in the service of God that apply at any time and in any place: the essence of Torah, faith and prayer, and the dynamic between them.¹ To set the background for these concepts, in the letter's opening and particularly at its conclusion, the author of the *Tanya* requests of his students, not something abstract, but rather that which relates to the order of prayer in the synagogue, its schedule, and the choosing of a prayer leader. The analytical portion of the letter also focuses primarily on the order of public prayer and even touches on the concept of the service of prayer of every individual.

פּוֹתְחִין בְּבִרְכָּה לְבָרֵךְ וְלְהוֹדוֹת
לֵה' כִּי טוֹב. We begin with a benediction, to bless
and give thanks to God, for He is
good. 3 Av
7 Av (leap year)

In line with letters of this kind, the author of the *Tanya* opens with poetic words comprised of passages from the *Tanakh* and the Sages.² Afterward, he returns to his signature style.

-
1. See *Sefer HaMa'amarim* (5708), p. 170, which states that this letter was actually not written at a single point in time but rather at various times that span the formative years of the Chabad hasidic movement under the leadership of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the *Tanya*.
 2. The expression "to give thanks to God, for He is good" appears many times in *Tanakh*. See, e.g., Jer. 33:11 and Ps. 106:1. The phrase is an expression of gratitude for good tidings. See Rashi, Gen. 24:52.

שְׂמוּעָה טוֹבָה שְׁמָעָה וְתַחֵי נַפְשִׁי, אֵין טוֹב אֶלָּא תוֹרָה (אבות פרק ו משנה ג),
My soul has heard good tidings and has been revived, and “good” means nothing but Torah (Mishna *Avot* 6:3).

This expression of gratitude refers to the “good tidings” regarding Torah study, which is that it enlivens the soul.

תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה, זוֹ הַשְּׁלֵמַת כָּל הַשָּׁם בּוֹלוֹ
Moreover, God’s Torah is perfect, restoring the soul. I refer to the completion of all of Talmud in its entirety

By using the Hebrew word *temima*, perfect, to describe the Torah,³ a word that also connotes that which is whole or complete, the author of the *Tanya* hints at the completion of the entire Talmud. To this day, it is customary among Chabad hasidim to learn the entire Talmud every year, beginning from the nineteenth of Kislev until the nineteenth of Kislev of the next year. The tractates are divided among the hasidim, each one resolving to complete the tractate that he most resonates with and that is within his capacity to study so that the entire Talmud may be completed once every year. ❧

THE COMPLETION OF THE TALMUD

❧ The completion of the Talmud is scheduled for 19 Kislev since it is the “New Year” for Chabad hasidim. This is a day of celebration, the date on which the author of the *Tanya*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was released from incarceration (see *Iggerot Kodesh* by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneerson, vol. 2, p. 98). This part of the letter was written, however, before the incarceration and redemption on 19 Kislev, and the custom to

complete the Talmud in one year was already being practiced in some communities. When Rabbi Shneur Zalman was incarcerated, his followers resolved to increase their Torah study, and when he was released from prison on the nineteenth of Kislev, the hasidim decided to commemorate this event by beginning and ending the cycle of Talmud study on this day, the day that he was released from prison, the day of liberation, the day of redemption.

3. Based on Ps. 19:8.

בְּרֹב עִירֹת וּמְנַנִּים מֵאַנְשֵׁי
שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ. in most towns and congregations of
our community of hasidim.

As these lines show, there were already entire towns of hasidim in those times in the region where the author of the *Tanya* was living. “Congregations of our community” refers to towns that, though not entirely hasidic, had hasidic congregations.

הוֹדָאָה עַל הָעֵבֶר וּבִקְשָׁה עַל
הָעָתִיד. I express gratitude for the past and a
plea for the future.

The author of the *Tanya* expresses his gratitude for their completing the Talmud in the past year and makes an appeal for the future: that they accomplish the same the next year and every year thereafter.

כֹּה יִתֵּן וְכֹה יוֹסִיף ה', לְאַמִּיץ
לְבָם בְּגִבּוֹרִים, מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה
בְּגִבּוֹרָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה. וְלִהְיוֹדִיעַ
לְבְנֵי אָדָם גְּבוּרָתָהּ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה
שֶׁבְעַל פֶּה וְכֹחַ עוֹז. May God thus continue to grant and
increase their ability to complete the
study of the Talmud, strengthening
their hearts among the mighty with
the might of Torah from year to year
and informing mankind of the strength
of the Oral Torah and its great power.

Just as God gave the hasidim the energy to complete the Talmud this year, so may He grant them the strength to complete it in the future with even greater fortitude. The author of the *Tanya* specifies the quality of might in relation to the Oral Torah since this aspect of the Torah is aligned with the side of *Gevura*, the attribute of restraint.⁴ The Oral Torah constricts and delimits the Written Torah within the parameters of the reality of this world. It also gives power and strength to those who study it to overcome the barriers of the concealment and physicality inherent in this world and in the body while experiencing divine illumination without being nullified or burned by it.⁵

4. *Zohar* 3:257a; see also *Etz Hayyim* 35:83.

5. See *Torah Or* 66a; *Likkutei Amarim*, chap. 36.

פִּירֵשׁ שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם:
 "חֲגָרָהּ בְּעוֹז מִתְנִיָּה כּו'" (משלי
 לא, יז). King Solomon, may he rest in peace,
 explained, "She girds her loins with
 might..." (Prov. 31:17).

The chapter from which this verse is taken describes the woman of valor, extolling the virtues of the Jewish woman. While this can be taken at face value, its mystical underpinnings open up an entirely different dimension.

The woman of valor is a metaphor for all of reality, for the *sefira* of *Malkhut* (Kingship), for the congregation of Israel, and for the unique holy soul of every individual Jew. In this light, the verse can be understood on a new level. "Might" refers to the Torah, as the Sages affirm: "There is no might besides the Torah."⁶ But it is not clear what the "loins" of the Torah refer to, and therefore the author of the *Tanya* goes on to explain this expression in the verse.

מִתְנִיָּם' הֵם בְּחִינַת דְּבַר הַמַּעֲמִיד
 כָּל הַגּוּף עִם הָרֹאשׁ הַנִּצָּב וְעוֹמֵד
 עֲלֵיהֶם, וְהֵם הַמּוֹלִיכִים וּמְבִיאִים
 אוֹתוֹ לְמַחֲזוֹ חֶפְצוֹ. The loins are the aspect of the body
 that supports the entire body, includ-
 ing the head, which is perched atop
 the body, positioned above the loins.
 It is the loins that carry the body and
 bring it to its desired destination.

The loins are what we call the pelvic region, which includes the two legs that emerge from it. The pelvis has two functions: First, it provides stability for the body since it is where the body's weight is centered, and second, it gives the body the ability to move from one place to another. While the head, the center of awareness and cognition, and the heart, the emotional focal point, are loftier, they are incapable of standing alone without the support of the pelvis and unable to move from one place to another without the legs.

וְכַמוֹ שֶׁהוּא בְּגִשְׁמֵיּוֹת הַגּוּף, כִּן
 הוּא בְּבְחִינַת רִוְחָנֵיּוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ
 הָאֱלֹהִית. Just as it is with regard to the physical
 anatomy of the body, so it is with the
 spiritual structure of the divine soul.

6. *Sifrei*, Deut. 32:2, *Shir HaShirim Rabba* 2:10; *Zohar* 2:58a.

The physical structure of man reflects his spiritual composition.⁷ A person's spiritual faculties are his spiritual limbs, metaphysical mirrors of his corporeal limbs. There is, then, a spiritual faculty that fills the role of the hips within one's soul, that supports one's conscious essence (the head) and his emotions (the body), enabling him to function without losing his composure and sense of self.

הַאֲמוּנָה הָאֱמִיתִית בְּה' אֶחָד, The loins of the soul are **true faith in the one God,**

The spiritual faculty called the loins of the soul is the power of faith. Before the author of the *Tanya* goes on to explain how faith, like the loins, holds up the rest of the soul's faculties, he says a few words about faith. The faith that he is talking about, the faith that one's entire spiritual structure stands upon, must be true faith in the one God.

True faith is distinguished in two ways. The first is to believe in that which is true. Some people may harbor faith in that which is false. The second is to truly believe; one's faith must be genuine and palpable. These two facets of faith do not necessarily go hand in hand. A person once asked a rabbi, "Why are heretics so successful?" The rabbi answered, "Because they truly practice their falsity, while we superficially practice our truth." ❧

TRUE FAITH

❧ For faith to be true, it must be defined and specific. This is not the common concept of faith that people refer to today. Faith is what people call that indefinable feeling for the inexplicable. When they feel they have no choice, no other way to relate to something they think is true, they say that they believe. This is how people educate children about values, with that same general vagueness that does not directly explain anything. What kind of values are they? Faith in what? How does this faith relate to me?

Therefore, the author of the *Tanya* emphasizes that the faith he is talking about must be true and real, not just a vague sentiment but rather a defined system of belief that a person lives by, that is integral to his being. It is true faith because it contains particular content, because it is directed toward defined goals. Although that content is rationally incomprehensible, inexplicable, and unprovable, it is rooted in the soul in a very deep and real way and paves a clear road of commitment before the believer.

In his introduction to *Sha'ar HaYihud Ve-*

7. See the introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a.

Moreover, the content of this faith must be in the one God. While faith is a spiritual faculty that transcends rationale, it is built on the basis of a particular cognitive recognition. This logic encompasses the assertion of God's oneness in detail, as will now be explained.

אֵין סוֹף בְּרוּךְ הוּא, דְּאִיהוּ מְמַלֵּא
כָּל עֲלָמִין וְסוֹבֵב כָּל עֲלָמִין *Ein Sof, blessed be He, who fills all
worlds and encompasses all worlds,*

Asserting God's oneness means affirming that He exists within everything and beyond everything and that nothing exists outside His oneness. Other sources explain that this perspective of God's unity, that He fills and surrounds every aspect of reality, is actually the definition of faith.⁸ The mitzva to believe in God does not entail abstractly believing that He exists. His existence can and must be understood, known, and even felt, with whatever degree of clarity a person can cultivate, just as a person senses the reality of His soul. The mitzva of faith relates not only to God's existence but to His essence: that it fills all worlds and encompasses all worlds. ❧

Ha'emuna, the author of the *Tanya* explains the proverb "Train the lad in accordance with his way; even when he grows old, he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6). The education of a small child must obviously begin with simple wording that is "according to his way." Yet it is crucial to transmit true content so that "even when he grows old, he will not turn from it." When a person depicts God to a young child, he may describe the imagery of an old man giving out candies from his abode in Heaven. This is certainly "according to his way" since it is an image the child can easily comprehend. But when the child grows older, he will stop believing it. When

a person thinks that faith in God means believing in a giant with a white beard who is out there somewhere, at a certain point he stops believing in it. Rightfully so, not only because a rational person does not believe in such a thing, but also because it is downright forbidden to believe it (see Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer HaMadda, Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:5). Therefore, the author of the *Tanya* emphasizes that one must relate accurate concepts even to children, only using appropriate wording so that no matter what a person's level, his comprehension and resonance with those concepts will be genuine.

BELIEVING THAT GOD FILLS AND SURROUNDS ALL WORLDS

❧ God's absolutely incomprehensible essence is described with phrases such as "He who fills all worlds and surrounds all worlds," "*Ein Sof*, blessed be He," and "the

8. See *Derekh Mitzvotekha, Mitzvat Ha'amanat Elokut*.

וְלֵית אֶתֶר פְּנוּי מִיְמִינָהּ, לְמַעַלָּה עַד
 אֵין קֵץ, וְלַמְטָה עַד אֵין תְּכֵלִית,
 and there is no space void of Him,
 in the boundless heights and never-
 ending depths,

The dimension of space in both the spiritual and physical realms has six poles: the four directions, above, and below. God fills each direction, and the infinite light is drawn from the highest of heights to the lowest of depths throughout the progressive descent of the Divine from the source above to the lowest world below. ❦

וְכֵן לְד' סְטָרִין, בְּבַחֲיַנֵּת אֵין סוֹף
 מִמֶּשׁ. including the four directions, in an
 absolutely infinite manner.

Lord, He is the God” (see *Derekh Mitzvotekha, Mitzvat Ahdut Hashem*). The same thread runs through all these expressions: the combination of two opposites, two ways that we can grasp and discuss God.

On the one hand, He fills all. He is the innermost dimension of every iota of reality, permeating everything. On the other hand, He encompasses all. He is the farthest, most distant, and hidden dimension of life, like a circle that surrounds, neither touching nor relating to anything at all. The expression “*Ein Sof*, blessed be He” expresses this dichotomy. On the one hand, God is *Ein Sof*, infinite, like the math-

ematical expression for that which cannot be measured or defined. On the other hand, He is “blessed.” The Hebrew word for blessed, *barukh*, etymologically means to draw down and implies drawing close the transcendent Divine into this reality (see *Or HaTorah*, vol. 3, s.v. “*lehavin inyan haberakhot*”).

Many hasidic discourses grapple with the reconciliation of these two aspects of God. Their main point is that the mutual existence of these two facets of the Divine is rationally inexplicable, and therefore belief in both these truths constitutes authentic faith in God.

BOUNDLESS HEIGHTS AND NEVER-ENDING DEPTHS

❦ What meaning does up and down have in the context of the light of *Ein Sof*? The line between up and down in the spiritual realm is determined by the order of progression. “Up” means greater revelation, and “down” means greater concealment. God’s infinite essence is manifest in both directions but in different ways. “Up” signifies His ability to endlessly manifest Himself, while “down” expresses His ability to

conceal and delimit Himself to an infinite degree. His power to illuminate and His power to conceal are equally endless.

Elsewhere, these two facets of *Ein Sof* are referred to as the power of limitlessness and the power of limit (see *Hemshekh Samekh Vav*, p.188). They serve as the source of the distinction between the light that encompasses all worlds and the light that fills all worlds.

Divine reality fills all the dimensions of space with infinitude. There is no vacant space, no molecule of reality that is impermeable to Him. As the liturgy known as *Shir HaYiḥud* declares, “There is no space empty or devoid of You.”

וְכֵן בְּבְחִינַת שָׁנָה וְנַפְשׁ, בְּנֹדָע. The same applies to the dimensions of year and soul, as is known.

Reality consists of three basic dimensions: world, year, and soul, which correspond to existence as it manifests within space, time, and human beings.⁹ True faith is believing that God’s infinite essence fills all three dimensions. “Year” proverbially refers to time, including its abstract spiritual form: the facilitator of change. God fills it, from its beginning until its end, past, present, and the future. There is no time devoid of Him.

“Soul” refers to the conscious reality that is aware and senses the vitality that exists within time and space. In our world, we are the aware souls, while in a higher realm, the angels are the beings that perceive. Higher yet are the sentient beings called seraphim and so on. In every world, at all times, the souls in reality are permeated with pure divine light.

True faith, then, is knowing that on the one hand “there is no space devoid of Him,” that every atom of the universe is absolutely permeated with the Divine Presence so that there is no separation between reality and Him in any way, shape, or form. He who believes that God exists in a particular place, while other places are not privy to God’s presence and control, does not have true faith.

On the other hand, true faith must also include the belief that God is infinitely distant and separate, as it says, “This knowledge is too wondrous for me.”¹⁰ In view of this, the definition of faith is the basic awareness of God’s existence as absolutely separate, beyond us, while simultaneously He is intimately close. He is the “Holy One, blessed be He”: “holy” because He is unfathomably distant, and “blessed” because infinitely close.¹¹

9. See *Sefer Yetzira* 3:6.

10. Ps. 139:6.

11. In hasidic teachings, the term for blessed, *barukh*, implies drawing down the infinite divine light into our selves and into objects, such as food.

הַגֵּיהַ אֲמוּנָה זֹאת נִקְרָאת בְּשֵׁם בְּחִינַת
 מְתַנִּים, דְּבַר הַמַּעֲמִיד וּמְקַיֵּם אֶת
 הָרֹאשׁ, הוּא הַשִּׁבְלֵי הַמְתַּבְּוֵינִן וּמַעֲמִיק
 דַּעַת

This faith is referred to by the term “loins,” that which serve to support and uphold the head, which is the intellect that contemplates and deeply ponders

Once there is a foundation of faith, the next stage follows, that of the rationale of the intellect. The intellect contemplates and analyzes, delving in to inquire: What does this mean for me? What is its central axis?

Faith itself serves as the bedrock for every logical idea and feeling and establishes one’s whole personhood. Faith constitutes an organic perception of reality, seeing things at their essence. It is not an analytic faculty that organizes and arranges ideas but rather a general outlook that informs a person how he experiences reality itself. When presented with particular concepts, it is faith that enlightens the person as to what is right and what is wrong. While this certainty is not rational nor scientifically provable, it serves as the foreground for all his thoughts and enables his entire rational functioning and being, from which stems all the faculties of the soul.

This is why the author of the *Tanya* places an emphasis on the intellect. The main, conscious spiritual work happens in the head through one’s ability to think and contemplate rationally.

בְּגִדוֹלַת אֵין סוֹף בְּרוּךְ הוּא, בְּבְחִינַת
 עוֹלָם שָׁנָה נֶפֶשׁ, the greatness of *Ein Sof*, blessed
 be He, in the dimensions of
 world, year, and soul

There are two facets to this contemplation. The first is contemplation of God’s infinite greatness, of His vast distance and separateness. This contemplation evokes the sense of God’s might and how that immense, almost oceanic power expresses itself in each of the dimensions of “world, year, and soul.” To do this, one should consciously contemplate the infinite nature of space, the infinite aspect of time, and the infinite power of the soul. Afterward, he can attempt to stretch his mind even further to ruminate on the essence of the infinite in relation to the confines of those dimensions.

וּבְרוּב חֶסֶדוֹ וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו עִמָּנוּ
 לְהִיּוֹת עִם קְרוֹבוֹ, וּלְדַבְּקָהּ בּוֹ
 מִמֶּשֶׁה. and God's abounding kindness and
 His wonders that He performs with
 us, allowing us to be a people near to
 Him and to literally cleave to Him.

The other subject of contemplation that the author of the *Tanya* suggests is not the abstract concept of God's exalted loftiness but rather the aspect of His closeness,¹² that the infinitely exalted God creates a personal relationship with each and every one of us, certainly a colossal kindness and wonder. This is true not only of the past, throughout our whole national history, but even within the details of every individual's present are revelations of His kindness and wonders.

כְּנוֹדֵעַ מִמֵּאֲמַר "יִפְּהַ שְׂעָה אַחַת
 בְּתַשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם
 הַזֶּה מִכָּל חַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא" (אבות
 פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה י"ז), This is known from the Sages' state-
 ment "One hour of repentance and
 good deeds in this world is more pre-
 cious than an entire lifetime in the
 World to Come" (Mishna *Avot* 4:17),

This axiom from the Sages expresses this very idea of a person's intimate closeness to God against the backdrop of His infinity. The reference here to life in the World to Come refers to life in the Garden of Eden after death. Edenic experience is a very high level of spiritual experience. Every person, commensurate with his spiritual standing and deeds, has his own World to Come, his own level of divine revelation that his soul experiences after it is divested from all its bonds to the materiality of this world.

There are, in truth, levels upon levels of revelation, endless progressive phases of bonding with the supernal wisdom and delighting in the radiance of the Divine Presence to which a soul can aspire when it is divested of its ties to this material world. The gradations of the World to Come not only vary from person to person, but each individual may have countless rungs of revelation to climb in his own portion of the World to Come.¹³

"All the life of the World to Come," then, refers to all the levels of the

12. Based on Ps. 148:14.

13. See epistle 17.

World to Come. The Mishna is telling us that every movement toward repentance, every good deed, is loftier, deeper, and more powerful than all the achievements, levels, and potential for attachment to the Divine that one could attain in the World to Come.

שְׁהוּא רַק זֵיו וְהָאֶרֶה מִפְּחִינָה
הַנִּקְרָאת שְׁכִינָה, "הַשׁוֹכֵן" כּו'
(ויקרא טז, טז). which is but a glimmer and illumination of the level called *Shekhina*, Divine Presence, whose name is derived from the verse "that dwells [*hashokhen*] with them..." (Lev. 16:16).

The Divine Presence is but a glimmer of the totality of God's essence, the manifestation of the Divine that has been clothed within the confines and parameters of reality, enlivening every minutia in existence.¹⁴ Yet the World to Come in its entirety is merely an illumination of the Godly revelation experienced in this world called the Divine Presence.

וְנִבְרָא בְּי"ד אֶחָת מִשְׁמוֹ יִתְפָּרֵךְ
כּו'. The Word to Come was created with the single letter *yod* of God's name and so on,

The Sages point out that the name of God that appears in the verse "For God the Lord is an everlasting rock" (Isa. 26:4) is spelled *yod-heh*.¹⁵ They explain that the Hebrew word for "everlasting," *olamim*, literally means "worlds," and the Hebrew word for "rock" that is used in the verse, *tzur*, shares root letters with the word *yatzar*, created. The verse may then read, "God created the [two] worlds [this world and the World to Come] with the letters *yod* and *heh*."

A name is a particular manner of manifestation that reflects the relationship between the self and the outside world. The name of *Havaya*, which is the name that refers to the divine essence itself, is the name through which God enlivens all the worlds. More specifically, God used the *yod* from the name of *Havaya* to create the World to Come.

14. See also *Sifra*, *Bemidbar* 1; *Raya Meheimna* 3:255b.

15. *Menahot* 29b; Jerusalem Talmud, *Hagiga* 2:1; *Bereshit Rabba* 12:10.

The smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the *yod* resembles nothing more than a point and is the embodiment of the most minimal degree of independent existence that one could fathom. It follows that the World to Come is nothing but a glimmer of the smallest letter of God's name, a mere spark of the divine light. The essence of the World to Come can be summed up as the most reduced experience of God's name, of the divine essence, that the soul can receive commensurate with its spiritual capacity at that time.

אָבֵל תְּשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים מְקַרְבִּין
 יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָבִיהֶם שְׁבִשְׁמִים מִמֶּשׁ,
 לְמַהוּתוֹ וְעֵצְמוֹתוֹ כְּבִיכּוֹל, בְּחֵינֵת
 אֵין סוּף מִמֶּשׁ, but repentance and good deeds
 bring the Jewish people close to
 their actual Father in Heaven, to
 His essence and being, as it were,
 the level of *Ein Sof* itself,

Repentance and good deeds are not merely instruments through which a person acquires the World to Come. The Torah study and mitzvot that a person performs in his daily life are in and of themselves points of contact with God's infinite essence,¹⁶ opportunities for a genuine connection with God Himself. The closeness attained in the performance of a mitzva is not just a feeling of spiritual positivity from a faint glimmer of the divine light but literal attachment to God's actual infinite essence. ☞☞

CLEAVING TO GOD THROUGH TORAH AND MITZVOT

☞ The Talmud divulges that a deeper layer of the word *anokhi*, the first word of the Ten Commandments, emerges by reading it as an acronym: *Ana nafshi ketavit yehavit*, which means, "I Myself wrote and gave" (*Shabbat* 105a). The simple meaning of this is "I wrote [the Torah] Myself,

and I am giving it to you." A deeper understanding is brought in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov, who reads it as "I have articulated My essence in writing and am giving it to you [through the Torah]" (see *Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim, Ki Tisa*, s.v. "pesel"). This implies that the Torah is more

16. Repentance and good deeds are relevant only in this world: mitzvot, because they consist entirely of action in the material realm, and repentance, because the pivotal moment of transformation and change can happen only in our lower world. See *Likkutei Torah*, Lev. 75c.

than a revelation of the Divine. It is literally divine essence. One who engages in Torah study and the performance of mitzvot is fusing with the very essence of the Divine. When a person performs mitzvot,

he is not holding an instrument that connects him with God, but rather forges contact directly with God (see *Likkutei Amarim*, chap. 14).

ILLUSORY ATTACHMENT

☞ Attachment to God and the experience of attachment are not necessarily synonymous. A person may feel close to God, while in reality his connection is imagined. On the flip side, a person can have a true attachment to God without a remarkable experience of it. The difference between this world and the World to Come depends on this distinction, on the experience versus the thing itself (even without the experience). In the World to Come, “one hour of tranquility is more precious than an entire lifetime in this world” (*Mishna Avot 4:17*), because it is a world of being, of experience alone, in which we feel and experience the results of our actions in this world. The degree of experience that the soul encounters in the World to Come is infinitely greater than its experience in this world because it is no longer limited to the confines and parameters of the body and its corporeal faculties. Therefore, the experience of the World to Come manifests through other-worldly dimensions and is unfathomably more powerful than the sum total of all the conceivable experiences of this world. Yet still, this world, which is the foreground for performing mitzvot, offers the opportunity for actual attachment to God. Therefore, “one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is more precious is than an entire lifetime in the World to Come.”

The fusion that we can achieve with God Himself in this world is due to “God’s abounding kindness and His wonders that

He performs with us,” as the author of the *Tanya* points out above. Imagine a father and his young child. The father wants to connect in some way with the child, but the distance is too great. They are on totally different wavelengths, unable to relate to each other on a cognitive and emotional level. The only way that the father can forge a connection with his child is through an action: He can extend his hand to his child. The child does not understand at all who the father is and what their connection entails, yet when he takes hold of the hand outstretched to him, he literally connects himself to his father.

The *Zohar* calls the Torah and the mitzvot the “limbs of the King” (*Tikkunei Zohar 74a*). When God gave us the Torah, He gave us His hand, as it were. Every time a person performs a mitzva or studies Torah, he takes hold of God’s proverbial hand and fosters a quintessential connection with God Himself, a bond one would not be able to forge in any other way.

A hand that reaches out to bridge an unbridgeable gap is a wondrous phenomenon that only God Himself can accomplish, from above to below. No matter how much a person is driven toward good, he cannot operate beyond his own parameters. Any attachment to God that he is privileged to attain is a product of “God’s abounding kindness and His wonders that He performs with us.”

וְכַמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב: "הוֹדוּ עַל אֲרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם
וְיָרֵם קֶרֶן לְעַמּוֹ כו'" (תהלים קמא, ג-יד),
as it is written, "For His name
alone is exalted, His glory across
earth and heaven; He raises a
horn for His people..." (Ps.
148:13–14), for His people cleave
to God's very essence.

This virtue of Torah study and mitzvot is expressed by this verse, which signifies that God is so exalted and singularly separate from all the revealed worlds that merely the glory and illumination from His name alone is sufficient to enliven and sustain all of reality. Yet, despite His unimaginable exalted essence, He raises a beam of His divine essence to His nation of Israel through the Torah and mitzvot so that they may literally cleave to Him.¹⁷

"אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו כו'"
Similarly, in the blessings recited
upon the performance of a mitzva,
we address God "who has sancti-
fied us with His commandments
and commanded us..."

God imbues us with holiness through our performance of mitzvot, elevating us to His holy essence, which far transcends the aspect of His being called "His glory" that shines throughout the heavenly spheres and the entire universe. The whole purpose of the mitzvot is to forge a connection with the Divine. The word *mitzva* itself is etymologically connected to the word *tzavta*, which means connection.¹⁸ The wording of the blessing recited upon performing a mitzva, "who has sanctified us with His commandments," conveys that not only did we receive the commandments in order to perform them, but every commandment kindles the light of holiness within its doer. It hoists a person beyond

17. The word *keren* used in the verse, translated as "horn," also connotes the essence of a thing. See *Pardes Rimmonim, Sha'ar Arkhei HaKinuyim*, s.v. "keren"; *Raya Meheimna*, Lev. 24:2.

18. See *Likkutei Torah*, Lev. 45c; *Pri Etz Hayyim, Sha'ar HaLulavm*, chap. 3; *Derekh Hayyim, Sha'ar HaTefilla* 52:2; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* (5698), p. 52; *Likkutei Sihot*, vol. 7, p. 30.

the realm of corporeal man and into the dimension of the sacred, the inner sphere of the Divine.

וְכַמֵּים הַפְּנִים כּוֹ" (משלי כז, בט). "As water reflects a face to the face, so does the heart of a person to a person" (Prov. 27:19).

When a person gazes into water, it reflects back to him the same expression that he shows it. The Sages say that the heart is like water. When a person thinks about how another person feels toward him, those same feelings are evoked in his own heart. The same is true when a person contemplates God's immeasurable, infinite greatness on the one hand and His outstanding closeness on the other. When a person ponders how God is absolutely separate from anything physical yet provides us with bread to eat and clothes to wear, how He is totally beyond our finite world yet endows us with the most wondrous gift of attachment to Him by imbuing us with holiness through His mitzvot, offering us His outstretched hand through each one, inviting us to approach Him, to literally be with Him, at that moment a corresponding feeling of love burgeons forth, "as water reflects a face to the face," and the person wells up with desire to draw close to God.¹⁹

לְהוֹלִיד מִתְבּוֹנָה זוֹ דְּחִילוֹ וְדְחִימוֹ Similarly, such contemplation serves to generate fear and love of God,

This reflective contemplation that encompasses both facets of our relationship to the Divine, the loftiness and the closeness, creates a bifurcation of emotion. Fear is the feeling that stems from the realization of God's exaltedness and distance, while love arises from feeling how close God is and the desire to bond with Him. ☞

CONTEMPLATION ENGENDERS EMOTION

☞ Contemplation is not necessarily relegated to the practice of great people, as many would imagine. Every person contemplates; the difference lies in the object of the contemplation. No emotion can develop in a significant way without contemplation. When a person gets angry, he must have contemplated the issue

19. See also *Likkutei Amarim*, chap. 49.

שְׂכָלִים אוֹ טְבֵעִים, whether intellectual or innate,

There are actually two types of love and fear, though the author of the *Tanya* does not elaborate on them here but only gives them a mention. Intellectual love and fear are engendered from intellectual awareness. The deeper and wider one's awareness, the more the emotions will develop.

On the flip side, innate love and fear are not created from conscious awareness and are not even bound to it in the same way. Consciousness merely opens a gate for the innate love or fear to burst outward. While these emotions are woven into the fabric of a person's soul, they are lying latent deep within, unable to manifest on their own in this world of obscurity and concealment. Contemplation, in this context, unleashes that emotion.

This natural love can also be released in ways other than intellectual contemplation. A person can hear a song that makes his heart brim

beforehand. He may react to someone who mistreats him, but he does not get angry. It is only after ruminating on what was done to him (*How dare he? What an insult!*) that he snaps and grows more and more angry. Likewise, if a person contemplates the greatness of God "who sanctified us with His commandments," and thinks deeply about it, over and over, depicting the reality of this truth in his mind more and more clearly, he will undoubtedly awaken an emotional connection to the Divine within himself.

To contemplate God's greatness, one does not need an extraordinary mind nor an exceptional spiritual ability. All one needs is to be invested in it. There were once hasidim, simple people, who hardly knew how to learn *Humash* with Rashi, but when it came to the teachings of Hasidism, that which touched upon the depths of their being, they arrived at an understanding and an ability to meditate at extremely high levels.

A story in *Tanna deVei Eliyahu* illustrates this point:

Elijah met a hunter and asked him, "Why don't you study Torah?"

"My parents never taught me," he answered.

Elijah then asked, "And who taught you to hunt?"

"God did," the hunter replied.

When a person wants something, when he feels that he has no choice, that the issue at hand touches on the depth of his soul, he will do whatever it takes. He will tap into the necessary skills and seek out the advice he needs to achieve it. He will discover skills he never imagined he had. People prefer to contemplate all kinds of things other than the greatness of the Divine because it is easier and they feel that other topics are more relevant to their day-to-day life. But once a person prioritizes accordingly and is ready to invest the effort, he too can contemplate the greatness of God's infinity and generate love and fear of God within him.

with love or tremble with fear. The lyrics of the song may not even directly relate to the feeling that arises in the heart of the listener, yet they penetrate the depth of a person's soul, opening a channel to a more subtle, holy divine love or fear.

לְהִיּוֹת בְּחִינַת "צַעַק לְבָם אֶל
ה'" (איכה ב, יח) או בְּחִינַת
רְשָׁפֵי אֵשׁ וְשִׁלְהֶבֶת עָזָה (שיר
השירים ח, ו), בְּבִחִינַת 'רְצוּא',
וְאַחֵר כִּךְ בְּבִחִינַת 'שׁוּב'.

giving rise to the level of love that can be described as “Their hearts cried to the Lord” (Lam. 2:18), due to their feeling of distance from God, or the level described as sparks of fire, a great conflagration (see Song 8:6), which is characterized by an advance followed by a retreat.

These are the two essential movements of life, like the beating of the heart, like inhaling and exhaling, outward and inward, advancing and retreating, running and returning.²⁰ Love and fear beat to the rhythm of advance and retreat as well. Love is generally the movement of drawing close, of desire and yearning to leave one's place to run to the beloved. The height of love of God is yearning to leave the world to just be with God. Yet afterward, if the awakening was real, that feeling manifests itself in another way, in retreat. One is struck with the awareness of who it is before whom he is standing, that one is in the presence of the Divine. This awareness engenders fear and trembling and results in retreat and distance, in returning to the place where one originally stood.

לְהִיּוֹת פֶּחַד ה' בְּלִבּוֹ, וְלִיבוֹשׁ
מִגְדוּלָתוֹ כו'.

The retreat is the outcome of when there is fear of God in one's heart and when one feels ashamed before God's greatness, and so on.

Retreat entails a feeling of shame, of smallness compared to God, as in the verse “For who is it whose heart dared to approach Me?” (Jer. 20:21). ☞

THE TRUE TEST OF SERVING GOD

☞ The bond of love and fear, of running and returning, advance and retreat, is a crucial element of serving God (see *Ba'al Shem Tov al HaTorah, Parashat Noah*) and,

20. See Ezek. 1:14; *Hagiga* 13b; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:4; *Likkutei Amarim*, chap. 41.

וְהוּא בְּחִינַת "שְׂמֹאל דּוֹחָה", This fear and shame comes from the left side that pushes away,

This is followed by the "right hand that draws close."²¹ The right hand is the symbol of love, the embodiment of the attribute of *Hesed* and the desire to be close, while the left is the side of distancing, the attribute of *Gevura*, the expression of one's awareness of God's exaltedness and the subsequent feeling of fear that necessarily follows coming close.²²

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּמִתְן תּוֹרָה: "וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנּוּעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרְחוֹק כּו" (שמות כ, יח). as it is written regarding the giving of the Torah, "The people saw, and trembled, and stood at a distance..." (Ex. 20:15).

During the revelation of the giving of the Torah, the nation responded with that same movement of advance and retreat. On the one hand, they were propelled forward, drawn like magnets to God's supernal infinite being. Yet, upon encountering that intimidating sight, intense fear sent them recoiling backward.

וְהֵן בְּחִינַת הַזְּרוּעוֹת וְהַגּוּף שֶׁבִּנְפֶשׁ. These feelings of love and fear are the arms and the body of the soul.

The *Tikkunei Zohar* explains that love and fear, the attributes of *Hesed* and *Gevura*, are the right and left arms of the soul's faculties. The attribute of *Tiferet*, compassion, which is the synthesis of love and fear,

in a certain sense, of thriving in the interpersonal realm as well. There was a sage who would say that fear without love is senseless trepidation while love without fear is debauchery. The feeling of love, if real, is directed toward God. It is not a nebulous emotion that has no connection to anything. Of necessity, it encompasses an awareness of the Divine, of God's great-

ness. In view of this, one of the litmus tests of true love of God is that fear follows it. It cannot be that one feels such love of God and does not then feel the fear. A person does not feel both emotions at the same time, but one is constantly moving from one to another, alternating between them, advancing and retreating, running and returning.

21. See *Sota* 47a; *Sanhedrin* 107b.

22. Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a.

comprises the “body,” or torso, of the soul’s faculties.²³ As previously mentioned, the aspect of the soul represented by the head is the faculty of thought and contemplation, which gives power and direction to the arms. The aspect that corresponds to the hips, faith, upholds them all. When there is a weakness in faith, a person lacks content on which to contemplate and necessarily lacks love and fear. But when a person has faith that penetrates the depths of his soul, he has something to contemplate and can arrive at the emotions of love and fear. ❧

This concludes the first part of the letter, which stands, in a certain sense, on its own. It actually comprised one letter in the early years of the author of the *Tanya*’s leadership, as corroborated by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson. This section discussed the cultivation of the faculties of the soul – the head, body, and arms, which correspond to the intellect and the emotions that are engendered by it – all of which are supported by the hips, the power of faith. The author of the *Tanya* explained how faith is that point of absolute certainty in

FAITH: ITS BEGINNING EMBEDDED IN ITS END

❧ Faith ostensibly exists in the lowest level of the soul, lower than conscious awareness, lower than the emotions. Yet, as explained elsewhere, “its beginning is embedded in its end” (*Sefer Yetzira* 1:6). There is a connection between that which transcends rational comprehension and that which lies beneath one’s emotional radar. Something inherently lofty and inconceivable by the rational mind can be grasped in the soul’s depths in a way that does not demand specific emotional or conscious articulation.

Faith itself is imperceivable. If a person feels that faith burns within him, it is not the faith itself that burns but rather the awareness and emotion that it generates. The reality of faith does not depend on whether it can be proven by logical in-

ference or clearly depicted. On the contrary, rational awareness depends on the foundation of faith.

Faith is like the feet: A person cannot move or progress without it. One cannot walk on his head; he cannot get anywhere with just his cognitive abilities. The Mishna in *Pirkei Avot* (3:9, 17) echoes this idea, warning that one’s wisdom should not outweigh one’s deeds. The same is true regarding someone whose wisdom exceeds his faith. The more a person thinks abstractly, even on the highest levels, even if he were to arrive at some emotional experience, it will not spark true change or spiritual growth. One’s ideas must touch on his center of faith for tangible transformation to take place on any spiritual plane.

23. Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a.

God's existence and underlies a person's understanding and emotions. While the intellect is higher, responsible for cultivating a conceptual relationship with God through contemplation and emotional connection, something that is required of a person in his service of God, the contemplation and emotional connection are, at the end of the day, outgrowths of the soul's experiences. The nucleus of faith, on the other hand, is the essential foundation upon which all these faculties must stand and move. Without faith, one has no framework in which to interpret the soul's experiences and cultivate them through contemplation and emotion to develop one's relationship with God.

The author of the *Tanya* now addresses how to develop and fortify one's faith.

4 Av אֵךְ מִי הוּא הַנּוֹתֵן כֹּחַ וְעוֹז לְבַחֲיַנֵּת **But what gives the loins the ability**
 8 Av מְתַנְנִים לְהַעֲמִיד וּלְקַיֵּים הָרֵאשׁ **and strength to support and uphold**
 (leap year) וְהַזְרוּעוֹת? **the head and the arms?**

It is faith that enables all of one's spiritual, intellectual, and emotional work. The question is, where does faith get its strength from?

The problem is that we neither know how to reach the realm of faith nor how particular content becomes a matter of faith. We are only aware of its secondary aspects, its peripheral substructures, its outgrowths, but we are not cognizant of its essence or root. We know something about the attributes, how to develop and cultivate them. We know what to contemplate. Yet when it comes to strengthening faith, we are not clear on the mechanism.

While we do not have obvious, direct paths to develop and increase faith, we do have practices that are more indirect, that we might call *segulot*. There is "food" that nourishes faith, that, though illogical (much like faith itself), can be used to strengthen faith.

הוּא עֵסֶק וְלִמּוּד הַלְכוֹת בְּתוֹרָה **It is the occupation with and study**
 שְׁבַעַל פֶּה, **of the laws in the Oral Torah,**

When a person studies *halakha* in the Oral Torah, whether it is the laws of *ketubot* (marriage contracts) in the *Mishneh Torah* of Rambam or the laws of forbidden mixtures, which clarify such *halakhot* as the

status of a spoon used to eat dairy that fell into a pot that is used for cooking meat, one reveals and strengthens his faith.

שְׁהִיא בְּחִינַת גִּילּוֹי רְצוֹן הָעֲלִיּוֹן, which is the revelation of the supernal will,

This strengthening of faith does not come about as a direct result of knowing the *halakhot*. There is no obvious connection between this study and faith in God. Furthermore, faith is essentially incomprehensible and cannot be strengthened by intellectual contemplation alone. It is only because the Oral Torah is a distillation of the will of God that its study has the power to strengthen one's faith. ❧❧

THE SUPERNAL WILL OF GOD

❧ *Halakha*, the delineation of what, when, and how to perform the service of God as explained in the Oral Torah, is the revelation of God's will. Essentially, *halakha* is the stipulation of what God wants. This revelation of the divine will, expressed as detailed instructions for the way to conduct ourselves, is independent of any underlying explanation. It is simply how God wants it. While there are layers of insight to be unearthed behind every *halakha* in the Torah, they are all of secondary importance to the action itself.

In other words, since it is the *halakha*, we search for the reason behind it, but

it is not essential to our application of it. Our approach to science resembles this approach to mitzvot. We explain natural phenomena by starting with certain facts, certain principles. Even in the field of mathematics, which is entirely a human creation, as it were, there are certain basic givens, like natural numbers, that we accept without any explanation as fact. While the world is a physical reality that God created, and science a collection of its governing laws and principles, the Torah is a revelation of spiritual reality, and *halakha* constitutes the simple laws and principles by which God governs it.

THE ORAL TORAH: THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WILL

❧ The author of the *Tanya* specifically refers to the study of the *halakhot* of the Oral Torah as the manifestation of God's supernal will because the revelation of divine will becomes manifest as practical action only through the Oral Torah. One cannot thoroughly decipher the divine will from the Written Torah in all its detail. It is impossible to know exactly what

God wants us to do from the Written Torah alone. It is only through the Oral Torah, and sometimes only through literally hearing the laws from the mouth of a Torah scholar, that the revelation of God's will reaches perfection, becoming clarified to the extent that enables us to actually carry it out.

דְּאוֹרֵי־יְתָא מִחֻמְדָּה הִיא דְנִפְקַת אֲבָל
מִקּוּדָה וְשִׁדְשָׁה הִיא לְמַעְלָה מִעֲלָה
מִבְּחִינַת חֻמְדָּה, וְהוּא הַנִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם
”רִצּוֹן הָעֲלִיּוֹן בְּרוּךְ הוּא”

for although the Torah is derived from the *sefira* of *Hokhma* (Wisdom), its source and root is far higher than the level of *Hokhma*. It is from the level called “God’s supernal will, blessed be He,”

God’s will corresponds to the *sefira* of *Keter* (Crown), which transcends the level of wisdom and the intellect: Before wisdom and understanding comes the initial will. The author of the *Tanya* is conveying that the Oral Torah is rooted in the level of the supernal will, from *Keter*. Yet elsewhere it is explained that the root of the Torah lies in *Hokhma*.²⁴ While it is true that the Torah, especially the Oral Torah, is expressed in rational form so that it is the attribute of *Hokhma* that is applied for apprehending Torah concepts and the way they interact, the root of the Torah is the expression of God’s will. The supernal will far transcends not only every degree of human wisdom and rational understanding, but it also lies far beyond the power of the essence of divine *Hokhma* itself. ☞

THE WILL BEYOND ALL WILLS

☞ The expression “God’s will” is a loose translation of the phrase used here by the author of the *Tanya*. Its literal translation is “supernal will,” and when this term is used in relation to the Torah, it belies a deeper layer of meaning: Not only is it God’s will, but it is the highest, deepest, and most primal facet of His will.

God created a world that contains many realities. The existence of some of these realities is conditional (such as that which hinges on Israel’s acceptance and fulfillment of the Torah), while others are sustained by God as a cog in the great entirety of creation (see *Tanna deVei Eliyahu Rabba* 1). Encompassed in this is that

which does not seem to serve an express purpose, including the presence of evil. It is impossible to say that God does not desire these phenomena. Otherwise they would not exist at all. But the type of desire that God has for them is different. They are part of the system, part of the necessary context for sustaining and operating that which God truly wants to remain in existence.

Torah, in this sense, is the supernal will, that which God truly desires, the highest, deepest will that lies at the core of all other desires, so that that in every level through which the Torah manifests, it expresses the inner will within it.

24. *Zohar* 2:85a, 121a.

וְכִמּוֹ שְׂפָתַיִם: "כִּצְנָה רְצוֹן תַּעֲטֹרְנוּ"
 (תהלים ה, יג), כְּעֵטְרָה שֶׁהִיא עַל
 הַמּוֹחִין שֶׁבְּרֹאשׁ.

as it is written, "For it is You who blesses the righteous man, Lord, surrounding him with favor, like a shield" (Ps. 5:13). The word used for "surrounding," *tatrenu*, is related to the word *atara*, crown, which sits above the brain that is in the head.

The word for "favor," *ratzon*, used in the verse can also be rendered as "will." The will, which transcends *Hokhma* is like a crown that sits upon the head. The word for crown, *atara*, which also denotes "surrounding," refers not only to that which sits above but also to the dimension that lies beyond and separate from the soul's cognitive and emotional realm. This is the will, the *ratzon*: It crowns and encompasses the soul from without. It is not an internal faculty that lends insight and apprehension but rather a power that comes from beyond. We sense its existence, yet we are incapable of understanding or defining it.

When a person performs a mitzva or studies *halakha* from the Oral Torah, he connects with that supernal will that surrounds and encompasses all of reality yet also penetrates and nourishes it on a deep, subconscious level. Therefore, the act of studying the Oral Torah or fulfilling a mitzva activates the soul's deep, unconscious levels, such as the soul's faculty of faith.

וְכִנּוּדֵעַ מִמֶּה שֶׁפִּרְשׂוּ עַל פֶּסוּק:
 "אִשְׁתׁ חַיִּל עֵטְרַת בַּעֲלָהּ" (משלי
 יב, ט).

This is also known from the Sages' explanation of the verse "A woman of valor is the crown of her husband" (Prov. 12:4).

The woman of valor is an analogy for the Oral Torah, which corresponds to the attribute of *Bina* (Understanding).²⁵ "Her husband" refers to the Written Torah, which corresponds to *Hokhma*. *Hokhma* influences *Bina*, yet from a certain standpoint, *Bina*, or the Oral Torah, is higher than *Hokhma*, the Written Torah, because it is the revelation of God's

25. See epistle 29; see also *Zohar* 2:85a. The *Zohar* there indicates that the Oral Torah can also correspond to the *sefira* of *Malkhut*. See also *Torah Or* 1c, 6c; *Likkutei Torah*, discourses on *Sukkot* 80a.

supernal will, which is rooted in a higher realm than *Hokhma*. From this angle, the Oral Torah is the “crown of her husband,”²⁶ higher than “her husband,” *Hokhma*, the Written Torah, and having an influence on it. In this vein, this verse is also understood as prophetic insight into the future, when in all the worlds that which now receives will give.²⁷

The *halakhot* of the Oral Torah are thus the expression of God’s will that transcends *Hokhma*. Yet they are manifest in their application on a level lower than *Hokhma*. Unlike the wisdom of mystical Torah teachings that we essentially are incapable of understanding,²⁸ we are meant to understand *halakha*, the laws that instruct us what to do, in a way that enables us to perform it. ❧

CONNECTING ON THE PRACTICAL LEVEL THROUGH THE ORAL TORAH

❧ The intrinsic problem with the service of God, on every level and in every arena, is the issue of connection. When we are standing before God, we are facing the infinite. The gap between us and Him is unbridgeable, no matter how many steps we take. The only one who can bridge the gap is God Himself. He must extend His hand to us. Only He can offer that possibility. Yet even when He does so, when He communicates with us, we can apprehend and connect with Him only at the end stage, on the level of the bottom line, the action.

Consider the following metaphor. Two people who speak different languages face each other. One person must relay a message urgently to the other. He needs to tell him, “Move over to the right! You are about to be run over!” He could explain this with his most eloquent terminology and expla-

nations, yet the other will not understand. But if he makes a motion with his hand, signaling that the other should move and he moves, clearly he got the message. Communication was established; connection was achieved. This is the significance of the Oral Torah. It successfully clarifies the point, that we are supposed to do this and not that. This is the goal of learning *halakha*, the “crown of Torah”: It forges a direct connection to the Divine that cuts through all the rifts of lack of comprehension and miscommunication between us and God.

The crown thus embodies the concept of “the beginning is embedded in the end” by manifesting both the point of inception and the point of completion. The summary of practical *halakha* is both the final conclusion of the abstract debate and the very starting point of God’s supernal will. This

26. *Megilla* 28b; see also epistle 29.

27. Giving is a masculine aspect, while receiving is characterized as a feminine attribute. See also *Torah Or*, s.v. “*vayigash elav Yehuda*”; *Likkutei Torah*, Song 48b.

28. From this idea stems the expression “The remnants of the supernal wisdom is Torah” (*Bereshit Rabba* 44). The aspects of Torah that we can grasp are only “remnants” that have fallen from divine wisdom.

וְכֹל הַשּׁוֹנֵה הַלְכוֹת בְּכָל יוֹם כּוֹ" (נדה עג, א).
 The Sages have also taught that “**anyone who studies *halakhot* every day** is guaranteed that he is destined for the World to Come” (*Nidda* 73a).

This idea, that “the woman of valor is the crown of her husband,” will ultimately come to fruition only in the time to come. When it comes to the study of *halakha*, God’s will is manifest through action, yet the divine rationale behind it remains utterly concealed. The level of *Keter*, which constitutes the divine will, fuses with the level of action yet bypasses the level of *Hokhma*, the level of wisdom, of cognitive awareness. One who studies *halakhot* will understand what he must do and act accordingly, but he does not see or feel the Divine there. That is simply the reality of this world. Yet anyone who studies *halakhot* creates vessels and soul garments through which he will be able to receive reward for his mitzva actions in the future, so that he will apprehend the divine illumination that underlies these actions, in the World to Come.

וְזֶהוּ “חֲגָרָה בְּעוֹז מִתְּנִיָּה” (משלי לא, יז), אֵין עוֹז אֶלָּא תוֹרָה שֶׁהִיא נוֹתֶנֶת כֹּחַ וְעוֹז
This is the meaning of the verse “She girds her loins with might and strengthens her arms” (Prov. 31:17). “Might” means nothing but Torah,

is why the woman of valor is called the “crown of her husband.” This connection between *Malkhut*, Kingship (the final *sefira* and level), and *Keter*, Crown (the first *sefira* and level), is direct. It circumvents neural pathways and limitations, evading the obstacles that the rational mind attempts to present. This connection is pure and free of any distortion that man’s intellect may cause, in whatever form it would take.

The Ba’al Shem Tov (some say it was the Vilna Gaon) asked regarding the verse “The Torah of the Lord is perfect” (Ps. 19:8): In what way is it perfect? His answer: Because no one blemished it (see *Degel*

Maḥaneh Efrayim, Parashat Ha’azinu; Kol Mevasser, vol. 1, Parashat Toledot). The Torah is perfect because it transcends all levels; it is beyond all realms. It is the *Keter* of the world, God’s supernal will that is beyond everything. It passes through the world, unbreakable and indivisible, a whole package. This explains why it can reach the lowest conceivable levels intact. Likewise, within the soul, the faculty of faith is on the level of *Keter*, transcending the upper reaches of the intellect. At the same time, it touches a point beneath the radar of the emotions so that, like the Torah, it remains perfect and unblemished.

לְבַחֲיַנַת מַתְנִים, הַחֲגוּרִים
וּמְלוּבָּשִׁים בָּהּ which gives the “loins,” or the faculty of
faith in the soul, which are girded and
clothed within it, the ability and might

We know that strength refers to Torah based on the verse “The Lord gives strength to His people” (Ps. 29:11).²⁹ By studying the *halakhot* of the Oral Torah, the embodiment of might, a person strengthens the faith within his soul, even if his wisdom, love, or fear do not increase.

לְחִזְק וּלְאַמֵּץ זְרוּעוֹתֶיהָ, הֵן
דְּחִילוֹ וּדְחִימוֹ שְׂבָלַיִם אִו טְבַעִים, to strengthen and support the soul's
arms, which are fear and love of God,
whether intellectual or innate,

The principle is that no matter their origin, whether they develop through cognitive awareness or they are rooted in one's innate love and fear, one cannot develop enduring emotions of love and fear without the foundation of faith. One must accept things as they are before one can develop an emotional response or cognitive attitude toward them.

כָּל חַד לְפִנֵּי שְׂעוֹרָא דִּילֵיהּ. every individual according to his capac-
ity.

Love and fear are very individual. One person's love is not like the next, neither in degree nor in type, neither in the way it is aroused nor in the way it is expressed.

(וְעַל הַעֲמֻדַת וְקִיּוּם בְּחִינַת
הָרֵאשׁ שְׂבָנָפֶשׁ, הוּא הַשֶּׁכֶל
הַמְתַּבּוֹנֵן כּו', אָמַר: "טַעֲמָהּ בִּי
טוֹב סְחָרָה" כּו' [משלי לא, יח] (Regarding the support and uphold-
ing of the soul's head, the intellect that
contemplates and so on, it is written,
“She perceives that her merchandise is
good...” [Prov. 31:18],

The author of the *Tanya* has primarily been discussing the “arms” of the soul, love, and fear. Here the author comments that the aforementioned concepts apply to the “head” as well. The verse he quotes follows the

29. *Sifrei, VeZot HaBerakha* 2; *Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1:23, 2:12; *Midrash Tanhuma, Bemidbar* 3.