

Gates of Holiness

ספר

שערי קדושה

למורנו ורבנו הרב הקדוש
רבי חיים ויטאל זצ"ל

Gates of Holiness

By the Holy Kabbalist
Rabbi Chaim Vital

A spiritual guide to Divine inspiration through the attainment of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, the revelation of Elijah the prophet and the souls of Tzaddikim etc.

Translated by
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Preface of Rabbi Chaim Vital

I have seen those who seek to ascend, but they are few. They long to climb up, but the ladder is hidden from their view. They contemplate the books of the ancients, seeking to discover the paths of life; the way upon which to tread and the deeds that will uplift their soul to its supernal root, so that they may adhere to He who is Eternal Perfection, blessed is He; similar to the prophets who spent all their days cleaving to their Maker. Through that cleaving the Holy Spirit rested upon them and showed them the path where light dwells, enlightening their eyes in the secrets of Torah, as King David, peace be upon him, said¹, “Unveil my eyes, that I may behold wonders from your Torah.” The Holy Spirit guided them on a straight path to the “Inhabited City” that is prepared for those who ascend.

After the prophets came the ancient *Chassidim*. These were hermits who sought to follow in the footsteps of the prophets and emulate them. Living in caverns and deserts, they secluded themselves from society. Some remained secluded in their homes but behaved like those in the deserts. Day and night they never ceased praising their Creator through studying the Torah and singing the Psalms of King David, peace be upon him, which gladden the heart. This they did constantly, until their mind cleaved to the supernal lights with powerful and mighty yearning. This was their practice all their days, until they arose to the level of receiving the Holy Spirit, prophesying ceaselessly. However, since each one acted alone and the character of one person is dissimilar to that of another, the means and methods of how these holy men served *HaShem*, blessed is He, were lost to us, so that we cannot emulate their ways.

Because of this, the hearts and knowledge of the following generations dwindled and people who attained the Holy Spirit vanished. These holy men went to their resting places, leaving us groaning from thirst and hunger. Finally, hopelessness of ever exploring this wondrous wisdom sprouted in the hearts of men. Only two or three grains may be found in a stalk of wheat; one in a city or two in a clan who seek water but there is none, for all vision has been sealed. This is because the methods of how to approach and come closer to the inner holiness were never written in a book.

Later, there arose men who sought to attain spiritual levels by invoking the angels through the power of incanting their holy names. However, they hoped for light and behold darkness; for the angels they conjured were of a very low order who were appointed to affect matters of this, lowly world. This being the case, they are composed of good and evil and themselves perceive neither Truth nor the supernal lights. Therefore, they revealed matters that were admixed with good and evil, truth and error and vain things; matters, such as mystical cures, alchemy (the art of transforming silver into gold and copper or tin into silver), amulets, oaths and incantations. Furthermore, these people fell to imbibing wine and strong drink.

¹ Psalms 119

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If only they would have been as devoted to studying Torah and doing mitzvot! They would have learned from the example of the four great sages of Israel who entered Paradise². Not one of them left unscathed, except for the saintly Rabbi Akiva, and even in his case, the attendant angels attempted to eject him. Had not HaShem helped him, he would not have entered in peace and left in peace. If even the greatest sages of Israel were thus endangered, how much more so, we, who cannot begin to compare to them?

Truth be told, these holy sages aspired to attain very great levels, bordering on prophecy. Therefore, they were placed in harm's way. However, in regard to us, would that we should merit even a tiny glimmer of the Holy spirit, such as the revelation of Eliyahu the Prophet, which many have merited to attain, as is well known; or such as the revelation of the souls of the righteous³, as mentioned often in *Sefer HaTikunim*-The book of Rectifications.

Furthermore, even in our times, I have witnessed holy men who merited attaining all this. Moreover, there is such a level that a person's own soul, because of its great refinement, is revealed to him and directs him in all matters. All these ways are within reach to those who are worthy of them, even in our times. Still and all, great discernment and much experience are necessary in order that it be established upon truth, for perhaps a different spirit visited him; one that is impure. All this will be explained in Part Three, Gate Eight.

Due to all the above, I feel compelled to free true seekers of their difficulties, by supporting their right hand and instructing them concerning the path they should follow. Therefore, I have decided to compose this book, small in quantity but great in quality; may it enlighten the wise.

I have called it, "Gates of Holiness". In it, I will explain hidden matters that have never been taught in previous generations. I have received these teachings directly from the mouth of the holy man of G-d, the messenger of the L-rd of Hosts, my master and teacher, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the holy Ari'zal.

Being that these are concealed and hidden matters that have forever been secret, I will, therefore, reveal only a hands-breadth while concealing two thousand cubits. Thus, with great difficulty, I will unlock the gates of holiness and push them open just a crack, merely the width of a pin. May it be that those who are worthy merit entering the inner sanctum. HaShem is good and will not deprive goodness from those who walk in purity.

I have divided the book into four parts:

Part One – Regarding saintly and ascetic conduct that leads to the attainment of the Holy Spirit. This part is divided into six gates.

Part Two – Words of rebuke, including an explanation of reward and punishment in connection to the positive and negative mitzvot. This part is divided into eight gates.

Part Three – Regarding how to attain the Holy Spirit. This part is divided into eight parts.

² The word paradise is a corruption of the Hebrew word *pardes*.

³ *Tzaddikim*

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Part Four – Regarding methods of meditative “unifications” through which the Holy Spirit may be attained. I, personally, have tried and tested these and have found them to be effective. However, I will only enumerate their details briefly, by way of signposts that point the way.

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Part One

Gate One

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An explanation of the blemishes caused by transgressing the mitzvot of the Torah

Let me instill you with wisdom and enlighten you regarding the great damage that befalls a person who transgresses any of the 365 mitzvot that are forbidden to do or who desists from fulfilling any of the 248 positive mitzvot that he is commanded to do.

As known, the physical body of man is not his actual identity. This is merely called human flesh, as in the verse⁴, “You clothed me with skin and flesh and covered me with bones and veins.” Furthermore, it is written⁵, “It may not be applied to the flesh of man etc.” From this we understand that man is the inner aspect, whereas, the body is similar to a garment. The intellectual soul, which is his true identity, is invested in the body as long as a person remains in this physical world. However, upon death, he is divested of this garment. Rather, he becomes clothed in a spiritual, rarified and pure garment. This is as scripture states⁶, “Remove the soiled garments from upon him”; and he said to him, “Behold, I have removed your iniquity from upon you and dressed you in a pure garment.” This garment is called, “The Vestment of the Rabbis”.

Just as the tailor makes a garment according to the form of a person’s body, so G-d, blessed is He, made the body, which is the garment for the soul, in the form of the image of the soul. That is, He made 248 organs plus 365 veins that connect them. The blood and life-force surge from organ to organ by means of these veins, similar to pipes. Once the body was formed, G-d blew the spirit of life into it. This spirit is comprised of 248 spiritual organs and 365 spiritual veins that are invested within the 248 organs and 365 veins of the physical body. With this, the organs of the soul act through the organs of the body, which are their tools, like an axe in the hand of the lumberjack. Proof of this, is the fact that the physical organs only perform their functions so long as the soul resides within them; the eyes see and the ears hear etc. However, upon the departure of the soul, the eyes dim and all sense and feeling vanishes from the 248 organs.

In like manner, the 365 spiritual veins of the soul are invested within the 365 physical veins and distribute the physical sustenance of the blood to the 248 organs of the body, together with the spiritual sustenance within it, to sustain the 248 organs of the soul. At death, when the soul departs, life-force ceases to be drawn to the body. As a result, the physical veins and organs fall apart, decompose and become as if they never were. From this we see that the actual identity of a person is the intellectual soul and that it resides within the body, which acts as its garment while the soul remains in this world.

Know that when the first man sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, both his body and soul took on a composition of good and evil. This is the matter of, “the dross of the serpent”, that was instilled in Eve and Adam. This dross brought about illness, disease and

⁴ Job 10:11

⁵ Exodus 30:32

⁶ Zechariah 3:4

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death, both spiritually and physically. This is the secret of the verse⁷, “For on the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die” – meaning the death of the soul, as well as the death of the body⁸.

We will now explain the matter of the good and evil that became mixed in them. (Examine what is written in Part Three, gates two and three and you will understand what is written in this gate.) Behold, when man sinned with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he caused this admixture to permeate all worlds. Due to this, there is nothing which does not include both good and evil in it.

Therefore, the body of man was formed from the four elements of the physical world that have both good and evil included in them. These are fire, air, water and earth. However, man’s body was formed from the choicest portion of these elements⁹. Nevertheless, this choice portion also has an admixture of evil in it. Man’s four humors (i.e. the white, black, red and green humors¹⁰) were formed from the grossest portion of these elements. For the body to be healthy, these humors must be balanced. However, if there is an imbalance, and any one of them overpowers the positive characteristics of the others with its negative characteristics, this results in illness and disease. If it is even more overpowering, death may result.

As explained, the admixture of good and evil permeated all worlds, even the upper, spiritual worlds. This being the case, the soul of man was also affected, for was it not hewn from the same four spiritual elements from which all the supernal beings were formed? These four elements are the four letters of *HaShem*’s name¹¹, blessed is He. About this it says¹², “From the four spirits, come O spirit etc.” This “spirit” that comes is the essential soul of man from the side of goodness.

However, G-d made everything with its opposite. Just as the upper spiritual worlds are the source of goodness and purity, so He created a source of evil and impurity. This is the *Sitra Achera* (The Other Side) which is called *Adam BliYaal* (The Incurably Evil Man). It is made up of four sources of destruction¹³ and four indicators of plague¹⁴, which are its four evil elements. From there, an evil soul, which is called, “The Evil Inclination” (*Yetzer HaRa*), is drawn to man. If this soul overpowers the good soul, destruction, plagues and spiritual illnesses befall it. Moreover, if it is too overpowering, it can even cause spiritual death, G-d forbid.

Now, the pure soul, which is compared to the fruit, consists of 613 organs and veins and resides within the 613 organs and veins of the impure soul, which is compared to the shell (*Kelipah*) covering over the fruit. In turn, they both reside within the 613 organs and veins of the body. Thus, the organs of the pure soul reside within the organs of the evil soul and the organs of the evil soul reside within the organs of the body.

⁷ Genesis 2:17

⁸ The literal translation of the verse is, “Die, you shall die”, i.e. physical and spiritual death.

⁹ The physical body of man is the most refined matter in all of physical creation, as opposed to the grosser physicality of all other creatures.

¹⁰ The white humor is phlegm, the black humor is the gall produced by the spleen, the red humor is blood and the green humor is the gall produced by the gallbladder. These humors affect the physical health of a person, as well as his character and disposition.

¹¹ (י) Yud :d’s name are-The four letters of G Hey (ה) Vav (ו) Hey (ה).

¹² Ezekiel 37:9

¹³ These are called the “Fathers of Damages (אבות נזיקין).

¹⁴ מראות נגעים.

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In order to exist, each of these two souls needs spiritual sustenance. However, the spiritual sustenance of the holy soul is drawn to it through the fulfillment of the Torah, which consists of 613 mitzvot, corresponding to the 613 organs of the soul. Thus the Torah is called “bread”, as in the verse¹⁵, “Come, partake of My bread”. Each of the 248 organs receives sustenance from a specific mitzvah that relates to that organ. However, if a person lacks the fulfillment of any mitzvah, the organ specific to that mitzvah will lack the sustenance drawn to it from the four letters of *HaShem*.

This is indicated by the verse¹⁶, “You (*HaShem*) give life to all.” All the mitzvot depend on these four letters, as our sages of blessed memory said, “The letters *Yud* (י) *Hey* (ה) coupled with the word, “My name” (שמי) of the verse, “This is My name and this is My memorial (זה שמי וזה זכרי) have the numerical value of 365. The letters *Vav* (ו) *Hey* (ה) coupled with the word, “My memorial” (זכרי) of the same verse, have the numerical value of 248.”

Likewise, as mentioned above, the roots of the four elements of a person’s holy soul are drawn from these four letters. Therefore, if a person totally lacks a specific mitzvah, the corresponding organ of his holy soul starves to death and departs, G-d forbid. In turn, when this holiness departs from it, the spirit of impurity from the four elements of the impure soul becomes vested in it. This is the secret of the rabbinic dictum, “Tyre did not become a great metropolis until Jerusalem was destroyed.” Thus, the organ now receives its sustenance from the “impure bread” that was exiled from there.

This is the meaning of the statement¹⁷, “The wicked are considered to be dead during their lifetime.” This is because the holy soul from the Living G-d has withdrawn from them. Rather, death, which is called, “The ultimate source of impurities”, rests upon them.

Conversely, the rabbis said regarding a person who desists from transgressing the 365 negative mitzvot, “A person who desists from transgressing a negative mitzvah is rewarded as if he performed a positive mitzvah.” In other words, by not transgressing he empowers the spiritual sustenance that is drawn through the positive mitzvot, as mentioned above, to flow through the “pipes”, which are the 365 veins of the soul, thus enlivening its 248 organs.

However, if he transgresses any of them, the pipe specific to that transgression becomes blocked due to the dross of the sustenance from the *Kelipah*, which adheres to the walls of the pipe. When the pipe withers, the organ that receives from it withers with it. This is so, even if the life-force is not totally withdrawn from it, similar to one who lacks a positive mitzvah. Nonetheless, it becomes blemished.

This being the case, a person should make every effort to fulfill all 613 mitzvot. Furthermore, when he fulfills a positive mitzvah, he should have in mind to rid the specific organ of his soul which correlates to that mitzvah, of the dross of that *Kelipah*. Once the dross has been removed, the

¹⁵ Proverbs 9:5

¹⁶ Nehemiah 9:6

¹⁷ Berachot 18.

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holy organ of the mitzvah may rest upon him. This is the secret of the verse¹⁸, “Their sins were upon their bones”, because when the one rises, the other falls.

Likewise, when an opportunity to transgress comes about, a person should restrain himself from doing it and have in mind that by doing so, the dross in the specific vein of his soul which correlates to that transgression withdraws. With this, the blockage will be removed and the spiritual influence which is drawn by way of that spiritual pipe will be able to flow through. In this way, his soul becomes a seat and a vehicle for G-d’s holiness, blessed is He. This is the secret of¹⁹, “The patriarchs are the Chariot.”

¹⁸ Ezekiel 32:27

¹⁹ Bereshit Rabbah 47:6

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Part One

Gate Two

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Concerning the blemishes which come about through bad character traits

The character traits are naturally embedded in the lowly, fundamental soul of man. This soul is comprised of four aspects; inanimate, vegetative, animate and articulate. They too are a composite of good and evil. Therefore, the good and bad character traits depend on this soul. They constitute a seat, foundation and root for the upper, intellectual soul, upon which the 613 mitzvot of the Torah depend, as mentioned above in gate one. Because of this, the character traits are not included as part and parcel of the 613 mitzvot. Nonetheless, they are essential prerequisites to their fulfillment or negation, for the simple reason that the intellectual soul is powerless to fulfill the mitzvot with the 613 organs of the body except through the agency of the fundamental soul which is connected to the body. This is the secret meaning of the verse²⁰, “For the soul of every flesh; its blood is its life.” This being the case, the bad character traits are actually much worse than the transgressions themselves.

We may now understand why our sages, of blessed memory, said, “When a person loses his temper, it is as if he is actually worshipping strange gods” – which is a negation of all 613 mitzvot of the Torah! Furthermore, they said, “Whosoever has a haughty spirit is likened to one who denies the fundamental truth of G-d’s existence. He is worthy of being cut down like an *Asherah* grove²¹. There are many such quotes. Contemplate this greatly and consider that since the character traits are root causes and fundamental characteristics imbedded in the natural soul, they are not counted amongst the 613 mitzvot that depend on the intellectual soul. We, therefore, find that greater caution must be taken to safeguard oneself from bad character traits, than even from fulfilling the positive mitzvot or desisting from committing the negative mitzvot. This is because if a person possesses good character traits, he will not find it difficult to fulfill all the mitzvot.

With this, we may now understand some astounding comments made by our sages, of blessed memory, regarding character traits, such as the statement that humility and lowliness bring about the Holy Spirit, in which the presence of G-d²² rests upon a person. Furthermore, Eliyahu said, “Only a person who is not pedantic will be given the ability to explain the meanings of Torah. Moreover, I too, will not be revealed except to one who is not pedantic.” Likewise, our sages of blessed memory said, “Who is worthy of life in the world to come? Whosoever is lowly and humble.” There are many such statements. Note that they mention good character traits rather than fulfilling the mitzvot. Set your eyes upon these goals and you shall surely find success.

However, just as the four physical elements are the roots from which the 613 organs of the body were formed, so likewise, the physical life-force of these four elements are the foundations of all the good and bad character traits which are the means by which the Torah and the 613 mitzvot, that come from the four letter name of G-d (יהוה), may be fulfilled or negated. It is the intellectual soul, which is comprised of the four spiritual elements from which its 613 organs were hewn, that fulfills

²⁰ Leviticus 17:14

²¹ This was a grove used for the ancient idolatry of tree worship.

²² Shechinah

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the mitzvot²³. Contemplate this well and you will understand that the basis for the fulfillment or negation of the mitzvot are good and bad character traits.

We have already explained that G-d composed everything of two opposites, good and evil. Just as there are four bodily elements composed of good and evil; the white, green, black and red humors, and these powers either establish a physically healthy body (“Matter”) or damage it, so is it regarding the life-force of the natural, fundamental soul (“Form”). Its four elements are also comprised of both good and evil which affect its health through good character traits, or its illness, through bad character traits which are drawn from its four evil, impure *Kelipot* (Husks).

When a person rids himself of these bad character traits, then, in their stead, the four letters of G-d’s name (הוי"ה) become invested in the natural soul and become a life-giving light for it. Thus, the natural soul and the physical body become a vehicle for G-d’s holiness in the world of Action (*Asiyah*) [which is the *Nefesh* level of the intellectual soul]. This, literally, is similar to what was explained about the intellectual soul when it fulfills the mitzvot.

Moreover, keep in mind that, besides this, through occupying oneself in the study of the four levels of Torah, which form the acronym **PaRDeS**;

- a) *Peshat* (the straightforward, simple meaning of the verses)
- b) *Remez* (the meaning that is intimated but not explicitly stated in the verses)
- c) *Deroosh* (The meaning arrived at through deeper investigation and analysis of the verses)
- d) *Sod* (The esoteric secrets of the verses)

the *Ruach* level of his intellectual soul becomes a seat for the four letters of G-d’s name (הוי"ה) in the world of Formation (*Yetzirah*). Likewise, through contemplation and mental focus, the *Neshamah* level of his intellectual soul becomes a seat for the four letters of G-d’s name (יהו"ה) in the world of Creation (*Beriyah*).

Returning to the explanation of the acquisition of good character traits through the clarification of the four elements; know that all the bad character traits are rooted in the evil and *Kelipah* of the four levels of the fundamental soul. Because of this, all bad character traits may be categorized into four kinds, as follows:

A) The Element of Fire:

This element is the source of arrogance, which is called, “A Coarse Spirit”. This is because it is the lightest and highest of all the elements. It includes anger, because, when his will is not done, an arrogant person becomes angered. If he would always be humble and recognize his own

²³ This means that in order for the Divine soul to perform the physical mitzvot, it must act through the agency of the four elements of the animal soul (which are the physical life-force of the body and the source of all the natural character traits). This is because the Divine soul is invested in the animal soul and the animal soul is invested in the body.

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shortcomings, he would not lose his temper. From this we see that arrogance and anger are one and the same quality. This character trait has three offshoots;

- 1) Being pedantic. If not for haughtiness, a person would never be pedantic, similar to what we explained regarding anger.
- 2) Seeking to dominate others and to be honored by them. This is because he believes he is their superior.
- 3) Hatred toward anyone who is his superior. This too is an offshoot of arrogance.

B) The Element of Wind (Air)

This element is the source of the kind of speech which is called, “Idle Chatter”. That is, talking about needless matters which have no bearing on anything, neither spiritually nor physically. This character trait has four offshoots;

- 1) Speaking words of flattery.
- 2) Speaking lies.
- 3) Speaking the “evil tongue” about others.
- 4) Speaking words of boasting and self-aggrandizement to others.

C) The Element of Water

This element is the source of lust and the desire for pleasure. This is because water causes all manner of pleasurable things to grow. This character trait has two offshoots;

- 1) Envy. This leads to stealing another’s property or seducing his wife or the theft of anything that someone else possesses which he wants to delight in.
- 2) Jealousy. If his friend is wealthy or the like, which he wishes he could be; he will harbor jealousy toward him.

D) The Element of Earth

This element is the source of depression in all its details. It has one offshoot;

- 1) Laziness. This causes him to be slothful in studying Torah or fulfilling the mitzvot, either because he is depressed by the difficulty of acquiring the vanities of this world or because of troubles that befall him. Such a person will never be happy with his lot, in any matter. Moreover, no matter how wealthy he becomes, it will never satisfy him.

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From the above, we find that there are four sources of all the bad character traits. These are arrogance (including anger, which adheres to it), idle chatter, lust for pleasure and depression. Their sources are the four *Kelipot* of the *Yetzer HaRa* (The Evil Inclination) in the fundamental soul.

The opposites of these are four good character traits whose sources are the four good elements of the fundamental soul. These are;

- 1) Humility. This is a total sense of unimportance. Such a person distances himself from any kind of anger, because anger is a result of haughtiness.
- 2) Silence. Except when he is occupied in the study of Torah and mitzvot or in the physical needs of the body or for the needs of others, he acts as if mute, as one who cannot open his mouth.
- 3) He despises all physical pleasure or unnecessary excesses.
- 4) He is always happy with his lot. This is because he realizes that it is all from above and everything that G-d brings about is for the good. This attitude also results in alacrity with perfect joy in serving his Creator, as scripture states²⁴, “I rejoice in your words (O G-d) as one who has discovered vast treasure.” Similarly our sages stated, “Make Torah study your permanent priority and your occupation a temporary one”.

We see that when bad character traits are embedded in a person they obstruct him from fulfilling Torah and mitzvot. Even if he does fulfill them, it will not be for the sake of heaven and they will be very burdensome to him. About such a person scripture states²⁵, “A golden ring in the snout of a pig”, because his impurity is still within him, vested within the *Kelipot*. This is as our sages, of blessed memory said²⁶, “If a person is meritorious, his Torah learning becomes a life-giving elixir. However, if he is not meritorious it becomes fatally poisonous”.

However, if a person rises up to overcome his evil inclination and battles against it until, through great effort, he rids himself of his bad character traits, and thus truly fulfills Torah and mitzvot; he is called a “Perfect *Tzaddik*”, a “G-d Fearing Person” and a “Mighty Warrior who conquers his evil inclination”.

Moreover, if a person advances himself in this, accustoming himself to it to an even greater degree, until he totally rids himself of all bad traits, so that his soul no longer lusts after them at all and he acquires the good traits to the point that they, literally, become natural to him, in that he no longer need battle against the evil inclination, since both his body and fundamental soul have been thoroughly cleansed of all physical dross, as *Sefer HaTikunim* comments²⁷ on the verse²⁸, “Take your shoes off your feet” in regard to Moses; then the four letters of G-d’s name (יהוה) become invested in him and he becomes a holy seat for G-d’s chariot, Blessed is He. Such a person is called

²⁴ Psalms 119

²⁵ Proverbs 11

²⁶ Talmud Yoma 75

²⁷ Tikun 31 and 48

²⁸ Exodus 3

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a “Friend of G-d out of love”. He is called a “Perfect *Chassid*”, “One who is perfect with every kind of perfection”.

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Part One

Gate Three

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A thorough explanation of the levels of “*Tzaddik*” and “*Chassid*” and how one should act in order to attain them

If a person wishes to purify and sanctify himself and truly accept the yoke of the heavenly kingdom upon himself, let him prepare himself with all his might to perform all 613 mitzvot with alacrity. Through their fulfillment the 613 organs and veins of his soul will become perfected, as mentioned. This is because if he lacks even one of the 248 positive mitzvot, he still lacks an organ of his soul. About such a person scripture states²⁹, “A lacking which is incalculable”, which is worse than the matter of, “Anyone who has a blemish may not approach”³⁰.

However, one who fulfills the positive mitzvot, but has transgressed even one of the 365 negative mitzvot, is within the category of an actual “*Baal Moom*” – a truly blemished person. This is because the pipe (or vein) that draws sustenance to the organs has become bent [thereby obstructing the flow]. About such a person the verse states³¹, “irreparably crooked”. However, the meaning of the verse is that it is only irreparable once the soul has departed from this world, because one cannot perform the mitzvot which he lacks or repent and thereby rectify the transgressions that he committed, except while he still is in this world. This is as scripture states³², “Whatever you can accomplish while you are able, do it, for there is neither deed nor accounting nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave to which you are going.” “Deed” here, refers to performing the positive mitzvot, “Accounting” refers to repenting over the negative ones and “knowledge” refers to the knowledge gained through Torah study. None of these are possible “in the grave to which you are going”.

From here we see that as long as a person has not fulfilled the 613 mitzvot he is in the category of an “Imperfect *Tzaddik*”. It is not without warrant, that our teacher, Moses, peace be upon him, prayed for permission to enter the land 515 times, corresponding to the numerical value of the word, “*VaEtchanan*” – “and I pleaded for grace” (וְאֶתְחַנַּן). He sought to perfect his soul by keeping the 613 mitzvot [many of which only apply in the land of Israel].

If one fulfills all the mitzvot, but has not also fully acquired all the good character traits, in that he must constantly conquer his *Yetzer HaRa* by struggling with it; such a person is in the category of the “Perfect *Tzaddik* who conquers his *Yetzer*”.

However, once all the good character traits become so totally imbedded in a person that they become his nature, so that he performs the 613 mitzvot with joy that comes from love, without any resistance from the *Yetzer HaRa* because his physicality has become totally refined, he is called a “Perfect *Chassid*”. Similarly, King David said³³, “My heart is empty within me”³⁴. Furthermore, he

²⁹ Ecclesiastes 1:15

³⁰ This is because, as explained above, a blemish in a mitzvah is not the complete absence of the mitzvah. Therefore, one who lacks a positive mitzvah altogether is worse off than one who performs it, but in a blemished and imperfect manner. Nonetheless, though his positive mitzvot blemished, nonetheless, since he does not transgress the negative mitzvot, he does not fall into the category of an actual “*Baal Moom*” i.e. a truly blemished person.

³¹ Ecclesiastes 1:15

³² Ecclesiastes 9:10

³³ Psalms 109

³⁴ This means that he rid himself totally of the *Yetzer HaRa* by starving it to death.

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said³⁵, “*HaShem*, my heart was not proud nor were my eyes haughty. Neither did I pursue matters that were too great or wondrous for me. Have I not calmed and stilled my soul like an infant nursing from his mother? My soul is like a nursing infant.” This is to say that he appears as if all his good character traits were already naturally embedded in him when he first came out of his mother’s womb. Therefore, because good character traits and the performance of the mitzvoth had become so embedded in King David’s nature, he called himself a *Chassid*, as in the verse³⁶, “Guard my soul, for I am a *Chassid*.”

Moreover, our rabbis, of blessed memory, said³⁷, “Whosoever desires to become a *Chassid* should fulfill the words of *Pirkei Avot* – which speak regarding the acquisition of good character traits. For example, our sages, of blessed memory, said³⁸, “Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said, “What is the straight path that a person should follow? Everything that is both beautiful to the doer and beautiful to him from others etc.” Akaviah ben Mehalalel said³⁹, “Contemplate three matters and you will never come to the possibility of transgressing. Know from whence you came and where you are going and before whom you are destined to give an accounting. From whence did you come? - From a putrid drop. Where are you going? – To a place of dust, maggots and worms. Before whom are you destined to give an accounting? – Before the King, King of kings, The Holy One, Blessed is He. Likewise, Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh said⁴⁰, “Be very, very humble, for the hope of man is maggots.”

What Akaviah meant when he said, “and you will never come to the possibility of transgressing” is that you will never be subject to the *Yetzer HaRa* which causes a person to transgress, because your *Yetzer HaRa* will cease to be. However, if the *Yetzer HaRa* still exists and one merely restrains himself by force of willpower, he should have stated, “you will not transgress”.

Generally, what comes out of this is that a *Tzaddik* is a person who has a *Yetzer HaRa* but fulfills the 613 mitzvoth by overcoming it. On the other hand, a person who has completely acquired good character traits, as his nature, fulfills the mitzvoth because his *Yetzer HaRa* has been abrogated. Such a person is called a “Perfect *Chassid*”.

In addition, there is a level of *Chassidut* even higher than this, which is the highest of all levels. Such a person is called “Holy”. This level is mentioned often in *Sefer HaTikunim* and in the *Zohar*, especially in *Parashat Kee Teitzei* of *Raaya Mehemna*⁴¹, as follows:

“It is not without warrant that the Holy One, Blessed is He, said, ‘Whosoever occupies himself in the study of Torah, in doing acts of loving-kindness and in praying with the congregation, I regard it as if he redeemed Me and My children from exile amongst the nations of the world’. Now, how many people occupy themselves in the study of Torah, in doing acts of loving-kindness and in praying with the congregation, but nonetheless, the Holy One, Blessed is He, His *Shechinah* and

³⁵ Psalms 131

³⁶ Psalms 86

³⁷ Talmud Baba Kama 30

³⁸ Avot 2:1

³⁹ Avot 3:1

⁴⁰ Avot 4:4

⁴¹ page 281a

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Israel are not redeemed!?! However, the meaning here is that a person should be occupied in the study of Torah solely to unite the *Shechinah* with the Holy One, Blessed is He.

As we have established, “Acts of loving-kindness” here means that a true *Chassid* is one who is kind toward his Master. That is, his intent in doing all the mitzvot is to liberate G-d’s *Shechinah* from exile. By doing so, he acts kindly toward the Holy One, Blessed is He. By acting kindly toward G-d’s *Shechinah* he is acting kindly toward G-d Himself.

When Israel sinned, the Holy One, Blessed is He, wanted to punish them, but their Mother [the *Shechinah*] protected them. Because of this, they descended to evil ways. What did the Holy One, Blessed is He, do? He banished the children of the King, along with the Queen [the *Shechinah*] and He swore that He would not return to His place until the Queen returns to Her place. Thus, whoever repents with the sole intention of liberating the *Shechinah* through Torah and mitzvot; such a person acts kindly toward his Master. It is as if he liberates Him, His *Shechinah* and His children from exile.

Eliyahu and all the heads of the upper academies declared, ‘*Raaya Mehemna* [Moses], you are such a person. You are the son of the King and Queen. Actually, your manner of toil for the Holy One, Blessed is He, is even beyond one who acts kindly toward his Master. Rather, you are like a son who invests his whole being and strength into liberating his father and mother; who is willing to give up his life for their sake. However, a person who is not the son of the King, but who, nonetheless, does a kindness to the King and Queen, such a person is considered to be kindly toward his Master’.

Raaya Mehemna stood up and bowed before the Holy One, Blessed is He. He wept and said, ‘May it be G-d’s will that he regard me as a son. May it be that He consider my actions on behalf of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and His *Shechinah*, like a son who toils on behalf of his father and mother because he loves them more than his own body, soul [*Nefesh*], spirit [*Ruach*] and super-soul [*Neshamah*] and he regards all his possessions as worthless, except for the purpose of serving the will of his Father and Mother and liberating them. Though I realize that [in reality] everything is G-d’s possession [and that I have nothing of my own], nonetheless, the Merciful One desires the heart.’”

Now, the above is as scripture states⁴², “You have caused the Rock that bore you to be removed”. Moreover, it states⁴³, “Give strength to G-d”. This is in accordance to the statement⁴⁴, “Rabbi Yochanan says, ‘Happy is he who toils in Torah and brings satisfaction to the One who formed him.’ – meaning that he does not toil in the Torah in order to receive a reward at all. Rather, his intent is solely to bring satisfaction to the One who formed him, about whom it is written⁴⁵, “In all their suffering, He suffered.” That is, wherever Israel were exiled the *Shechinah* went with them. She is our Mother, about whom it says⁴⁶, “Thus says HaShem, ‘Where is your Mother’s bill of divorce [as proof] that I banished her? To which of my creditors did I sell you? Truly, you were

⁴² Deuteronomy 32:18

⁴³ Psalms 68:35

⁴⁴ Talmud Berachot 17

⁴⁵ Isaiah 63:9

⁴⁶ Isaiah 50:1

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sold through your sins and through your transgressions she was banished with you.” [It is, specifically, the *Shechinah* that] is called “The One Who Formed us”, as in the verse⁴⁷, “You have caused the Rock who bore you to be removed.” [The word for rock here is *Tzoor* (צור), which also means the “source of form”, just as a child is formed in its mother’s womb.] This is why [Rabbi Yochanan said that such a person brings satisfaction “to the One who formed him”, rather than saying “to the Holy One, Blessed is He.”

From this we see that when a *Chassid* is occupied in the study of Torah or in performing the mitzvot or in good character traits; if even a hint of motivation to receive a reward is mixed into it, he is a *Chassid* for himself, as in the verse⁴⁸, “A man of kindness (*Ish Chessed*) brings goodness upon himself.” This is because when he fulfills the mitzvot he brings goodness upon himself. Therefore, he is called a “Man of *Chessed*” rather than a “*Chassid*”, because he does himself the kindness. Only a person whose sole motivation is to do a kindness to his Master can be truly called a “*Chassid*” and a “Holy Man”. This is because he has become purified from all impurities and has sanctified himself in G-d’s holiness, Blessed is He. We find that the term קדושה-*Kedushah* (holiness) means “preparation”, as in the verse⁴⁹, “Prepare⁵⁰ yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat”. This is because such a person makes himself the vehicle for G-d’s holiness, Blessed is He. As mentioned above, rather than caring about his own glory, he only cares about his Master’s glory.

When Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said⁵¹, “Caution brings to zeal, zeal brings to cleanliness, cleanliness brings to separateness, separateness brings to purity, purity brings to holiness, holiness brings to fear of sin, fear of sin brings to humility, humility brings to *Chassidut*, *Chassidut* brings to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit brings to resurrecting the dead” – he was referring to this. This is specifically the perfect *Chassidut* which follows holiness and leads to the Holy Spirit. Because he cleaves to G-d totally he will merit to attain the revelation of the secrets of Torah and to prophesy about the future.

This is as Rabbi Meir said⁵², “Whosoever is occupied in Torah for its name (i.e. for its sake, rather than his own sake) merits many things. Moreover, the whole world is worthwhile because of him. He is called friend, beloved, lover of G-d, lover of the creatures, the delight of G-d and the delight of the creatures. The Torah garbs him in humility and awe. It prepares him to be a *Tzaddik*, a *Chassid*, upright and trustworthy. It distances him from sin and brings him close to merit. He benefits others with counsel and wisdom, understanding and strength, as it says⁵³, “Mine is counsel and wisdom; I am ‘understanding’, strength is mine”. The Torah gives him kingship, governance and penetrating judgment. The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him. He becomes like an overflowing spring and like an ever-flowing river. He becomes modest, long-suffering and forgiving of insults. The Torah magnifies him and elevates him above all things.”

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 32:18

⁴⁸ Proverbs 11:17

⁴⁹ Numbers 11:18

⁵⁰ The word here for “prepare yourselves” is Hitkadshoo-“sanctify yourselves” (התקדשו).

⁵¹ Mishnah, end of Sotah.

⁵² Pirkei Avot 6:1

⁵³ Proverbs 8:14

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Furthermore, when Rabbi Meir said, “For its name”, he meant for the “name” of the Torah, in that the Torah is the name of the Holy One, Blessed is He. This is because the entire Torah is comprised of the names of the Holy One, Blessed is He.