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## Torah from the Heart: Chassidic Insights into Spiritual Education

WHEN THE CHASSIDIC movement first made its appearance among Eastern European Jewry in the mid-eighteenth century, it found itself addressing a fairly stable, well-established community almost seven hundred years old. True, the golden age of Polish Jewry had ended with the Chmelnicki Massacres (1648–1649) and the subsequent breakdown of the Council of Four Lands. Still, the community's social structure, its legislative processes, its hierarchy of rabbis and communal officials, and its religious life had remained intact despite the series of catastrophes.<sup>1</sup>

Into this scene came the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Chassidic movement. In many ways, this revivalist movement that quickly conquered most of Eastern Europe was not new at all. The social structures remained in place,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The influence of the *Haskalah*, with its civic, educational and dress reforms clearly had a greater effect on the structure of Eastern European Jewry than the Chassidic movement.

<sup>2</sup> Though control was transferred to the Chassidim. See also Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Chassidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), who claims that the Ba'al Shem Tov simply filled an established communal position of doctor and *ba'al shem*. While this opinion clearly ignores the creative contribution of the father of Chassidism to the movement, it does

and many of the central ideas underlying the movement had existed previously.<sup>3</sup> What did happen, however, and what shook Jewry to its core, was a restructuring of the *values* of Jewish life.<sup>4</sup> While many of the central tenets of Chassidism have been shown to exist in pre-Chassidic writings, it was their unique combination, their popularization, and their embodiment in the figure of the Tzaddik that transfigured Jewish life. What Chassidism did was re-order and re-prioritize Jewish values – the Tzaddik over the scholar, prayer over Torah study, immanence over transcendence.<sup>5</sup> No longer was attachment to God the exclusive property of the *talmidei chachamim* and kabbalists. Rather, it was equally available (at least in theory) to the broad spectrum of Jews. God was “close to all who call upon Him; to all who call upon Him in truth” (*Tehillim* 145:18). This was the curative for a society that, to many of its members, had lost its vision and inspiration.<sup>6</sup>

Almost three hundred years later, the influence of the Chassidic movement has not abated. This is not only evident in the remarkable post-war rebirth of traditional Chassidism, with its unique mode of dress, its Rebbes and courts, and its tight-knit communities. Rather, conceptually, the transformation in values that the Ba'al Shem Tov initiated has remained a powerful spiritual force, expressing itself in a variety of ways, whether Martin Buber's existential Chassidism of the early twentieth century or the counter-culture Chassidism of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, which continues to inspire people a decade after his passing.

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affirm that the Ba'al Shem Tov was less radical than previously thought in terms of his communal position. On the transfer of communal authority to Chassidic leaders in the first generations of the movement, see Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Chassidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3 See Mendel Piekartz, *The Beginning of Chassidism: Ideological Trends in Derush and Musar Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Inst., 1978).

4 A good synopsis of the various issues under debate (albeit presented from a reactionary, traditional point of view) is Dov Eliach, *Sefer HaGaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Moreshet HaYeshivot, 2002).

5 See A. Green, “Typologies of Leadership” in *Jewish Spirituality I*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 127–156.

6 See S. Dresner, *The Zadik* (New York: Schocken, 1960).

One of the significant areas in which Chassidism changed traditional values was in the fulfillment of *mitzvot* and the study of Torah. No longer was it sufficient to perform these acts out of mere servitude to God. Rather, they became means to the goal of *deveikut* – mystical clinging to the Divine. Selfless learning, *limmud Torah l'shemah* – for the sake of Heaven – became learning *l'shem hey* – for the sake of the letter *hey*, representing the *Shechinah*. In other words, a person learns Torah in order to uplift and return the Divine Presence to God, which entailed, as well, a transformation in human consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

This change in focus is precisely where Chassidism has the power to speak to us today. Not necessarily in its emphasis on mystical experience (though renewed interest in that area may also be occurring), but in the change in focus from the rote performance of *mitzvot* and Torah study to that which engenders a sense of personal meaning.<sup>8</sup> It offers us a different

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7 On the Chassidic approach to Torah study, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism, Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 171–188. On the connection between prayers for the *Shechinah* and the uplifting of the consciousness, see my doctoral diss., *Letters of Desire: Language, Mysticism, and Sexuality in the Writings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav* (Bar-Ilan University: 2005), 121–122.

8 Of course, it is unlikely that the early Chassidim would have understood themselves in this way, as the idea of “personal meaning” was not yet in their vocabulary. They too developed a theory that *deveikut* was for the sake of a higher, objective good – the restoration of the Divine Presence, an act which entails the negation of the self, not its enrichment. Nevertheless, when one looks at the sociological response to the early movement and the enthusiasm with which it spread, it is clear that a renewed sense of personal meaning lay at its heart. This approach was given explicit voice in later generations of Chassidic teachers, such as in the statement of R. Klonymus Kalmish Shapira, the Piazeczna Rebbe, in his work *Tzav v'Ziruz*: “Emotion is the food of the soul; it is as much of a need of the soul as food is to the body. A person who fulfills this need with emotional prayer and study is nourishing the soul correctly. Prayer and study without emotion will leave a vacuum that will force the soul to search for emotion anywhere, even in sinful behavior.”

It is possible to read the issue of “self-fulfillment” as part of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin’s critique of the Chassidic movement, in the fourth chapter of his work, *Nefesh HaChaim*. There, he rails against those individuals who seek spiritual experience over the straightforward, selfless fulfillment of the commandments or Torah

approach to the fulfillment of the tradition than is currently practiced.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the underlying principles that Chassidism originally advanced are still available to us – such as an emphasis on experience over knowledge, or a sense of closeness to the Divine. These can be used to further the spiritual renewal of the Jewish people.<sup>10</sup>

#### SPIRITUALITY IN JEWISH EDUCATION

The idea that education should be a spiritual experience, and not merely an intellectual one, is receiving increasing attention of late.<sup>11</sup> There are, of

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study.

For a contemporary example of this debate, see David Bleich's discussion of women's prayer groups in *Contemporary Halachic Problems*, vol. III (New York: Ktav, 1989), especially his comment on p. 119.

9 For a discussion of the perennial disagreement between the Chassidic movement and the Mitnagdim, as it has played out in contemporary Judaism, see Shaul Magid, "Hasidism, Mithnagdism, and American Jewry," in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Martin Kavka and David Novak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

10 Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidism has banked on this idea over the last forty years in their outreach work. Furthermore, the current, widespread interest in Kabbalah is really, to my mind, an interest in Chassidism (though not explicitly identified as such), since authentic Kabbalah is generally so complex and abstract that the average person would derive little satisfaction in learning it. Chassidism, however, developed the practical and psychological implications of Kabbalistic ideas. This was also the goal of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the *Ba'al HaSulam*, in his reinterpretation of the *Zohar* and the Lurianic system (though his system differs widely from that of Chassidism). This may explain why R. Ashlag's teachings have lent themselves to such popularization of late, such as in Philip Berg's Kabbalah Centre in America, and Michael Laitman's "Bnei Baruch" in Israel.

11 Several important titles on this topic are: *Education as Transformation: Religious Pluralism, Spirituality and a New Vision for Higher Education in America*, ed. V. Kazanjian and P. Laurence (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*, ed. Steven Glaser (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1995); Palmer, Parker, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993). See also the "Spirituality in Higher Education"

course, numerous definitions of the term “spirituality,” among them many that seem vague or catchall.<sup>12</sup> Alan Brill,<sup>13</sup> however, lists five criteria for an authentic spiritual experience: (A) It is concerned with living experience over religious doctrine. (B) Spirituality is *not* to be confused with ethics. Rather, “ethics are the applications of the Divine imperative to life.”<sup>14</sup> (C) Spirituality includes a practical discipline, such as meditation or prayer. (D) It deals with the extra-ordinary – that which transcends normal life – while at the same time; (E) it makes these states or concepts personally

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initiative of UCLA, at [www.spirituality.ucla.edu](http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu).

From the Jewish perspective, see Asher Friedman, “*K’Ganim b’Gan Hashem* – As Gardeners in the Garden of God: Chassidic Thought and its Implications for Teacher-Student Relationship,” in *Wisdom From All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiatives in Contemporary Torah Education*, ed. Jeffrey Saks and Susan Handelman, (Jerusalem: Urim Publications and ATID, 2003); Zvi Leshem, “The Translation of Chassidic Educational Philosophy into the Contemporary Educational Landscape” at [www.nishmat.net](http://www.nishmat.net); Jeffrey Saks, *Spiritualizing Halakhic Education* (Jerusalem: Mandel Foundation, 2006); Ron Wacks, “Emotion and Enthusiasm in the Educational Doctrine of R. Klonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piazechna,” [Hebrew] *Hagut b’Chinuch Yehudi* 6 (2004), 71–88. Philip Wexler, *Mystical Interactions: Sociology, Jewish Mysticism and Education* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2007). A recent issue of *Jewish Educational Leadership* (5:2 Winter 2007) published by the Lookstein Center for Jewish Education, Bar-Ilan University, is devoted to this topic.

On the role of emotions in learning, see Israel Scheffler, *In Praise of Cognitive Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3–17, although none of his emotional categories quite fit that which Rabbi Tzadok refers to.

12 See Alan Brill, “Dwelling with Kabbalah: Meditation, Ritual and Study,” in *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law*, ed. A. Mintz and L. Schiffman (New Jersey: Ktav, 2005), 142.

13 Brill, *ibid.*, 128–144, based upon Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality: Volume One: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Desclée Co., 1963). Bouyer himself cites P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1922), v.

14 Brill, *ibid.* This is opposed to the approach of *Tikkun* magazine editor, Michael Lerner, who conflates these two aspects, following his general socio-political approach to the topic. See, for instance, Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: Putnam, 1994) and *Tikkun* 13, 6. September/October 1998).

relevant. The words of Ewert Cousins sum up these last points: “This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendental dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, spirituality is both transcendent and deeply personal. It can be understood as a sense of *ultimate context*, within which the broadest dimension of existence is able to connect with the deepest levels of the soul.

In the following article, I would like to briefly examine the works of one of Chassidism’s greatest thinkers, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823–1900). Rabbi Tzadok is unique in the Chassidic movement not only for the depth and breadth of his thought,<sup>16</sup> but also on account of his personal history. Growing up in a traditional Lithuanian rabbinic family, he became a student of the Chassidic master, R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner – the *Mei HaShiloach* – in his early twenties. Throughout Rabbi Tzadok’s life, he maintained his incredible love for and intensity of learning, and even today, his writings are highly esteemed by both Chassidim and Lithuanian scholars alike.<sup>17</sup> As a Torah scholar of the highest caliber, Rabbi Tzadok’s writings on *limud Torah* shed light on the uniqueness of the Chassidic approach to study. Though his writing on the topic of Torah are vast and complex,<sup>18</sup> I would like to focus here on one particular aspect – Torah study with heart – a goal toward which many of us, as educators (or even just parents), should

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15 Ewert Cousins, “General Editor’s Introduction to the Series” in *World Spirituality: Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroads, 1985), xiii.

16 See Alan Brill, *Thinking God* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2002) for a discussion of much of Rabbi Tzadok’s thought, particularly his approach to mystical experience.

17 Many important twentieth century rabbinic personalities were influenced by Rabbi Tzadok’s thought, among them R. Yitzhak Hutner, author of the *Pachad Yitzhak*, R. Eliyahu Dessler, author of *Michtav m’Eliyahu* and R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook.

18 The most thorough work on this topic is Amirah Liwer, *Oral Torah in the Writings of R. Tzadok haKohen of Lublin* [Hebrew] (doctoral diss.: Hebrew University, 2007). Especially relevant is chap. 9. See also, Brill, *ibid.*, chap. 10.

strive in our efforts to make Torah study a more vibrant and spiritual experience for today's youth.

Before discussing the path of Torah study itself, I cite here a teaching of Rabbi Tzadok on the nature of human thought. This is a necessary preface to understanding how Torah study should ideally be conducted.

#### INNERMOST THINKING

At the beginning of the book *Machshavot Charutz*, Rabbi Tzadok discusses a passage from the Kabbalistic work, *Tikkunei Zohar*:<sup>19</sup>

How many thoughts there are, one higher than the other, one above the other, as it is written: "for one higher than the high watches, and there are higher than they" (*Kohélet* 5:7). And above all of them is the most hidden thought of all (*machshavah setimah*), the highest of the high, of which no other thought is higher. And how many thoughts there are, one enclothing the other.

Although the *Tikkunei Zohar* uses the term "thought," the broader context of the discussion shows that it is actually referring to the supernal worlds<sup>20</sup> or *sefirot* – the Divine hypostasis that underlie reality. The text is stating that these worlds can be envisioned in two ways, either hierarchically, one higher than the other, or concentrically, one within the other, so that the most recondite can also be considered the most high. This highest, innermost world is called *machshavah setimah* – hidden thought, which Kabbalistically, corresponds to the dimension of *Adam Kadmon* ("Primordial Man"), the first emanation from the Godhead.<sup>21</sup>

On this passage, Rabbi Tzadok comments:

<sup>19</sup> *Tikkun* 69, p. 115a.

<sup>20</sup> The envisioning of supernal worlds in anthropomorphic terms is characteristic of Kabbalah, from among the earliest texts, such as the *Sefer Yetzirah*, down to Lurianic writings. Chassidism reversed this trend, as will become evident below.

<sup>21</sup> According to the commentary *Metok m'Devash* (Jerusalem: Machon Da'at Yosef, 1991), 1064.

It is known that whatever is above also exists below in the human soul, which is “in our image and our likeness”<sup>22</sup> . . . Human thought also has numerous levels. And there is the deep beginning of thought, which is hidden and concealed from a person, from which all thoughts are drawn. This is the hidden thought, whereas the lowermost garment, which is the revelation of thought in actuality – the various thoughts and musings that pass through the mind – is not essential thought, which is always considered Wisdom (*Chochmah*), which is the essential man, *ko’ach mah* (“the potential of what”), as stated in the *Tikkunim* 22.<sup>23</sup> This has the numerical value of “Man” – “Adam” (אדם = מוה), as is known. And this is the thought that makes a mark on the mind and spreads immediately to the heart and from there to the entire body. For *Abba* and *Imma* (“Father and Mother”) are “two companions that are never separate.”<sup>24</sup> For thought that touches the root of *Abba* alludes to the wisdom of the mind, as is known. It is joined to Understanding (*Binah*), which is in the heart, and causes the birth of the potential for action, in the manner of “the eye sees, the heart desires and the vehicle of action completes [the process].”<sup>25</sup>

Rabbi Tzadok is stating that just as there are multiple levels (or garments) to the worlds, so there are numerous levels of human thought. The thoughts we are most familiar with – the fleeting cognitions of the mind – are only the outermost shell of essential thought. Even moments of concentrated thought may still be superficial, since true thought – *machshavah setimah* – is unique in that it maintains a continual connection to the heart. Rabbi Tzadok cites the *Zohar*,<sup>26</sup> which calls *Abba* and *Imma*, “two companions that never separate.” Kabbalistically, this refers to the constant union of the two uppermost sefirot, *Chochmah* and *Binah*, which engenders a continual downflow of energy that maintains the creation. Rabbi Tzadok applies this

22 *Bereshit* 1:26. Here, Rabbi Tzadok uses the familiar Chassidic principle of the psychologization of Kabbalistic cosmology. On this, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism, Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 227–238.

23 P. 67a.

24 See *Zohar* 2:56a, 3:4a.

25 See Rashi on *Bamidbar* 15:16.

26 Alternative names for the sefirot *Chochmah* and *Binah* when functioning as *partzufim*.



principle to the cognitive dimension. *Chochmah* corresponds to intellect, *Binah*, to the heart.<sup>27</sup> Just as in the upper worlds, *Abba* and *Imma* are never separated, so on the innermost level of consciousness – what Rabbi Tzadok calls the essential person – an inseparable connection exists between the mind and the heart, so that what a person knows, he immediately feels, with the result of this union being the birth of appropriate actions.

There are also many levels in the feelings of the heart. There are also superficial feelings that are not in the depths and inwardness of the heart at all, for from the heart “is the outpouring of life” (*Mishlei* 4:23). A total emotion is that which touches the depths of one’s life. This is the root of Understanding (*Binah*) of the heart, which is drawn from the depths of the Wisdom (*Chochmah*), which is in the mind. And this type of thought, upon which the essential point of life of the heart depends, is the essential person; not the other, superficial thoughts, which are garments to the inner and essential thought.

This innermost point of Wisdom and Knowledge, thought and feeling, are hidden from a human being – *machshavot setimah* – yet they underlie and generate all other thoughts. They are the spring from which true knowledge and meaning continually flow outward.

At this primal level of essential thought and emotion, explains Rabbi Tzadok, a human being is engaged in a continual, contemplative union with God. All of one’s thoughts and feelings are directed to the Source. Here, Rabbi Tzadok echoes a teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov, which states that at the root of all mundane desires and emotions is the love or experience of God. Rabbi Tzadok is stating that even mundane thoughts bear within them a spark of Torah, which is at every moment touching the heart, though the deeper one’s thoughts go, the more the heart is aroused.

Although, according to Rabbi Tzadok, only the rarest individuals can access this most recondite part of the soul (for to do so permanently would be to repair the sin of Adam), nevertheless, everyone can approach it to some degree. Thus, he offers a model of cognition that should be of significance

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<sup>27</sup> This is a common distinction in Chassidic texts, based upon the *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a.

to Jewish educators, for it implies that the natural consequence of “deep thought” is its ability to touch the heart and bring about a corresponding change in action, whereas a superficial understanding of Torah will have little effect on the heart or deeds. A teacher should perhaps ask him or herself if the material he or she presents reflects such a union of mind and heart. Does it reach out to unite the minds and hearts of his or her pupils (as the rabbis have said: “Words that come from the heart enter the heart”). Does it inspire them and lead them to action, or do the ideas remain cold and irrelevant? And if so, how can this natural link between our minds and our hearts be uncovered, to whatever degree possible.

#### TORAH OF THE HEART

In *Tzidkat HaTzaddik*, Rabbi Tzadok’s earlier,<sup>28</sup> more renowned work, he discusses the idea that Torah study must include an affective dimension.<sup>29</sup> He writes:

The words of Torah that pass through a person’s heart, which the heart feels and becomes enthused by, are called a “Tree of Life” and an “elixir of life.” For the heart is the source of life, as it states: “for from it are the issues of life.”<sup>30</sup> And when it is aroused, the very source of one’s life is aroused by means of the words of Torah, which engender life in a person.<sup>31</sup>

To Rabbi Tzadok, it is not sufficient to merely understand Torah, there must be an emotional experience as well – a person must be moved by the words of Torah and by what they signify. To be more precise, it is not merely an emotional experience that is being suggested here, but a deep

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28 See Brill, *Thinking God*, 384–385.

29 One should not make the mistake that Rabbi Tzadok saw Torah study as *only* an act of the heart. Indeed, Rabbi Tzadok developed a comprehensive intellectual mysticism, in which Divinity is grasped through the mind, in the act of Torah study. For a critique of superficial emotionality and enthusiasm in the spiritual life, see Brill, “Jewish Spirituality,” 143.

30 *Mishlei* 4:23.

31 *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 225.

*internalization* of the topic being studied: A sense of truth and affectiveness of which emotion is only one part. The traditional appellation of the Torah as a “Tree of Life”<sup>32</sup> means just that: when a person learns Torah with heart, the Divine life-force within him – his very vitality – becomes aroused. Herein lays the Torah’s power to change a person for the better, as the rabbis have said: “The light in it causes him to become good.”<sup>33</sup> According to Rabbi Tzadok, this ability is implied in the very word “Torah,” which he sees as related to the word “*moreh*,” as in “*moreh derech*” – a guide.<sup>34</sup>

To Rabbi Tzadok, this type of knowledge is the very definition of wisdom, and the interiorization of Torah is the goal of all learning: “The main wisdom and understanding is when it is absorbed in the heart.”<sup>35</sup> It is captured by the rabbinic statement: “The Compassionate One desires the heart”<sup>36</sup> – meaning, it is not that God simply desires our emotions, but that our knowledge of Him, gained through the Torah, should affect us in the most heartfelt way.

#### THE NEED FOR NEED

Experience shows that this process does not happen automatically. Not every word of Torah penetrates the heart of the listener, nor is every heart naturally open to hearing the deeper strata of words of Torah. Rabbi Tzadok thus identifies the most important criterion for being able to hear deeply the meaning of the words as a feeling of lack for what the Torah is coming to teach.

The main words of Torah are those that enter the heart. And which ones enter the heart? When a person is thirsty and greatly longs for them, as it

32 “It is a tree of life for all those who cling to her” (*Mishlei* 3:18).

33 *Eichah Rabbah*, Introduction, *piska* 2.

34 *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 133.

35 *Divrei Sofrim* 15. This is Rabbi Tzadok’s understanding of the verse: “And I have given wisdom to all those of wise heart” (*Shemot* 31:6).

36 See *Sanhedrin* 106b and Rashi *ad. loc.* See also *Zohar* 2:162, 3:218b.

says: “And I ate it, and it was sweet as honey to my mouth” (*Yechezkel* 3:3),<sup>37</sup> which is the matter of: “Your Torah is within my innards” (*Tehillim* 40:9). Meaning, it is absorbed in one’s entire body.<sup>38</sup>

Words learned without longing and a sense of spiritual or existential emptiness do not penetrate the heart or affect a change in the student. They remain external to a person, as Rabbi Tzadok writes: “This is not the case [when Torah is studied] with coldness; when [the words of Torah] do not pass through the heart. For even though he understands their wisdom intellectually and grasps matters of Divinity and the words of Torah, the heart is completely unaffected, as though he were studying secular wisdom,<sup>39</sup> to which he has no connection.”<sup>40</sup> Not only do such words of Torah fail to change a person for the better, they may propel him away from a true connection to God, as the Talmud says: “If a person deserves it, the Torah becomes a potion of life; if not, it becomes an elixir of death.”<sup>41</sup>

Rabbi Tzadok defines this sense of lack as “fear of God” or “fear of sin.” This is a dramatic reinterpretation of the traditional understanding of these terms, which usually implies fear of transgression or fear of punishment.<sup>42</sup>

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37 Notice how Rabbi Tzadok plays with the meaning of the verse. In the original context, Yechezkel saw a scroll containing prophecies of doom. The rabbis, however, identify it with the Torah. Rabbi Tzadok goes one step further and points to its sweetness (“... so I ate, and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey”) – the Torah that one learns must be sweet to the mouth.

38 *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 133. Rabbi Tzadok also writes here: “This thirst comes from the existence of a lack; that a person feels lacking in something, and he needs the words of Torah to fill it.” See, also *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 211: “The Torah was only given to those who lack, and recognize their lacks and request God to deliver them.”

39 Lit., “external wisdom” – *chochma chitzonit*. See Rabbi Tzadok’s work, *Likutei Emorim*, p. 42a for a further discussion of the nature of this type of wisdom.

40 *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 225.

41 *Yoma* 72b.

42 *Shabbat* 31a; *Yoma* 72b; *Avot* 3:17. On the concept of fear of God in Chassidic thought, see Alan Brill, “Moving Beyond Lightness and Confronting Fears: Chassidic Thought on the Fear of Heaven” in *Yirat Shamayim: The Awe, Reverence and Fear of God*, ed. Marc Stern (New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2008).

Here, Rabbi Tzadok interprets them to mean the inherent sense of lack and dissatisfaction that so often accompanies the pursuit of worldly pleasures. The point, however, is not to annul these desires, but to direct a person to seek fulfillment from the words of Torah.

This reflects an important concept in early Chassidism, found in statements of the Ba'al Shem Tov, that physical desires are not inherently evil, as often implied in pre-Chassidic ethical treatises, but contain within them the potential for good – a spark of divinity. As the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, “It is proper for a man to have physical desires, for through them he will come to desire the Torah and the service of God,”<sup>43</sup> and “Every commandment or act of holiness starts with thoughts of physical pleasure.”<sup>44</sup>

The point is that desires, even mundane ones, actually reveal a longing in a person's heart for God. They lay the ground for all deep, positive learning and should thus be encouraged. This may be the very opposite of every educator's personal experience. The worst thing for a teacher is to face an unruly class, whose students are given over to their every whim and desire. A “good class” is usually defined as one in which the students are quiet and attentive. However, to Rabbi Tzadok, this situation might indicate precisely the opposite – the lack of an “evil inclination” on the part of students indicates a lack of desire and feeling, and ultimately, a lack of interest. Such students lack the basic prerequisite for Torah to enter their hearts – the potential to feel and transform their own shortcomings. They lack a feeling of lack. Rather, the educator must know that when faced with a class of challenging, difficult, and unruly students, he is addressing a group of individuals who have the greatest potential to hear his words. As the Zohar states: “If it were not for the evil inclination, there would be no joy from Torah.”<sup>45</sup>

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43 R. Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoy, *Ben Porat Yosef*, 66b quoted in David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Figures Basic, 1992), 131. See Esther Liebes, “Love and Creation: The Thought of Rabbi Baruch of Kosov” [Hebrew], (doctoral diss., Hebrew University, 1997), 270–275; Tishby and Dan, “Chassidism,” in *Encyclopedia Hebraica* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Poalim, 1988), XVII: 1405, 1408; Weiss, “Beginnings of Chassidism” [Hebrew], *Zion* 16 (1951), 46–105.

44 *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, 151a, quoted in *Eros*, 131.

45 *Midrash HaNe'elam*, *Toldot* 138a. Quoted by Rabbi Tzadok in *Tzidkat*

Obviously, this does not mean that the students should remain on the level of gross desires. Fear of God – the sense of lack – is the indispensable key for transforming these emotions into something positive. How an educator can instill this feeling, how he can somehow extract his students from the enticements and distractions of modern society is a challenge and a question unto itself. The point we will remain with here, at least, is that the students who are the most difficult to address may actually be the ones with the greatest potential for heartfelt learning. Needless to say, the words of Torah that the teacher offers must be able to quench this thirst. They must be of equal potency to the desires that rack the students' hearts.

#### TORAH FROM THE LIPS

Does this mean that any Torah study that is not accompanied by deep-heartedness or interiorization is worthless? Yes and no. On the one hand, learning Torah without “fear” may lead to an inner dichotomy in which knowledge of religious truths and unredeemed material desires exist simultaneously, with the former unable to redeem the latter. In such a case, the lower desires can eventually influence and corrupt the mind, leading to a misconstrual of the Torah's authentic meaning. Rabbi Tzadok identifies this as the problem with such biblical and Talmudic characters as Doeg HaEdomi, Bila'am or Elisha ben Abuya (*Acher*), who were Torah scholars (or prophets, as in the case of Bila'am), yet who rebelled against God. It is particularly a problem for Torah scholars, who must struggle with greater desires than the average person.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Torah, if not properly channeled through the heart after the prerequisite of fear-lack, becomes an “elixir of death.”

On the other hand, in a related teaching, Rabbi Tzadok clearly states that fear of God is not an absolute prerequisite for studying Torah:

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*HaTzaddik* 133.

<sup>46</sup> See *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 45; *Divrei Sofrim* 19. It is precisely this inclination, when transformed, which propels them to greatness.

Each person is able to grasp wisdom and words of Torah, even though he does not have the preceding fear of sin and the arousal from below that stimulates the study and understanding of Torah for the sake of the honor of His name, and recognizes that [the Torah] is God's Torah. Nevertheless, God is always ready to constantly bestow words of Torah, even without a lower arousal. And this is: "In His goodness, He constantly renews each day the work of creation."<sup>47</sup> Just as the act of creation did not have a lower arousal, for Adam had not yet been created, so, constantly, each day, He renews [creation] in His goodness alone, without any prior lower arousal . . . However, the "work of the chariot" is when God reveals Himself to one who arouses Him.<sup>48</sup>

In discussing the dynamic relationship between the upper and lower worlds, Chassidism often speaks of *hitarutah d'l'tatab* – the lower arousal, and *hitarutah d'l'eylah* – the upper arousal, with the former being preferable to the latter. In other words, in the symbiotic relationship between the upper and lower worlds, there is a difference as to which dimension of reality initiates the process that ultimately leads to an outflow of *shefa* – spiritual bounty from above to below. Ideally, spiritual outflow should be initiated by human endeavor, which triggers a corresponding downward movement. There are times, however, such as during the creation of the world, when there was no source of "lower arousal" with which to start the process of outflow – mankind having yet to be created.<sup>49</sup> At that time, God had to begin the process from above. Subsequently, only after the creation of Adam, could the proper sequence be established.

In general, Kabbalah and Chassidism see this model as applying to every act in the relationship between God and the creation. Every human act

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<sup>47</sup> From the morning prayers, in the blessings before the recitation of *Keriyat Shema*.

<sup>48</sup> *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 226.

<sup>49</sup> This is only until the creation of Adam, of which the verse states: "Now, no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, nor had any of the herbs of the field yet sprung up, because the Lord God had not brought rain on the earth, for there was no man to work the soil" (*Bereshit* 2:5). That is, once man would be created, Adam's prayers for rain (the lower arousal) could initiate a supernal response.

triggers some Divine reaction.<sup>50</sup> However, Rabbi Tzadok points to a section of the morning prayers which states: “In His goodness, He constantly renews each day the work of creation.” In other words, there is an aspect of creation that is constantly being generated by God, even without human influence. This “upper arousal” is an ongoing dimension of reality, not a one time event. Whereas human events can initiate the supernal outflow – effectively generating and justifying the ongoing existence of creation – there is another, parallel dimension in which God is constantly, gratuitously creating the world, regardless of human actions.<sup>51</sup>

Rabbi Tzadok applies this idea to the way we understand Torah. Ideally, Torah should be learned from “the bottom up.” A “lower arousal” – the fear of sin that produces the sense of emptiness and lack – should drive a person to seek fulfillment from the words of Torah, which descend from Above. However, even when that prerequisite is lacking, God is always ready to bestow Torah upon the individual, in the same way that He is always creating the world anew, from above to below, without any lower impetus. By “Torah” Rabbi Tzadok does not mean the simple act of book learning, but a creative interaction with the text, and a degree of Divine influence that enhances one’s ability to understand the subject and develop *chiddushim* – new understandings of the material being studied.

The difference as to whether Torah comes first from above or in response to a movement from below is the difference as to whether the words of Torah affect a person’s heart or not. In the “above to below” model, the words of Torah remain external to a person, registering in his intellect alone. When the arousal comes from below, however, as a result of the

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<sup>50</sup> See *The Palm Tree of Devorah* by R. Moshe Cordovero, for several examples of this.

<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Tzadok would say that this reflects the paradox of God’s omniscience and human free will. Both sets are true, although they do not overlap. We can regard human actions as products of human free will. In that case, Divine providence plays no role in them. Or, we can regard all activities as being ordained from above, in which case, free will is irrelevant. Rabbi Tzadok says (*Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 40) that both are true, each in its own, independent dimension.



fear-lack nexus, words of Torah can penetrate a person's heart and lead to transformation.

Rabbi Tzadok applies to this distinction the terms *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* – the Work of Creation and the Work of the Chariot. The Talmud speaks of these as two early schools of mystical knowledge: “One should not explain . . . the Work of Creation to two [students] and the Work of the Chariot to one, unless he is wise and understands it by himself.”<sup>52</sup> *Ma'aseh Bereshit* refers to the secrets of the creation of the world, alluded to in the opening chapters of *Bereshit*, whereas *Ma'aseh Merkavah* refers to the mystical secrets contained in Yechezkel's prophetic vision (*Yechezkel* 1:4–26).<sup>53</sup>

According to Rabbi Tzadok, these categories correspond to the two different approaches to Torah study mentioned above. *Ma'aseh Bereshit* refers to the Torah novellas that descend each day as part of God's ongoing creation of the world,<sup>54</sup> whereas *Ma'aseh Merkavah* refers to God's presence that rests itself upon an individual who has prepared himself for the encounter, leading to a personal and transformative understanding of the Torah:

God “rides” upon and leads a person who works hard [at Torah study] and prepares himself . . . And this is the subject of the second blessing before the *Keriyat Shema*<sup>55</sup> – to grasp the words of Torah derived from the wisdom of the Work of the Chariot, which is what God bestows upon us individually . . . in as much as we wait and long for Him, and with our lower arousal.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Mishnah *Chagigah* 2:1.

<sup>53</sup> *Tosafot Yom Tov* on the Mishnah. See Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, for a different approach.

<sup>54</sup> Rabbi Tzadok interprets the Midrashic statement that “God looked into the Torah and created the world” as an ongoing phenomena. God is constantly “looking into the Torah” and creating the world, on a daily basis. As a consequence, just as the world is new each day, so there are new revelations of Torah that descend from heaven. See *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 90 and 216.

<sup>55</sup> As opposed to the ongoing, autonomous and universal emanation of the worlds and the Torah, which is alluded to by the words of the first blessing of *Keriyat Shema*: “In His goodness, He constantly renews each day the work of creation.”

<sup>56</sup> *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 226. See also *ibid.*, 189: “There are two ways of apprehending Divinity, one from the perspective of creation, in that one recognizes that

In another early work,<sup>57</sup> in the context of a discussion of Kabbalistic texts and mystical experience, Rabbi Tzadok defines these terms somewhat differently: *Ma'aseh Bereshit* is the study of *any* text whose purpose is to merely describe the ontological structure of reality (primarily the supernal worlds). *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, on the other hand, is not the *description* of the cosmos, but an *experience* of divinity. In other words, even the Lurianic corpus, often considered as the most recondite and esoteric school of Kabbalah, still falls only in the category of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, in that it describes the operation of the worlds.<sup>58</sup> *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, on the other hand, is the living experience of God.

If we juxtapose this teaching with the one from *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* discussed above, we find an interesting parallel. In both cases, *Ma'aseh Bereshit* refers to the acquisition of knowledge on the intellectual realm, whereas *Ma'aseh Merkavah* means experiencing the knowledge in an inner way. The latter is considered the deeper of the two approaches, thus making experience, whether mystical or heart-felt, to be the true goal of Torah study.

Practically speaking, we can say that while true Torah study is that which is preceded by a sense of lack, and not merely that which is learned intellectually – “from the lips and outward,” as Rabbi Tzadok calls it – there is still some validity to Torah taught as an objective discipline. This parallels God’s ongoing act of creation, which begins from above without human initiation.<sup>59</sup> Still, if Torah is to be more than *Ma'aseh Bereshit* – a mere *description* of reality – it must eventually enter the hearts of its learners as a response to their seeking and longing.

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there is a Creator. This is called *Ma'aseh Bereshit*. The second from the perspective of stewardship (*hanhagah*) and this is called *Ma'aseh Merkavah* – how God ‘rides’ on the creation.” See, also, *Dover Tzedek*, 117 and *Sefer HaZichronot*, 58ff.

57 *Divrei Sofrim*, 66ff.

58 At least, when these texts are taken at face value. For an interpretation of the Lurianic corpus as a vast meditative system, see Menachem Kallus, *The Theurgy of Prayer in the Lurianic Kabbalah* (doctoral diss.: Hebrew University, 2002).

59 Even in this case, there must be an element of newness and originality in the material presented, in that it corresponds to the energies of creation, which are renewed each day. See n. 54 above.

## CONCLUSION

What do these ideas mean for us, besides informing us of the deeper, truer levels on which we should study Torah?

As an educator, I believe they have important repercussions as to the nature of both the study and instruction of Torah. Rabbi Tzadok's words present an ideal and a challenge. They tell us that the ultimate expression of Torah study is that which joins the mind and heart on the innermost level, so that one's knowledge and feelings are united in a way that naturally leads to action – to the inspired service of God. On the other hand, they also tell us that the prerequisite for this connection is a heart that thirsts – at first, for anything, but ultimately, for the words of the living God. One needs a feeling heart, a passionate heart, even a heart filled with worldly lusts, which can be transformed and redirected.

A teacher not only has to connect deeply to the subject he presents, he must recognize, and even elicit, the gnawing existential sense of lack in his students. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "Religion is an answer to man's ultimate questions. The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in."<sup>60</sup> The students have to first hear the question; only then can they begin to hear the answer.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Meridian Books and the JPS, 1959), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Attention should be brought here to a pedagogical technique called Problem-based Learning (PBL), in which small groups of students must solve challenging, open-ended problems, with the teacher acting as a "facilitator." This has been shown to be highly effective in generating student involvement, particularly on the secondary school level. See Janice Skowron, *Power Lesson Planning: Every Teacher's Guide to Effective Instruction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006), 109ff. See the author's comment on p. 10: "Problem-based learning activities that engage students in personal and interesting ways can increase motivation and the desire to learn. Classrooms can be dynamic places where students and teachers are energized about learning, but it takes more than just a problem to excite students. Teachers need to share their own passion for learning, know how to relate to students, and provide the setting and resources that allow students to pursue meaning."