THE SLAGER EDITION

The

PRACTICAL TANYA

PART TWO

GATEWAY TO UNITY AND FAITH

RABBI

SHNEUR ZALMAN of LIADI

ADAPTED BY

CHAIM MILLER

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE SECOND BOOK OF TANYA

The *Tanya* was first published in 1796 as a single volume containing two separate works. The first work, *The Book for Inbetweeners* (*Sefer shel Beinonim*), consisting of fifty-three chapters and an introduction, has been translated and elucidated in volume one of this series.[1] The second section was a shorter treatise of just twelve chapters and a separate introduction, entitled *Gateway to Unity and Faith* (*Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-Ha-Emunah*),[2] which is translated and elucidated here in volume two of *The Practical Tanya*.

While they share a similar literary style, the two books are very different in content. *The Book for Inbetweeners* is written with a strong practical emphasis, to guide the reader in "worshiping G-d with the heart and the mind."[3] *Gateway to Unity and Faith,* by contrast, is abstract and theosophi-

1. Rabbi Chaim Miller, *The Practical Tanya, Part One: The Book for Inbetweeners* (Brooklyn: Kol Menachem, 2016). For biographical information on the *Tanya's* author, a history of its composition and printing, the origin of the *Tanya's* teachings and its methodology, see my "Translator's Introduction" in volume one. I will only add here additional information pertinent to this volume.

2. For bibliographic details see Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine, *Torath Habad: Bibliographies of Habad Hasiduth Books,* volume 1, (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1981, Hebrew), pp. 15-16. The date of composition of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-Ha-Emunah* is unclear. For conflicting views, see Rabbi Nachum Greenwald (ed.) *Ha-Rav* (2015), pp. 361-375.

3. See Miller, *The Practical Tanya, Part One,* p. xxxi. *Sefer shel Beinonim* is by no means an exclusively practical guide, and contains much theosophical material.

   It is interesting that Rabbi Shneur Zalman chose to prioritize practice over theory by placing the more practical *Book for Inbetweeners* as Part One, before the philosophy that underpins it, in Part Two. Apparently, this was a late editorial move, and the author had originally intended to situate the more theoretical *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud* as Part One. See below pp. 1, 5. For a discussion of this decision see Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichos* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 2006), pp. 199-203. For a suggestion as to how the themes from second book form the basis of Chasidic worship, see *On The Essence of Chasidus* (Herschel Greenberg and Susan Handelman trans.), pp. 84-6 See also: *The Practical Tanya, Part One,* p. 233.

cal; through its twelve chapters, the author rarely, if ever, suggests a practical implication in daily worship.[4]

CENTRAL THEMES OF THE SECOND BOOK

The second part of *Tanya* is a sustained discourse on the unity of G-d. While apparently never completed by its author,[5] its twelve chapters represent one of the clearest, most popular and most enduring treatments of the topic from a Kabbalistic/Chasidic point of view.[6]

The belief in Divine unity is expressed in the standard Biblical declaration, *"G-d is one"* (*Deuteronomy* 6:4). The *Talmud* generally understood this as a statement of G-d's singular authority over the world,*"to declare G-d is King above and below, and over the four directions of the earth*"[7] The Sages also described G-d's unity in terms of *exclusivity,* that there are no other gods besides the one G-d.[8]

Gateway to Unity and Faith takes for granted that the reader is familiar with these concepts and does not elaborate upon them. Rather, our author has two different concerns in the discussion of Divine unity.

The first half of the book, up to and including chapter seven, is a radical re-reading of "Divine immanentism," the way in which G-d is deeply present in our world. We learn that the world's separate existence from G-d, as

4. There is some overlap in the themes discussed by both books. The core theme of chapters 1-7 of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-Ha-Emunah* (the voiding of the world's identity in G-d) receives a fairly detailed treatment in chapters 20-22 of *Sefer Shel Beinonim;* and the central argument of chapters 8-12 of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-Ha-Emunah* (the unity of Divine attributes), is articulated a number of times in *Sefer Shel Beinonim* (see *Practical Tanya,* volume one, pp. 46-48; pp. 526-7; 537-9; 623-4). In Part Four of the *Tanya*, (*Igeres Ha-Kodesh* sec. 11), the author offers some suggestions how to implement the central theme of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-Ha-Emunah* in a practical way.

5. See below, p. 171.

6. Important treatments of this topic in the earlier Kabbalistic tradition include: Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai, *Avodas Ha-Kodesh* (Warsaw 1883), *Chelek Ha-Yichud* (p. 8b-25b); comments scattered throughout the works of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, collected in Shmuel Yudaikin (ed.), *Ha-Melech Hakadosh* (Bnei Brak: 2001). See also sources cited from early Kabbalists, below xiv-xvii. For a contemporary analysis, drawing principally from the works of Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, Rabbi Isaac Luria and Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, see Gilad ben Shoshan, *Dorshey Yichudcha* (Jerusalem 2016).

7. *Talmud, Berachos* 13b.

8. *Mechilta, Bachodesh* sec.5. For a collection of sources see Norman Lamm, *The Shema Spirituality and Law in Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), chapters 5-6.

our senses perceive it, is not real, and there is a path to transcend this sensory consciousness through contemplation and meditation. This approach is attributed by the *Tanya* to Rabbi Yisra'el *Ba'al Shem Tov,* upon whose teachings the Chasidic movement was founded.[9]

The second part of *Gateway to Unity and Faith,* from chapters 8-12, builds on a discussion that features extensively in Jewish philosophical and Kabbalistic works from the 12th/13th centuries onwards: the problem of Divine attributes and their unity *within* G-d.[10] The discussion seeks to clarify: How does the notion of multiple Divine attributes, which are often indicated throughout the Biblical and Rabbinic writings, not compromise the unity of G-d?[11]

Placed side by side, the two core sets of teachings in *Gateway to Unity and Faith* complement each other. In chapters 1-7 we learn that *outside G-d there is no (true) existence*. In chapters 8-12 we learn that *inside G-d, everything is unified with Him.* These two concepts *together* clarify how "G-d is one"—inside Him all is one; outside Him there is nothing. The sum total: All that exists, in reality, is the One.

UNITY OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

Since the issue discussed in chapters 8-12, the unity of Divine attributes, has a richer historical precedent, I will discuss it first, seeking to place the *Tanya's* discussion in the context of earlier sources.

9. See below, p. 20. A similar emphasis on Divine immanentism (Panentheism) can be found in fragments of the immense corpus of Rabbi Moses Cordovero (*Ramak, 16th* century), but the concept does not feature prominently. For a collection of these passages see Yudaikin, *Ha-Melech Hakadosh*, sections 58-60.

   There are also some hints to the position in earlier Kabbalistic works. See "The Kabbalah and Pantheism" in *Encyclopedia Judaica,* (Macmillan Reference: 2nd edition, 2007), volume 11, pp. 648-651.

10. Throughout Rabbinic literature, G-d is described as acting through the mediation of Divine attributes, such as the "attribute of judgment" or the "attribute of compassion." See, for example, the *Tanya's* citation below on p. 59.

11. The *Tanya* does not comment on the dispute among the medieval Kabbalists (Rabbi Menachem Recanati and the anonymous author of *Mareches Ha-Elokus*) whether the attributes (in Kabbalistic terminology, *sefiros*) are instruments made by G-d (*kelim*) or are of His essence (*atsmus*). In later Chabad discourses this topic is elaborated upon considerably. For an exhaustive treatment, which brilliantly showcases some of the attention to detail and nuanced thinking of Chabad Chasidus, see Rabbi Yoel Kahn, *Sefer Ha-Arachim Chabad,* volume 4 (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1976), entry *Oros De-Sefiros, Peshitusam ve-Tziuryam*, pp. 56-207.

In his discussion of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, Maimonides writes:

> *"The Second Principle is G-d's unity. Namely, that we are to believe that He who is the cause of everything, is one. He is not like one of a pair, or one of a species, or like one person who is comprised of many parts. And He is not one like a plain item which is one in number but can be divided and subdivided endlessly. Rather He—May He be exalted!—is one with a unity that has no parallel whatsoever. This is the Second Principle of faith, taught by the verse, 'Hear, O Israel! G-d is our G-d. G-d is one'* (*Deuteronomy* 6:4)*."*[12]

If G-d's unity is absolute, how are we to understand the notion of His many attributes?

Maimonides answer is very simple: The attributes do not exist! They are nothing more than metaphorical, literary devices, and should not be taken literally. To do so, in fact, would violate the most basic foundation of monotheism.

Maimonides devotes a long section of his *Guide for the Perplexed* to this issue.[13] He opens with the following argument.

> *"You must know that He, may He be exalted, has in no way and in no mode any essential attribute. Just as it is impossible that He should have a body, it is also impossible that He should possess an essential attribute."*
>
> *"If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many. This resembles what the Christians say: namely, that He is one but also three, and that the three are one"*[14]

Later, Maimonides goes so far as to say:

> *"He who affirms that G-d, may He be exalted, has a positive attribute... has abolished his belief in the existence of G-d without being aware of it."*[15]

12. *Rambam*, *Commentary to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin,* beginning of *Perek Chelek*. See also his *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Foundations of the Torah,* 1:6-7.

13. *Guide for the Perplexed* (part one, chapters 50-60). The best English translation is by Shlomo Pines (Chicago University Press 1974), 2 volumes.

14. *Ibid*. p. 111.

15. *Ibid*. p. 145.

While Maimonides' position may seem extreme, it is clear-cut and logical. As a philosopher, he was not working with any received truth about G-d, and followed a rational argument: If G-d is truly one, He cannot contain multiple components.

In those instances where received tradition appeared to contradict logic, Maimonides often reconciled the two through the approach of *allegorization*. The text which appears to contradict logic, he would argue, is not to be taken literally. That was his way of dealing with the many Scriptural and Rabbinic references to Divine attributes: they are all metaphorical and not literal.

> *"When you encounter a word of the Sages which seems to conflict with reason, you will pause, consider it, and realize that this utterance must be a riddle or a parable. You will sleep on it, trying anxiously to grasp its logic and its expression, so that you may find its genuine intellectual intention*'"[16]

The Sages chose to speak in allegories, Maimonides argues, because:

> *"It is the method of truly great thinkers. Since the words of the Sages all deal with supernatural matters which are ultimate, they must be expressed in riddles and analogies."*[17]

All this seems fairly straightforward and consistent. If G-d is one, He must be simple and non-composite. Therefore He is devoid of any attributes. Any textual indication to the contrary must be read as an allegory.

Maimonides, however, then confuses us by stating an outright exception to the above rule. There *are*, it turns out, some things we can confidently and accurately say of G-d, that He is: *"living, possessing power, possessing knowledge, possessing will."*[18]

After Maimonides' confident and uncompromising dismissal of the notion of Divine attributes, this is a perplexing about-turn. The characterization of G-d "possessing knowledge" is particularly challenging since the process of acquiring knowledge implies change and duality—a thinker is

16. *Commentary to the Mishnah,* ibid.; see *Guide* 1:53.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Guide* ibid. The contradictory nature of Maimonides discussion is noted in Pines' "Translators introduction," p. xcvii. See also: Howard Kreisel, "Moses Maimonides," in Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 200-201.

not the same after learning a new insight. How would we understand that process in relation to the perfect and unchanging G-d?

Maimonides answers that G-d's intellect is simply different to ours.

> *"He is the power to know as well as the knower and the known… those three notions form in Him, may He be exalted, one single notion in which there is no multiplicity."*[19]

While Maimonides offers an elaborate proof of this point, ultimately he confesses that, *"the mouth has no power to express this idea, nor the ear to hear it, nor the heart of man to recognize it properly."*[20]

We will now examine how Maimonides views on this matter were received by the Kabbalistic thinkers that followed him. Since Maimonides' literary activity preceded any public discourse of the Kabbalah, his position became the standard which had to be either accepted or rejected by later authors. As we shall see, the position of the Kabbalah was at odds with Maimonides, resulting in either complete or partial rejection by later Kabbalists.

Rabbi Azriel of Gerona (c. 1160 – c. 1238), discusses the issue of Divine attributes in his *Explanation of the Ten Sefiros*,[21] a short work that aims to clarify the status of the Divine attributes in a series of questions and answers.[22] In his sixth question, the inquirer asks, *"How can we possibly say that He is One and the multiplicity of ten (sefiros) unites within Him?"*

19. *Guide* 1:68. This principle is also codified in his *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Foundations of the Torah* 2:10 (cited below p. 94, 137) and echoes Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. See "Translators Introduction" ibid.

    While such a stance may seem out of character for a rationalist such as Maimonides, he was forced to accept that G-d possesses intellect on the purely logical grounds that anything immaterial must be an intellect, as Aristotle reasons in *De Anima* III.4. For an extensive discussion see Peter Adamson, "Avicenna and his Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection" in Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 97-122.

20. *Laws of Foundations of the Torah* ibid.; cited below p. 121. See *The Practical Tanya* volume 1, p. 56.

21. *Sefiros* (sing. *sefirah*) is the term used by Kabbalists to refer to the Divine attributes.

22. Printed in Meir ibn Gabbai, *Derech Emunah* (Warsaw, 1890), p. 2a-5b. The work is composed as a series of logical and clear questions and answers about the *sefiros*. For a partial English translation see *The Early Kabbalah,* trans. Ronald Kiener, ed. Josef Dan (Mahwah, N.J., 1986), pp. 89-96. For a discussion of this work as a reaction to Maimonides see: Jonathan Dauber, "Competing Approaches to Maimonides in Early Kabbalah" in James T. Robinson (ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New*

Rabbi Azriel responds:

> *"I have already informed you that the One is the foundation of the many (sefiros) and that no new power is introduced in them, other than from Him."*
>
> *"He is more than them. Each one of the (sefiros) is superior to the next one below. The power of one is in the other."*
>
> *"Therefore, the first is the power of them all. (Conversely), the power of them all is nothing other than the first power."*
>
> *"And while the first is the power of them all, there is nothing in the particular (powers) that is not in the (first) general (power)"*
>
> *"A metaphor for this is: a fire, with its flame, sparks, and hues. They are all of one essence, even though they differ from each other and are divided into separate components."*[23]

The Kabbalah is unequivocal that ten Divine attributes *actually exist* and cannot be dismissed as a mere allegory.[24] Rabbi Azriel therefore cannot accept Maimonides' teaching that G-d is a single, non composite substance. The origin ("first power") is certainly one, but that first power has emanated other Divine powers (*sefiros*) which are now integrated within the G-dhead.

Rabbi Azriel argues that this does not contradict the monotheistic faith of Judaism since, *"there is nothing in the particular (powers) that is not in the (first) general (power)."* All the attributes stem from the One and are powered by the One. Therefore the lower *sefiros* are not separate from their source; they simply express it in a more "particular" way.

This is a very different approach from Maimonides who understood Divine unity more literally, as absolute simplicity, *i.e.,* the absence of any composite qualities.

Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 57-88.

23. ...ועל זה יוסיף השואל לשאול היאך נוכל לומר כי הוא אחד והמספר עשר המתאחדים בו... תשובה. כבר הודעתיך כי האחד יסוד הרבים ואין כח מתחדש בהם אלא ממנו והוא יתר מהם וכל אחד מהם יתר על חבירו שלמטה ממנו וכח זה בזה א"כ הראשון הוא כח כולם וכח כולם אינם [אלא] כח ראשון אע"פ שהראשון כח כולם שאין בפרט אלא מה שבכלל והמשל על זה האש והשלהבת והזיקים והגונין שהם עקר אחד (ו)אע"פ שהם משתנים זה מזה בהתחלק חלקיהם (*Explanation of the Ten Sefiros* p. 2b-3a).

24. *Sefer Yetzirah,* which is the source of the term *sefiros*, speaks of *"ten ineffable sefiros... like a flame in a burning coal"* (1:7), suggesting that the *sefiros* are real and present.

Rabbi Azriel does not respond directly to Maimonides' concerns of attributing multiple powers to the one G-d. Since the attributes are deeply integrated, and each expresses the other, Rabbi Azriel sees no real multiplicity. There may be ten different energies, but it is all one "fire."

Rabbi Asher ben David, a Kabbalist operating during the same period as Rabbi Azriel, took a different approach, attempting a synthesis with Maimonides' position, while not accepting it fully.

In his *Sefer Ha-Yichud* ("Book of Unity"), a work written to defend the Kabbalah against its critics,[25] Rabbi Asher ben David frames the problem of Divine attributes in very similar terms to Maimonides.

> *"How could (G-d) be ascribed limited and defined attributes, even if they remain bound with the Cause-of-causes?*
>
> *"For, in truth, every limited thing must have a beginning and an end; every form must have a body. Every limited thing can be displaced and every composite thing can be decomposed…*
>
> *"Heaven forbid for us to speak in such a way of (G-d), the 'Rider of the heavens,' or even of His attributes! For how could it possibly be said that they are limited or bound with Him (in a composite way)?"*
>
> *"Therefore, every intelligent person ought to understand and know that (the description of) each attribute is 'to calm the listening ear,' and it is impossible for Him to contain any limited or defined attribute."*[26]

This passage reads as if it were taken right out of one of Maimonides' works. The notion of attributes, the author argues, would impose limitation and is therefore utterly inappropriate for G-d. "Heaven forbid" to say that G-d's attributes are bound with Him in a composite way, (as was argued by Rabbi Azriel). Rabbi Asher ben David even intimates that the whole discussion of attributes is merely, "to calm the listening ear."

25. *Rabbi Asher ben David: His Complete Works and Studies in his Kabbalistic Thought,* ed. Daniel Abrams (Los Angeles, 1996), [Hebrew]. For the polemical nature of the work, see p. 120.

26. איך יתכן לתת מדות קצובות וחלוטות ואף כי מחוברות בעלת העלות וסבת הסיבות כי אמת כל מוגבל יש לו ראש וסוף וכל צורה יש לו גוף וכל מוגבל נטרד וכל מחובר יפרד.... וחלילה לנו מלדבר כזאת על רוכב ערבות גם מדותיו הנאמרות כי מי יאמר שהם מוגבלות או להיותם בו מחוברות. לכן ראוי לכל משכיל להבין ולדעת שכל מדה לשכך אוזן שומעת ואי אפשר להיות בו מדה קצובה וחלוטה (*ibid*. p. 119).

The phrase "to calm the listening ear" is based on *Mechilta* to Exodus 19:18, cited by the *Tanya* below p. 141 and 147,

But, unlike Maimonides, Rabbi Asher ben David *did* maintain that G-d possesses ten intellectual and emotional attributes (*sefiros*). In a brief passage, *Sefer Ha-Yichud* resolves how this is to be reconciled with the Maimonidean doctrine of Divine simplicity and non-compositeness.

> *"They are called 'attributes,' not from G-d's perspective, but according to their effect on us, from our perspective. For He is one from every angle; He is kindness, He is judgment, He is mercy."*[27]

The differentiation into distinct attributes, we are told, is only "from our perspective." From G-d's perspective, there is just simple, non-composite oneness.

The implication here is that there are two states of consciousness or reality. From our lower, worldly point of view, the ten Divine attributes exist and function as modes of expression. But if we were able to see things from G-d's point of view, we would appreciate that "He is one from every angle," and devoid of any multiplicity implied by the attributes.[28]

Rabbi Asher ben David's position is certainly not identical with Maimonides, who maintained that the attributes (other than intellect) are purely metaphorical. But, *Sefer Ha-Yichud*'s higher state of consciousness does closely resemble Maimonides' description of the Divine intellect (the unity is wondrous and not fathomable by man). This has led one scholar to describe Rabbi Asher ben David as a "non-Maimonidean Maimonidean," meaning to say that he has a similar approach to Maimonides to the problem of Divine attributes, although he reaches different conclusions. (Maimonides would not accept *Sefer Ha-Yichud's* position that at a lower consciousness/reality the attributes do exist). Rabbi Asher ben David reconciles the Kabbalistic view of the attributes with the view of Maimonides to the greatest extent possible.[29]

27. ולפי פעולותיו בנו נקראו מדות לא מצד לעצמו וכי אם מצד שלנו לפי שהוא אחד בכל צד הוא החסד הוא הדין הרחמים (*ibid.*).

28. This is not too dissimilar from Maimonides' position that it is acceptable to speak of Divine attributes, not as qualities within G-d, but in relation to *actions* that G-d performs: *"Every attribute that we predicate of Him is an attribute of action"* (*Guide* 1:58, p. 136).

    Even the phrase *"one from every angle"* is identical to the language used by Maimonides in *Laws of Foundations of the Tora*h 1:10, (cited by the *Tanya* below, p. 94). See also *Sefer Ha-Yichud* p. 82: *"one from every angle, and in all His attributes from every angle, without any separation and without any conjoining"* (אחד בכל צד ובכל מדותיו מכל צד בלא שום פירוד ובלא שום חיבור), which is almost identical to the language used by Maimonides ibid.

29. For all the above see Dauber, "Competing Approaches."

The *Tanya* follows in the "non-Maimonidean Maimonidean" path. In his discussion of Divine Knowledge in chapter 7, Rabbi Shneur Zalman cites Maimonides' treatment almost verbatim.[30] In a similar fashion to Rabbi Asher ben David, the *Tanya* extends the Maimonidean model of Divine intellect to all the *sefiros* described in the Kabbalah: *"Now as for what Rambam of blessed memory, wrote that G-d is totally one with His essence, being and knowledge in an absolute and non-composite unity, the same is true, literally, of all G-d's attributes."*[31]

In Maimonidean fashion, Rabbi Shneur Zalman concedes that the unity of G-d with His many attributes is ultimately something we cannot fathom: *"This unity, how He is one with the attributes which He emanated from Himself, is also not possible to be understood... their unity with Him is a matter of supra-rational faith."*[32] The *Tanya* also draws a distinction, similar to Rabbi Asher Ben David, between G-d's perception of the attributes and ours: *"It is only from the perspective of the creations (celestial or terrestrial), that G-d's attributes/will/wisdom are designated by the specific names which we use."*[33] This is in contrast to the way each attribute exists from G-d's perspective where *"it cannot be given its own name."*[34]

THE BA'AL SHEM TOV'S MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

While the *Tanya* draws on the concepts, terms and sources of the Kabbalah in general, the current work seeks to clarify the approach of a particular teacher who worked within this tradition, Rabbi Yisra'el *Ba'al Shem Tov.*

Let us first examine the core values and teachings which emerged from the mystical consciousness of the *Ba'al Shem Tov,* and then we will turn to the *Tanya's* adaptation of them.[35]

30. Below pp. 92-97.

31. p. 119. See also p. 121.

32. p. 138-9. See also p, 146. Chapters 8-9 offer the reader a prolonged "meditation" to contemplate how G-d's essence transcends His attributes.

33. p. 148. According to the *Tanya*, G-d's names are synonymous with His attributes (p. 71).

34. p. 147.

35. The author of *Tanya,* Rabbi Shneur Zalman was not a direct disciple of the *Ba'al Shem Tov,* whom he never met (in adulthood). All the Chasidic teachings Rabbi Shneur Zalman received came to him through the filter of the Magid of Mezritch. See "Translator's Introduction" to *The Practical Tanya,* volume 1, p. xvii-xxi.

"Consider yourself a child of the higher world," the *Ba'al Shem Tov* instructed his followers, *"for the whole of this world is like a mustard seed when compared with the higher world."*[36]

Our goal is to inhabit a higher consciousness. To do this we must retreat from the sensory experience of this world, transcending its allure and arresting demand for our attention. The tool which facilitates this shift is *human thought*. As the *Ba'al Shem Tov* teaches, *"When you will think of the upper world, you will be in the upper world. Wherever a person's thoughts are, there he is found."*[37] Thought, in particular, has this unique power: *"The reason why thought enables a person to endlessly grasp great ideas is because thought, too, is infinite"*[38]

Since it is abundant and unlimited, thought provides us with a tool to overcome the barriers which distance us from G-d. Thought enables us to be fully immersed in a perception which is beyond the limits of the senses.

What are we to contemplate in order to reach higher consciousness? The *Ba'al Shem Tov's* most often repeated quotes were, "*The whole earth is filled with His glory"*[39] and "*There is no place devoid of Him"*[40] We are to look at the world as saturated with the Divine. G-d is the energy which animates all physical forms. He is present in every object, every act, every word. There is no reality that is separate from G-d.

To illustrate the real possibility of reaching such a consciousness, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* taught the "parable of the barriers."

> *"There was once a very wise king who created a magical illusion of walls, towers and gates. He gave orders that people should come to him through the gates and towers, and instructed that some of his royal treasures be scattered at each gate."*
>
> *"Some people made it to the first gate, and then, (happy with the treasure they had found), returned. Others (made it further, but still returned home before reaching the king)."*

36 *Tzava'as Ha-Ribash* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1998), par. 6.

37 *Ibid.* par. 68.

38 Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhshank, *Noam Elimelech,* (ed. Gedaliah Nigal, Jerusalem 1978), 25a (vol. 1, p. 132).

39 *Psalms* 72:19.

40 *Tikunei Zohar*, *tikun* 57, p. 91b; see, for example, *Magid Devarav Le-Ya'akov* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 2004), p 39a.

> *"But the king's loving son made a great effort to reach his father, and he saw that there was really no barrier separating him from his father, because it was all an illusion."*
>
> *"And the meaning of the parable is obvious.... When a person knows that 'The whole earth is filled with His glory,' and that every motion and thought comes from Him, then... there is no barrier or curtain separating man from G-d."*[41]

Despite its robust appearance, the barrier between us and G-d which the physical world poses, is insubstantial. With the appropriate determination, we can lift our consciousness to penetrate this "illusion" and be united with G-d ("the king").

We do this, not by withdrawing from bodily activity, but by modifying our perception of it. We attune ourselves to the Divine energy which powers every sensory experience. No aspect of reality should be taken at face value; *everything* is a manifestation of G-d. We reach G-d through the world, not around it.

Physical consciousness is "illusory" in that it tends to hide this truth, obscuring the Divine presence which animates the universe.[42] Through the appropriate dedication to contemplative work, physical consciousness can be elevated to mystical consciousness, as our sensory experience becomes filled with the intuitive awareness of the Divine in all things.

Gateway to Unity and Faith is essentially a guide to succeed in this task. It offers us, in rich detail, ideas we can contemplate in order to reach the kind of consciousness the *Ba'al Shem Tov* had exemplified.

To achieve this goal of "deconstructing" physical awareness, the first seven chapters of our work focus on a radical, new way of understanding the creation process. In the traditional paradigm, creation is a process where G-d brings a new, non-Divine substance into being; He makes something that is not Himself. In the Chasidic paradigm, the Creator undergoes a kind of metamorphosis until some of His own energy *becomes* the creation. This is a very significant point and is the key to understanding *Gateway to Unity*

41 Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye, *Ben Poras Yosef,* (Petrikau/Piotrków 1884), p. 70c.

42 Chasidic thought does not maintain that the world is *actually* an illusion, a conclusion which would undermine the notion of Divine commandments performed in this world; only the world's apparent independence from G-d is illusory. For an often-cited proof of this point from a *Talmudic* law, see Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, *Toras Shmuel* 5629 (Brooklyn: Kehos, new edition 1992), pp.161-2.

and Faith. This book is essentially an answer to the question: How, exactly does G-d become the world?[43]

Once we have a convincing explanation of this point, we can begin to transcend the sensory illusion. We become aware that the world is really a Divine energy that has been cloaked or "dressed" as something else. Every creation remains Divine at its core.

Perceiving the world as something G-d has *become* is the secret to attaining the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* mystical ethos, that "*the whole earth is filled with His glory* and "*there is no place devoid of Him.*"[44]

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

How does G-d become the world? The *Tanya* illustrates this point using the symbolism of *Divine language,* which was a significant point of disagreement between Maimonides and the Kabbalists.

Maimonides saw creation as utterly removed from Creator, and argued that there is nothing that the former can adequately say of the latter.[45] As a result, Maimonides perceived language itself as a mere convention, a set of labels for objects and ideas, and saw nothing intrinsically sacred about words themselves, even when articulated in Hebrew.[46]

The Kabbalists differed sharply on this point.[47] The system of *sefiros* teaches us *similarities* between G-d and ourselves. The same ten attributes

43 In the Chasidic paradigm, G-d does not "become" the world in the pantheistic sense that He is nothing more than the world. Rather, He emanates energy ("light") which morphs into the world, through various diminishments. G-d always transcends the world at the same time that he energizes and "becomes" it. See below p. xxv.

44 The Lurianic teaching of *Tzimtum*—that G-d vacated a space in which to create the universe, rendering it devoid of the Divine—is therefore interpreted non-literally in Chasidic thought, as discussed below in the "addendum" to Chapter 7, p. 99*ff.* For a more extended discussion see Rabbi Zvi Einfeld, *Toras Ha-Gra u-Mishnas Ha-Chasidus* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2009) [Hebrew].

For a re-evaluation of the Chabad position see Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Hisva'aduyos* 5743 (Brooklyn: Va'ad Hanachos Lahak, 1984), volume 3, 1599-1601. See also the Rebbe's comments printed in Rabbi Aharon Chitrik (ed.), *Likutei Amarim Tanya, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah, Be-Tziruf Ma'arei Mekomos, Likut Perushim, Shinui Nuscha'os,* (Brooklyn: Kehos 1989), pp. 178-180.

45. *Guide* 1:58-59.

46. ibid. 2:30; 3:8.

47. See Nachmanides' criticism of Maimonides' view of language in his commentary to Exodus 30:13.

found within G-d, the Kabbalah teaches, are also present in our souls, and throughout every of layer the universe. A separation between Creator and creations is, of course, preserved, but it is significantly blurred as all existence is looked upon as the embodiment or "clothing" of Divine energies that lie below the surface. From this perspective, language is both sacred and Divine. Creation occurs through G-d *investing Himself* in the language of Hebrew, the letters acting as a luminous bridge from the Divine to our mundane world.

The letters and words which G-d "utters" in Genesis 1, are now perceived as Divine "packets" of energy. With a little more "repackaging" of this energy, our diverse universe soon emerges.

The *Tanya* returns to this issue repeatedly. What is the nature of Divine speech energy? Is it the same as the energy of ten *sefiros?* If not, what is its relationship with the *sefiros?* Why is the symbolism of speech, in particular, used? How, exactly, are the "packets" of energy in Divine speech rearranged to power the universe? What is the relationship between any given created entity and the Divine speech which powers it? Is Divine speech something of the past or is it "uttered" in the present too?

It is through clarifying the answers to these questions, the author of *Tanya* maintained, that we can truly internalize the notion that G-d has "become" the universe and that "*there is no barrier or curtain separating man from G-d."*

To appreciate the *Tanya's* use of the Divine speech metaphor, it would be helpful to briefly examine how earlier sources treated the subject.

The narrative of Genesis 1, of course, introduces the notion of Divine language causing creation; but from a simple reading of the text, G-d's, "creative statements" read more like instructions for something else to take place later on, rather than the actual medium of creation itself. In fact it is very difficult to find in the *Talmudic/Midrashic* corpus a clear indication that the letters of Divine speech are the "raw material" from which the universe is formed.

One Midrashic tradition teaches that creation was powered by a Divine name,[48] but this is quite different from the *Tanya*'s teaching that the world was formed from Divine language *in general,* from all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

48. *Genesis Rabah* 12:10. The role of Divine names in emanation and creation features extensively in Kabbalah, and dominates the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria and Rabbi Moshe Cordovero.

In another *Midrash* we are taught that G-d created the world after "looking into" the Torah.[49] However, even if we presume that this primordial Torah had already assumed its current, linguistic form, the *Midrash* does not actually imply that Divine language became the *material* of creation. It suggests that G-d consulted the Torah, deriving the form of the universe from it, but the world's substance seems to have emerged from elsewhere.

The only source we have from the *Talmud/Midrash* which at all resembles the *Tanya's* model of creation is the phrase, "*Betzalel knew how to combine the letters through which heaven and earth were created*"[50] This, as *Rashi* points out, means that Betzalel was adept in the techniques described in *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation).[51]

(*Sefer Yetzirah* is a short but very important book of cosmogony and is probably the oldest speculative treatise in Hebrew. The book has greatly influenced Kabbalistic discourse due to the many mystical commentaries written on it.[52] *Sefer Yetzirah's* teachings are traditionally attributed to our patriarch Abraham, though in its current textual form, the book probably emerged some time in late antiquity.[53])

Sefer Yetzirah details the mechanism through which the universe was created by means of *all* twenty-two letters of the alphabet,[54] not just the letters of G-d's name. G-d "carved" these Hebrew letters out of Himself,

49. Ibid. 1:1; *Zohar* 2, 161a

50. *Berachos* 55a; *Zohar* 2, 152a. This is the reason why he was chosen to construct the Tabernacle, G-d's "home" on earth.

51. *Rashi* ibid connects this with the *Talmud's* account that *"Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya would sit every Sabbath eve and engage in the study of Sefer Yetzirah, and a third-born calf would be created for them, and they would eat it"* (*Sanhedrin* 65b). Even if this is not precisely the same text of *Sefer Yetzirah* in our possession, it is likely to have contained similar material.

    The Zohar weaves together the two narratives (the creative power of letters and of the Divine name): *"When the blessed Holy One created the world, He created it by the mystery of letters, and letters revolved and created the world by engravings of the Holy Name"* (*Zohar* 2, 151b). The *Tanya* addresses the role of Divine names in creation below in chapters 4-6.

52. For a list of commentaries on *Sefer Yeztirah* see Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (trans.), *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory and in Practice* (Weiser Books, 1997) p. 325-334.

53. Traditional authors who attribute the text to the Patriarch Abraham include Saadia Gaon, Hai Gaon, Shabbatai Donnelo, Donash ibn Tamim, Judah Halevi and Moshe Cordovero. For references see Kaplan, p. 342, notes 14-15

54. And the ten *sefiros*, a term that the book never actually defines.

and they were combined in a variety of ways to create time, space and all existence.

While *Sefer Yetzirah* makes no explicit connection to G-d forming the universe through spoken word, it is the primary source for the *Tanya's* model of creation, that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are not only a creative force but part of the universe's structure.[55]

The metaphor of speech remains important from a philosophical perspective because it makes clear that not all of G-d becomes the world. The universe is formed from just a few words uttered by G-d, which we interpret to mean: a small amount of energy which emanated from Him. A person can speak almost endlessly, rendering the value and effort invested in any given sentence negligible; and the same is true of the Divine energy which formed the substance of the universe: it is negligible to G-d.

The metaphor of speech therefore teaches us two very important truths about G-d's relationship with the world. The world is made from Divine energy, so G-d is *immanent*. But it was also made from a negligible amount of Divine energy, so He is still *beyond* the universe and in no way limited by it.

CHASIDIC PANENTHEISM

This philosophical position, of simultaneous Divine immanence and transcendence has been described by scholars as *panentheism.* The term is derived from the Greek *pan-en-theos* which means "all-in-God."

Panentheism represents a maturation of our understanding of G-d, that incorporates some advantages of earlier positions, and sheds some of their disadvantages.

The view of G-d which dominated pre-modern and early modern thought was *theism.* This sees G-d as the perfect being (necessarily existent, eternal, changeless, almighty, all-knowing, supremely good), who is the creator of everything distinct from Himself. The salient point here is that G-d is absolutely separate from the world.

A popular trend among subsequent modern thinkers was to reject theism in favor of *pantheism,* the view that G-d is identical with the universe, and no more than it. The appeal of this position is that it leads to a deep

55. *Sefer Yetzirah* is cited by the *Tanya* on pp. 24-25, 164. This model of language also transforms our understanding of prophecy, which is not merely the hearing of an external Divine speech but rather an actual experience of the Divine as "encapsulated" in language. See p. 36.

reverence for the world in which we find ourselves and it helps us to look at G-d as something which can be encountered directly. Pantheism also sat well with the modern skeptical outlook which was uncomfortable with the supernatural theistic G-d and preferred a more naturalistic approach that would be compatible with science.

Most thought systems are reactionary; they develop out of a dissatisfaction with the preceding model. Therefore they usually *transcend and reject:* they deem it necessary to eschew the prior thought system in order to embrace a new one. The disadvantage of this is a proverbial "throwing out the baby with the bathwater." In rejecting the disadvantages of the previous paradigm, they reject all of it, including its virtues.

This was pantheism's relationship to theism. The drive to perceive G-d as immanent and associated with nature, resulted in an unnecessary rejection of the all-powerful G-d.

A more mature development from one paradigm to the next is to *transcend and include*. We progress to a higher way of thinking, but not in a reactionary way, hostile to the paradigm that preceded. On the contrary, we appreciate the virtues of the old paradigm, and try to carry them forward with us into the new.[56]

Chasidic panentheism took this approach. We gain the immanence and sense of G-d-within-nature which was appealing to the adherents of pantheism; but we do not feel compelled to reject the sacred tenets of theism and are able to carry them with us into the new paradigm. In panentheism, G-d is *also* distant, supernatural and utterly transcendent, as in theistic thinking. The world finds itself *in* (the *en* of pan-en-theism) a much greater, transcendent Divine matrix.[57]

With this approach the *Tanya* brings us a new paradigm of elevated mystical consciousness, typified by a radically new immanentism, and yet it does do so within the bounds of traditional Jewish religious belief and practices (*theism*).[58]

56. I have borrowed the model of "transcending and including" from writings of Ken Wilber. For an example see his *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality* (Shambhala, 2001), p. 25.

57. For a discussion of panentheism and the postmodern turn, see David Ray Griffin: *G-d and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 90-91.

58. For more on panentheism see below p. 41. The precise form of panentheism articulated here in the *Tanya* would be best described as *apophatic panentheism,* ("apophatic" meaning "negation"), since the *Tanya* argues that the separate existence of the universe

COMMENTARIES ON THE SECOND BOOK OF TANYA

The second book of *Tanya, Gateway to Unity and Faith* has been the subject of significant commentary and analysis. Some of the commentaries on book one, *Sefer Shel Beinonim,* also discuss book two, so I will recap these first. Since they have already been described in the "Translator's Introduction" to book one, I will mention them just briefly here.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Notes on Tanya.*[59]

Rabbi Aharon Chitrik ed., *Likutei Amarim Tanya, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah, Be-Tziruf Ma'arei Mekomos, Likut Perushim, Shinui Nuscha'os,* (Brooklyn: Kehos 1989), an anthology of comments on the *Tanya* found in the discourses of Chabad Rebbeim. This material is complex, and is, generally speaking, not aimed at clarifying the literal meaning of the text.

Rabbi Alexander Sender Yudasin (d. 1982), *Ha-Lekach Ve-Ha-Libuv* (Kfar Chabad, 1968), the second volume of this series contains commentary on *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah.*

Rabbi Yehoshua Korf (1905-2007), *Likutei Biurim Be-Sefer Ha-Tanya* (Brooklyn, 1968-1980), 2 vols.

Rabbi Yosef Wineberg (1917-2012)*, Shiurim Be-Sefer Ha-Tanya, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1984, Yiddish); Rabbis Levy Wineberg and Shalom B. Wineberg (trans.), *Lessons in Tanya,* volume 3 (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1989, English).

Rabbi Yoel Kahn (b. 1930), (Rabbis Avraham Kirshenbaum and Menachem Mendel Feldman eds.), *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah im biurei Ha-Rav Yoel Kahn* (Jerusalem: Mayanosecha, 2012). This is the best in-depth Hebrew commentary available.[60]

is voided and negated within G-d's presence. This classification was suggested by Elliot Wolfson in his *Open Secret* (Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 91. See below p. 79.

For a panentheistic reading of Maimonides see Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Hadran al Ha-Rambam* 5735 (Brooklyn: Kehos, 1984)

59. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Notes and brief comments to Sefer Shel Beinonim* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 2014). I refer to this work here as "*Notes on Tanya.*"

60 Rabbi Kahn's commentary on *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah* has also been adapted by Rabbi Moshe Link in his series, *Likutei Amarim Tanya im Biurim u-Peninim,* (Israel:

Rabbi Yekusiel Green, *Tanya im Maskil Le-Eitan, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah* (Kfar Chabad, 2002-3, Hebrew) 4 volumes. The section on Rabbi Green's commentary on chapters 1-6 has been translated into English in *Commentary on the Tanya: The Gate of Unity and Faith* (Kfar Chabad, 2006), 2 volumes.

Rabbi Adin Steinsalz *Biur Tanya,* (Jerusalem: Sifrei Milsa, 1997); one volume of this series is devoted to *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah.* English summaries of the commentary are published in Yehuda Hanegbi (ed.) *The Sustaining Utterance: Discourses on Chasidic Thought* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1989).

Rabbi Avraham Alashvili *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah ve-Igeres ha-Teshuvah in Perush Katzar* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 2015), is an expanded version of the author's *Tanya Mevuar* (Nachlas Har Chabad: Nachlas Sefer, 1998), and is the best short treatment of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah.*

Rabbi Moshe Yehudah Kroll et. al, *Sefer Likutei Amarim Tanya* (Bnei Brak: Pe'er Mikdashim, 2014).

In addition to the above, *Gateway to Unity and Faith* has merited the following treatments devoted exclusively to this section of the *Tanya.*

Rabbi Aharon Horowitz of Starosselje (1766-1828), *Sha'arei Ha-Yichud Ve-ha-Emunah* (Shklov 1820; new edition, Jerusalem, 2016), is an extensive elaboration on the themes of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah.* Rabbi Aharon was one of the great exponents of Chabad Chasidism in its second generation. Following the passing of his master, Rabbi Aharon established his own Chasidic court that, in some ways, competed with the court of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's son, Rabbi Dov Ber, and as a result Rabbi Aharon's works have not enjoyed too much popularity in later generations of Chabad.[61]

Machon Ma'or She-be-Torah, 2013-4), but the adaptation of Kirshenbaum and Feldman in this case is by far the superior work.

61. His works have been the topic of interest in the academic community. See Naftali Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago University Press, 1990), chapter 4; Louis Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Works of Aaron of Starosselje* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2006); Rachel Elior, *The Theory of Divinity of Chasidus Chabad, Second Generation* (Jerusalem: Magnes 1982, Hebrew).

Rabbi Zalman Gopin (Rabbi Shimon Gopin ed.), *Shiurim Be-Chasidus, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah* (Brooklyn: Kehos, 2008). Rabbi Gopin's commentary builds on the work of Rabbi Yoel Kahn and is the most in-depth treatment available.

Rabbi Yisrael Nachum Wilhelm, *Yesodos ve-Shorashim be-Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah* (Jerusalem: 2017) is not a running commentary but a series of essays on certain themes of the book.

Rabbi Michael Chanoch Golomb, *Yesodos be-Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah* (Brooklyn: Central Yeshivas Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim, 2008), 2 pamphlets offering an in depth analysis of isolated passages from chapters 1-7.

Yechiel Harari, *Le-Hakir es Ha-Borei* (Israel: Hirbonenut, 2011, Hebrew), adapts the first seven chapters into summaries in modern Hebrew, aimed at a lay audience.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon Teichman, *Toras Ha-Besht Be-rei Chazal* (Israel: Kfar Chabad 2001), summarizes the themes of the book in detail for an educated orthodox audience (in pages 23-204).

Shmuel Yudaikin (ed.), *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud in Perush Amud Aish* (Bnei Brak: Da'as Kedoshim, 2000), collects discourses from the Fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson, which are related to the themes of *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah,* but, in most cases, do not comment directly on it. A similar work, from the same editor, drawing from the works of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, is *Biurim be-Sefer Ha-Tanya*, volume 2 (Bnei Brak: 2003). These works should not be considered commentaries on the *Tanya;* they employ the text of the *Tanya* as a springboard to further readings drawn from the Chabad corpus.[62]

62 *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah* has also drawn the attention of non-orthodox/academic authors. Notable examples include: Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to G-d: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 49-100; Dov Schwartz, *Habad's Thought from Beginning to End* (Israel: Bar Ilan Univeristy Press 2010) [Hebrew], pp. 23-114; Jacob Gotlieb, *Rationalism is Hasidic Attire: Habad's Harmonistic Approach to Maimonides* (Israel: Bar Ilan Univeristy Press 2009) [Hebrew], pp. 47-70; Arthur Green, *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2006), pp. 3-67; Jay Michaelson, *Everything is G-d: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism* (Shambhala, 2009); Sanford Drob, *Kaballah and Postmodernism: A Dialogue* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009) chapter 8.

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