

Introduction by Rabbi Y. H. Greenberg, Buffalo, New York

The importance attributed to the study and teaching of *Chassidus* is well known. The Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, 1698-1760), founder of Chassidism, in an oft-cited letter to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon Kitover, described his mystical experience on Rosh HaShanah 5507 (1746), when his soul ascended to Heaven to commune with the soul of the *Mashiach* (the Messiah). On that occasion, the Baal Shem Tov asked what many of us would probably ask given the same opportunity: When would the *Mashiach* come? The Messiah replied, “When your wellsprings are dispersed abroad,” meaning, as our Rebbes have explained at length in the generations since, that for the *Mashiach* to come, the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings had to become so popular that everyone would be able to know them and become familiar with this G-dly understanding.

In his masterly essay, *On the Essence of Chassidus* (1978) (which I had the privilege of translating and annotating), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, explains the above idea at length. There, the Rebbe makes clear the relationship between the spreading of the teachings of *Chassidus* and the advent of the *Mashiach*, and how *Chassidus* is central to and imperative for the fruition of G-d’s ultimate plan for which the universe was created.

Chassidic teachings were most clearly expounded by the Baal Shem Tov’s spiritual successor, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1813), known as the Alter Rebbe (Old Rabbi). The Alter Rebbe formulated the general *Chassidus* of the Baal Shem Tov into a systematic intellectual philosophy comprehensible to the mind. His *magnum opus*, *Likkutei Amarim*, or *Tanya*, is a concise outline of his philosophy, which has come to be known by the name *Chabad*.

The *Tanya*, precisely because it is extremely concise and perhaps even terse, is considered the “Written Torah” of *Chassidus* because, like the *Chumash*, it contains in seminal form the basis of the entire system. Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s other classics, *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah*—essentially one work but published under separate names for reasons related to government restrictions on Jewish publishing in Russia—are considered the “Oral Torah” of *Chassidus*, for they expand and elaborate these principles of Jewish mysticism.

In *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah* one can find some of the most fundamental principles and concepts in Jewish mysticism—indeed, some of the most profound secrets of the Torah—laid out for the first time in Jewish history in a manner readily comprehensible to anyone. Prior to their elucidation by the Alter Rebbe, these lofty ideas were accessible only to a relative handful of saintly rabbis, whose refined souls and lifelong efforts at spiritual purification had

elevated them to the heavenly plane on which such concepts resided. Rabbi Schneur Zalman's essential achievement was to draw these G-dly ideas "down to earth," to bring them down to the level at which even the average person could read and understand them, and thus attain a greater knowledge, love and fear of G-d.

The *Kabbalah* teaches (*Zohar* I, 117a), "In the sixth century of the sixth millennium, the portals of wisdom above, and the fountains of wisdom below will be opened, and the world will be prepared for the spiritual elevation of the seventh millennium [i.e., the Messianic Era]....This is alluded to in the words (Genesis 7:11), 'In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah...all the fountains of the great depths burst forth.'" *Torah Or* was published in 1837, followed by *Likkutei Torah* in 1848. As the Rebbe points out (see, e.g., *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 15, p. 42), this time period corresponded with the end of "the sixth century of the sixth millennium" (i.e., the Jewish years 5500-5600, or 1740-1840). These two works were great breakthroughs in the process of articulating *Chassidus* in rational and intellectual terms. In fact, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel (known as the *Tzemach Tzedek*, 1789-1866) remarked (see *Toras Shalom*, p. 237) that the predictions of the coming of the *Mashiach* in the year 5608 (1848) alluded to the publication of *Likkutei Torah*.

However, the task of "drawing *Chassidus* down to earth" can hardly be said to have been completed so long as its important texts remain inaccessible to those unable to study them in the original Hebrew. The adaptation of *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah* into clear and friendly English is therefore a monumental step, a major leap forward in the "dispersal of the wellsprings abroad."

As the Rebbe discusses at length (see, e.g., the *sichah* appended to the present volume and *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 36, p. 38), explanation of Torah in other languages was initiated by Moshe Rabbeinu himself. By doing so, the Rebbe explains, Moshe made the Jewish legal classification of *Divrei Torah* ("words of Torah") applicable even to Torah studied in other languages, and rendered books of Torah written in those languages actual "holy books"—to the point where, as with all Torah, it is forbidden to speak them aloud before reciting the blessing over the Torah, and it is forbidden to treat such books with disrespect. Thus, although there is no question that, for those who have the ability to learn in Hebrew, the present volume is not a substitute for the original discourses of the Alter Rebbe, this work is nevertheless an authentic extension of those holy words into English. It is itself Torah; it is, as *Chassidus* is called, the very "words of the Living G-d," now brought even closer to the average person.

One final thought: for some time now, I have been familiar with the author's work from his website, LikuteiTorah.com, where drafts of these discourses are available not only on *Bereishis* (as in this present first volume), but on the other books of the Torah as well. In the quote from the *Zohar*, above, "the portals of wisdom above" is a reference to the secrets of the Torah, and "the

fountains of wisdom below” refers to advances in worldly knowledge like science and technology. Here we see the combination of these two in the service of G-d: not only is *Chassidus* increasingly available in English today, but technology has advanced to the point where anyone with a Palmpilot, smartphone, or similar wireless device can log on to websites like LikuteiTorah.com and access the most profound mysteries of the Torah wherever they happen to be. *Chassidus*, clearly explained, is literally in the air. It blankets the earth.

There can, seemingly, be no greater extension of the wellsprings abroad than that. May it be *HaShem*'s will, therefore, that publication of this volume be the final step in the dispersal of the wellsprings abroad, and that we immediately merit the reward for such dispersal. As the Rebbe explains in *On the Essence of Chassidus*, this is nothing less than the revelation of the Messianic Era, about which, as the Prophet Isaiah writes (Isaiah 11:9), “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea.”

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