A Note Regarding Dayan Simcha Zelig Rieger’s View of Opening a Refrigerator Door on Shabbat

Rabbi Michael J. Broyde

Introduction

Thank you to Rabbi Yaacov Sasson for his comments on footnote 59 of the article “The Use of Electricity on Shabbat and Yom Tov” found in the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, 21:4-47 (Spring 1991) co-written by Rabbi Jachter and myself. It is always nice to have people commenting on articles written more than 25 years ago.[1]

Before delving into the halacha, it is worth clarifying some preliminary facts – in particular, whether refrigerators even had automatic lights during the first half of the 1930s. Some commenters have suggested that such lights were not yet present, or that they were limited to rare and expensive refrigerators. This is not correct. I reproduce below a wide variety of newspaper ads from the early 1930s that show that a range of refrigerator models by many manufacturers at various price points featured automatic interior lights (see attachments here). These include a Frigidaire priced at $157.50, a GE priced at $99.50, a Majestic model with no price, a Frigidaire priced at $119.50, a Leonard priced at $114.75 and many more.[2] And while some of the publications appear targeted to the upper class, many others are clearly meant for
The relevant section of the article is about using refrigerators on Shabbat, and states in part:

A. Refrigerators

The opening of a refrigerator door on Shabbat has been the topic of vigorous debate in past decades. Opening the refrigerator door allows warm air to enter, thus causing a drop in temperature which causes the motor to go on sooner. If one accepts that turning the motor on during Shabbat is prohibited, then it would appear that opening the refrigerator door on Shabbat when the motor is not already running is prohibited. Indeed, many prominent rabbinic decisors have adopted this position. However, many authorities assert that one is permitted to open a refrigerator even when the motor is off.

The footnotes to the above-quoted text observe:

56. Opening the door when the motor is already running is permissible because all that is done then is causing the motor to stay on for a longer
period of time; see also section V.

57. See Har Zvi 1:151; Mishnat Rabbi Aharon, 1:4; Minchat Yitzchak 3:24; and Chelkat Yaakov, 1:54. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Yabia Omer 1:21 and Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, Edut Leyisrael p. 152, recommend that one be stringent in this regard, although they both accept that it is permissible to open a refrigerator even when the motor is off.

58. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach’s argument can be found in his Minchat Shlomo pp. 77-91. Others who are lenient include Rabbi Waldenberg, Tzitz Eliezer 8:12 and 12:92, Rabbi Uziel, Piskei Uziel no. 15. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein reports that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik subscribes to the lenient position in this regard.

59. Almost all authorities accept that it is forbidden to open a refrigerator when the light inside will go on. Notwithstanding one’s lack of intent to turn on the light when opening the refrigerator, this action is forbidden, since the light will inevitably go on (pesik resha).

However, Rabbi S.Z. Rieger (the Dayan of Brisk) rules leniently in this regard (Hapardes 1934, volume three). His lenient ruling is based on two assumptions. First, he states that when the forbidden act has no benefit to the one who performs it, and it is only incidental (psik resha d’lo nicha leh), no prohibition exists. Rabbi Rieger assumes that the lenient ruling of the Aruch (see Aruch defining the word “sever“) is accepted. Second, Rabbi Rieger states that the light in the refrigerator provides no benefit to the one opening the door. His first assumption is disputed by most authorities (see Yabia Omer 1:21,5; Minchat Shlomo p. 87). The
consensus appears not to accept the Aruch’s ruling as normative. The second assertion appears to be entirely incorrect. The light serves as a convenience to locate items in the refrigerator and cannot be described as having no benefit to one who opens the door. Most authorities, however, maintain that it is acceptable to ask a Gentile to open the door of the refrigerator even if the light will go on: see Iggerot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:68; and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah pp. 100-101. So too, it would appear to these authors that one could allow a fellow Jew to open the door when he does not know the light will go on, as that is only in the category of mitasek (unknowing) and thus permitted; see e.g., Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Shiurim Lezeicher Avi Mori, p.30 n. 58; but see Teshuvot R. Akiva Eiger #9.

(bold emphasis added)

Rabbi Sasson’s Criticism

Rabbi Sasson is commenting on the words in the second paragraph of footnote 59 (the bold sentences above). He proposes that the article is wrong in its understanding of the view of Dayan Simcha Zelig Rieger who did not, he claims, permit the turning on of the light in the refrigerator, but only the motor. Rabbi Sasson states:

Lo hayu dvarim me-olam. Rav Simcha Zelig did not permit opening a refrigerator when the light inside will go on. Rav Simcha Zelig wrote (Hapardes 1934, num. 3, page 6) that it is permitted to open the refrigerator since the intention is to remove an item, “v’aiino mechavein lehadlik et ha-elektri.” The authors misinterpreted this statement to be a reference to an electric light in the
refrigerator.
And his argument is:
However, it is clear from a simple reading of the articles to which Rav Simcha Zelig was responding that the topic under discussion at the time was triggering the motor by opening the door and allowing warm air to enter; lights and light bulbs are not mentioned at all. In the first of those articles (Hapardes 1931, num. 2, page 3), the language of “hadlaka” is used in reference to the refrigerator motor, and Rav Simcha Zelig’s language of “lehadlik et ha-elektri” appears to parallel the language used there.
As an additional proof, he notes:
In the second of those articles (Hapardes 1931, num. 3 page 6), the act of triggering the motor is referred to as “havara” and “havara b’zerem ha-chashmali”, and Rav Simcha Zelig used a similar nomenclature, “lehadlik et ha-elektri” to refer to triggering the motor.
Based on this Rabbi Sasson concludes:
Rav Simcha Zelig’s position was that it is permitted to open a refrigerator when the motor will then go on, as triggering the motor is classified as a psik resha d’lo ichpat lei, which is equivalent to lo nicha lei. Rav Simcha Zelig never addressed opening a refrigerator when the light will go on.
(footnotes omitted)
A Review of the Teshuva and a Defense of the Second Paragraph of Footnote Fifty Nine

The relevant paragraph of the teshuva by Dayan Rieger reads simply:

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And in the matter of the artificial [electric] icebox it appears that since when one opens the door of the box to get something from there and does not intend to ignite (light) the electricity it is a psik resha that he does not care about, even to light in way that is a psik resha.

The rest of the teshuva by Dayan Rieger presents his view of the halacha in cases in which there is a psik resha d’lo ichpat lei, which is that this is a dispute between Tosaphot and the Aruch. Furthermore, Rav Chaim M’brisk maintains that the Rambam is in agreement with the Aruch, and the custom is like the Aruch; therefore, it is completely proper to rely on the Aruch in cases in which there is a psik resha d’lo nicha lei.[6]

A careful reader of the first sentence, and indeed of the entire teshuva, can sense that there is some ambiguity here about the electrical object referred to, since Dayan Rieger does not specify the source or consequence of igniting the electricity. I am inclined to reinforce the original explanation that it was the light based on the following three observations.

First, the many articles in Hapardes do not necessarily use as interchangeable the terms zerem chashmali or chut chashmali or chut elektriki with the term hidlik et haelektrik – which seems to have a different connotation. Particularly in the Yiddish spoken culture of that time, the
“electric” seems to have meant “lights” and not electricity or motor. Rabbi Sasson’s claim that the phrase “havara b’zerem ha-chashmali” and Rav Simcha Zelig phrase “lehadlik et ha-elektri” are identical is, I think, not indubitably correct. Elekriki, according to my colleague at Emory, Professor Nick Block, more likely means the light than anything else in 1930s Yiddish. This is particularly true in my opinion, when added to the word “le’hadlik,” a word of ignition.

Second, and much more importantly, the halachic analysis presented by Dayan Rieger addresses a direct action, while everyone else who discusses the motor speaks about an indirect action. This is very important to grasp. The light in the refrigerator immediately turns on when the door is opened, as the opening of the door also opens the switch that controls the incandescent light. Not so the motor, which is controlled by a thermostat; opening the door usually leads to an increase of air temperature inside the refrigerator, which eventually directs the motor to go on.

As the editor of Hapardes notes (in volume 5), there are persuasive grounds to permit the opening of the refrigerator door based on two distinct principles of enormous halachic importance that are deeply grounded in factual reality: davar she’eno mitkaven and grama; it is based on this that many poskim to this day permit a refrigerator door to be opened, as our article from 25 years ago notes. Simply put, many times when the refrigerator is opened, the motor does not go on at all, since for the motor to go on immediately, the refrigerator must be at just a certain
temperature such that the warm air immediately causes the thermostat to turn the motor on. Sometimes the motor is already on, sometimes the motor is not hastened, and sometimes there is a very long time delay. This reality gives rise to important halachic grounds discussed in our article and quoted by many poskim, including many before and after the great Dayan Rieger.

But Dayan Rieger makes no mention of this: he does not discuss grama, or davar she’eno mitkaven or any of these other factors that apply to indirect action. Instead, he assumes that when the refrigerator door is opened, the electrical object under discussion is always ignited, and it does so immediately and directly, thus causing a melacha. This is the formulation of pesik resha, which inexorably causes melacha each and every time — in contrast to grama, davar she’eno mitkaven or any other principles of indirect or delayed or uncertain causation.

Dayan Rieger is not speaking about acts caused indirectly, uncertainly or after a delay – he is speaking about an action that directly and immediately occurs and is fully and directly caused by my opening the door. As he writes in his first paragraph:

"ובדבר התבת קרח מלאכותי נראה כיון דכשפותח את דלת התיבה הוא כדי לקבל משם איזו דבר ואינו מ ymin להדליק את העלעקטרי הוי פסיק רישיה דלא איכפת ליה אפילו להדליק אם הוא באופן שהוא פסיק רישיה."

No intermediary (like a thermostat) and no indirect or delayed causation is present in the case Dayan Rieger is discussing — the prohibited action is caused by the door opening. The act of opening the door turns on the elektri according to Dayan Rieger. His halachic insight is that even when such causation is direct,
it is of no value to the opener of the door, who just wants to take some food out; it is a psik resha of no benefit. Factually, this is not an accurate description of the motor at all, which frequently does not turn on immediately, but it does correctly describe the mechanism of the refrigerator light. Dayan Rieger implicitly concedes that if one were to open the door with the intent to turn on the light (or motor), that would be assur min ha-torah, since he sees no indirect causation in the process, something that most poskim think is not at all true for the motor. Professor Sara Reguer noted by email to me that “my grandfather conferred with scientists and specialists in electricity before giving his response,” and given this fact it is extremely unlikely that he missed such a basic point that anyone who repeatedly opened and closed a refrigerator would have observed. This was simply not true about refrigerator motors as the original question notes explicitly in Hapardes Volume 2. This technological assumption about the refrigerator is true about the light, which always turns on when the door is opened, but not about the motor. I would also note two additional factors for consideration. First, the other substantive halachic logic employed by Dayan Rieger which analogizes elektriki to sparks seems to me to be a closer analogy to a light than to a motor which is hardly fire at all; sparks, like incandescent lights, are fire according to halacha. Secondly, there has been a regular subset of poskim (as shown by Rabbi Abadi’s most recent teshuva, Ohr
Yitzchak 2:166) who adopt the exact analysis and view of Dayan Rieger and view the light as *lo ichpat* since one does not want it and a light is on already. If Dayan Rieger is speaking about the motor, he has gotten the facts terribly wrong as well as provided a halachic *chiddush* that is totally unneeded, whereas if he is speaking about the light, he has adopted a halachic view that has some company, and gotten the facts correct. Furthermore, his halachic analysis is needed to reach the desired result.

Given these factors – the linguistic ambiguity, the presence of logic that is discussing a *psik resha* and not a *grama* or a *davar she’eno mitkaven*, the analogy to sparks and the parallel teshuva by Rabbi Abadi reaching the same conclusion and employing the same logic for lights – I am still inclined to think (as the original article notes) that this teshuva is speaking about the light and not the motor. On the other hand, there is a good and natural impulse to read halachic literature conservatively and to press for interpretations that align *gedolim* with one other and not leave outliers with halachic novelty. Furthermore, I do recognize that many halachic authorities who have cited Dayan Rieger’s teshuva have quoted it in the context of the motor and not the light, as Rabbi Sasson claims is the proper reading. But, I think these citations are less than dispositive for the following important reason: Those who quote Dayan Rieger’s view as something to consider about the motor note that his analysis is halachically wrong (see for example, both Yabia Omer OC 1:21
paragraphs 7-11 are explicitly directly at explaining why Dayan Riegler’s halachic explanation for motors is wrong] and Minchat Shlomo 1:10 [section 7 calls this logic [43x478] who both note deep problems with Dayan Reigler’s analysis as applied to the motor).[9] Poskim generally spend less time and ink explicating the views of authorities whom they believe to have reached inapt or incorrect conclusions of fact or law compared with those whom they cite in whole or in part to bolster their own analysis. Simply put, the precedential value of how one posek cites another when they centrally disagree is not as great. Thus, when given two choices of how to understand what an eminent posek wrote, I prefer an approach that is both halachically plausible and factually correct rather than one what is halachically unneeded and factually wrong.[10]

Conclusion

In sum, while there is some ambiguity in Dayan Rieger’s teshuva, the recent (ca. 1930) introduction of lights in refrigerators, the fact that Dayan Rieger makes no mention of grama, davar she’eno mitkaven or any of the other classical grounds for discussing the motor, and from the fact that he uses the Yiddish word for light, all incline me to think that he is speaking about the light, although I understand the ambiguity. Let me add, lehalacha, as the original article notes, that I think such a view is not halachically normative in that we do not follow the view of the Aruch as a general matter. Having said all that, in hindsight I
would have worded footnote 59 a bit differently to reflect more of the nuance that is present in this post (and may in fact do so if the article is ever republished).

Postscript

Allow me to note my general agreement with Rabbi Sasson’s conclusion when he writes:

I would add two endnotes — when surveying Halachot with significant practical implications, such as in the realm of Hilchot Shabbat, it is an author’s responsibility to ensure that all sources are cited accurately, lest a reader rely on an incorrect citation with the result of Chillul Shabbat. Secondly, when confronted with a Halachic position of a Gadol B’Yisrael that seems to be entirely erroneous, the possibility that the Gadol’s position is being misunderstood must be explored.

This is true even when the citation is in a footnote and even when it is noted as not normative. More generally, readers of blog posts about nuanced textual disputes should, whenever they can, go back to the original sources and check for themselves. (The editors of the Seforim Blog should be commended for helping their contributors include images of such texts for the benefit of the readership.)

Let me also add a final endnote of my own: While vigorous debate has always been a fundamental part of Torah study within the confines of the beit midrash, and while online forums have brought intelligent Torah conversations to a much wider group of participants (and observers), the tone
and tenor of these conversations often take on the harsh, acerbic voice of the internet at large. I generally find that the sharper the rhetorical tone, the less value the substance has. Orthodox Judaism today would benefit greatly from deep, substantive conversations on a whole host of halachic and hashkafic matters that are conducted in a respectful manner. We certainly could use more light and less heat.


[2] In 2015 dollars, these range from about $1400 to $2200; see CPI Inflation Calculator here. They are not inexpensive, but seem to be attainable for middle-class consumers.


[4] Indeed, the number of household refrigerators increased dramatically during the Depression years, as increased longevity and reduced spoilage helped stretch family food budgets.

[5] Nor are these refrigerators more expensive than any other as the ads show. The reason for this is obvious, upon reflection. The compressor was the expensive, high-tech component at that time, whereas the spring switch light connected to the door had been invented many years earlier and was very low cost.

[6] The final section addresses ice making and it is not under discussion in this article.

[7] For more on this, see the concluding chapter of my ‘Innovation in Jewish Law: A Case Study
of Chiddush in Havineinu” (Urim Publications 2010).
[8] Added to this is the voice of Dayan Reiger’s granddaughter, Professor Sara Reuger, who tells me that she is certain that this teshuva is referring to the thermostat or motor and not the light. However, I was not persuaded by her recollection since she had no direct conversation with her grandfather about this and is only recalling conversations with her own father and (as explained above) this view places Dayan Reiger’s teshuva in a weak halachic light analytically (as well as other reasons).
[9] For another example of this, see Haparades volume 11:2 at page 8-10.
[10] Another possibility was suggested to me by Professor Miriam Udel of Emory who noted that the Hebrew term “התبوت קרח מלאכותי” corresponds well to the Yiddish term ayz-kastn which is really a very early refrigerator (ice chest). Ice chests were pre-modern refrigerators that had no electricity at all, but were cooled by ice; see here and here. By 1925 companies were selling add-on kits to these ice chests that contained an external motor which cooled a coil insert. See the article in the Washington Post, August 9, 1925 entitled “Modern Electric Plant Displaces Need For Ice Man: Its Refrigeration” at page F7. See also Display Ad 18 — No Title Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Jun 14, 1925 (attached) which notes simply “If you have a good refrigerator in your home, you can convert it into a Frigidaire easily and inexpensively. The Frigidaire “frost coil” is placed in the ice compartment; the simple mechanism is the basement or other convenient location. Small copper tubes connect the frost coil and compressor and a connection is made to your electric wiring.” This converted ice box, to the best of my knowledge, had no mechanism related to the door being open at all.
Dayan Reiger could not have been speaking about this, as he is addressing a door mechanism and not a hot-air-entering-the-refrigerator problem.

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**Evening Prayer Revisited**

*Evening Prayer Revisited*

Chaim Sunitsky

There is a dispute in *Tamud Bavli* (*Brachot* 4b) as to whether one should say *Shma* with *Brachot* before or after *Shmone Esre* during the evening prayer. The opinion of R. Yohanan is that *Shma* is said first while the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi is that *Shmone Esre* is said before the *Shma*. Moreover, while R. Yohanan holds that *Shma* is followed by *Shmone Esre* immediately, according to R. Yehoshua ben Levi *Shmone Esre* can be recited separately and *Shma* with its blessings does not have to follow immediately after. The practice of all Jews today is to follow R. Yochanan.

Most *Rishonim*[1] and the *Shulchan Aruch* rule like R. Yohanan and indeed this seems to be the opinion of the Babylonian Talmud. This is called being “Somech Geula leTefila”, meaning the blessing of Gaal Yisrael (Who Redeemed Israel) is recited immediately before the *Shmone Esre*. At first sight it seems that the last blessing after evening *Shma* (*Hashkivenu*...
– let us go to sleep) only makes sense according to R. Yehoshua ben Levi. Indeed, Talmud Bavli (ibid) asks how the blessing of Hashkivenu would not be considered an interruption between Geula and Tefila according to R. Yochanan? It answers that it is considered “long Geula” (or continuation of the Geula). Our thesis is that in Palestine in Talmudic times, the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi was the more accepted shita and moreover that they used to say Hashkivenu as the last blessing before going to sleep (as we say Hamapil[2]).

Rashi (Brachot 2a) brings in the name of Talmud Yerushlami: Why do we say Shma in the synagogue in the evening, even though this is done before[3] the earliest time to fulfil the obligation? It answers that we do this because we say

While it seems from Rashi that they said Shma with the blessings before Shmone Esre[4], the Tosafot (ibid) in the name of R. Tam[5] says that they used to simply recite Shma without blessings before Maariv, just like we say Ashre before Mincha. Later on they would say Shma with the blessings following R. Yehoshua ben Levi. Indeed the sugia further in the same Yerushalmi (1:1) supports this interpretation entirely[6]:

מילתיה אמרה lig. ישן אמר דברים אחר אמת ויציב מילתיה דרבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר כן רבי שמואל בר נחמני כד הוה נחית לערובה הוה מקבל רבי יעקב גרוסה והוה רבי זעירא מטמר ביני קופייא משמענא היך הוה קרי שמע והוה קרי וחזר וקרי עד דהו’ שקע מיניה גו שינתיה ומאי טעמא רבי אחא ור’ תחליפא חמוי בשם רבי שמואל בר נחמן רגזו ואל תחטאו אמרו בלבבכם
It discusses if it’s permitted to speak after one already said the blessings after evening Shma[7]. It mentions R. Yakov Grosa used to not speak after he said Shma with blessings, and then mentions R. Yehoshua ben Levi[8] who used to still say various psalms afterwards[9]. From the Yerushalmi it seems that most people used to say Shmone Esre during the daytime, and later ate their meal[10] and laid down to sleep[11] saying the evening Shma with blessings.[12]

We can also explain from here how the shita of Bet Shamai regarding saying evening Shma while laying down could have developed. It is unlikely that Shma in the evening was pronounced in normal position and then in some generation Bet Shamai suddenly ruled that one has to literally lie down to say it. A more likely scenario is that it was the norm to recite the evening Shma while lying down and the dispute of Bet Hillel and Bet Shamai arose as to whether this is the requirement or is merely done for convenience so as to not interrupt and fall asleep immediately.

Another obscure shita we can now explain is in Zohar Hadash (Bereshit 17d in Mosad HaRav Kook edition). It mentions that the idea of praying with “redness of the sun” applies to Maariv, not Mincha[13] like our Talmud (Brachot 29b). In light of the shita of R. Yeshoshua ben Levi we can understand this. It seems the ideal time for Maariv
according to this was around sundown. However one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of Shma at this time. It is also interesting that in Tosefta (Brachot, 3:2) the opinion of R. Yossi is mentioned that Maariv should be recited at the time of “Neilat Shearim”.

In conclusion, it seems that there were some communities where the norm was to recite Shmone Esre of the evening prayer before Shma with blessings, and these communities apparently recited the last blessing of Shma (Hashkivenu) in place of our Hamapil.

[1] I am currently unaware of any Rishon that paskened not like R. Yohanan, however the Meiri writes that “majority” pasken like R. Yohanan, so there must have been some who did not.

[2] Indeed Yerushlami does not mention the blessing of Hamapil, but it seems they used to say Hashkiveinu as the last Bracha and fall asleep afterwards. It’s interesting that our siddurim added Hashkivenu without Hatima at the Seder of going to sleep even though in reality for us this brocha is not necessary since we have Hamapil.

[3] It was normal to say the evening Shmone Esre in Eretz Yisrael during day time, before stars come out (possibly because of the danger to go outside at night as their synagogues were outside of the city).


[5] See also Rosh (Brachot 1:1) and Korban Netaniel (10).


It’s possible that Rashi did not see this whole sugia in Yerushlami but only
saw a quote of it in a Gaonic source. In general regarding use of Yerushalmi in Rashi, see Saul Lieberman’s letter to Solomon Zeitlin published at the end of Saul Lieberman and the Orthodox by R. Marc Shapiro, see also the discussion from Homat Yerushalaim printed in the beginning of standard Yerushalmi editions.

[7] The Yerushalmi calls the blessing after “Emet Veyatziv” as this was their Nusach, but our Nusach in the evening is “Emet Veemuna”.

[8] Of course R. Yehoshua ben Levi followed his own shita and said Shma with Brachot after Shmone Esre. Note that the same sugia before in Yerushalmi also discusses whether it’s permitted to speak after “Emet Veyatziv”. It continues with והא תני אין אומר דברים אחד אמת ויציב פתר לה באמת ויציב של 

[9] This is mentioned in our Talmud (Shevuot 16b) as well.

[10] And the prohibition of eating before Shma did not apply since they read Shma already even though they did not fulfill their obligation or because they were eating before the time of Shma arrived.

[11] For those who did not immediately go to sleep, the Yerushalmi (ibid) indeed mentions that they should recite Shma (with blessings) before midnight.

[12] Interestingly even at later times when many communities had a custom to say the evening prayer early, some people recited Shma without Brachot. R. Hai Gaon (Tshuvot Hagaonim Hahadashot – Emanuel, 93; this tshuva is brought in Rosh 1:1 and Bet Yosef 235) suggests that the one who is found in such a congregation should only say Shma without blessings and pray Shmone Esre
together with them, but later one say Shma with Brachot.

[13] Indeed the Talmud there states that in Palestine they cursed the one who prays Mincha so close to sundown as it may lead to missing the time. Obviously this does not apply to Maariv for which there is plenty of time afterwards.

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Shadal on Exodus by Daniel A. Klein (Kodesh Press) – New Book Announcement

Order on [Amazon](https://amazon.com) or on the [Kodesh Press](https://kodeshpress.com) website.

Very rarely in the history of *parshanut* has one author written both a translation of the entire Torah text and a complete Torah commentary in Hebrew. Most likely, no one has accomplished this feat since Shadal (Samuel David Luzzatto, 1800-1865). Now, the second volume of his *Pentateuco* is available in a new, all-English version—*Shadal on Exodus: Samuel David Luzzatto’s Interpretation of the Book of Shemot*, translated and edited by Daniel A. Klein (New York: Kodesh Press, 2015). This edition is a double translation, rendering into clear and modern English both Shadal’s Italian version of the text and his Hebrew *perush*. This marks the first appearance of Shadal’s complete work on *Shemot* in 143 years, since its original publication in Padua, 1872.
A great-grandnephew of Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (author of Mesillat Yesharim), Shadal served for more than 35 years as a professor of Bible, Hebrew, and Jewish history and religion at the Collegio Rabbinico of Padua, where he mentored many of the future leaders of Italian Jewry. Shadal was a superb linguist, writer, and religious thinker, devoting his talents above all to parshanut. Although he was a devout believer in the divinity, unity, and antiquity of the Torah, Shadal approached the text in a remarkably open spirit of inquiry, drawing upon a wide variety of sources, ancient and contemporary, Jewish and non-Jewish, and focusing on the “plain” meaning (peshat) as he saw it. A passionate scholar with a torrid “Italian” temperament, Shadal laced his commentary with occasional touches of wit and sarcasm, and many of his interpretations may strike even the modern reader as fresh and novel.
Among his most interesting comments on the Book of Exodus are the following:

- Even when performing miracles, God prefers to adhere to the ways of nature in part. Thus, the plagues of Egypt resembled in some respect phenomena that were natural in Egypt, some occurring in one year and some occurring in another, except that in the year in question, all of them came clustered together, and each one contained a novel aspect that was not found in nature (see at Ex. 7:20). Similarly, the splitting of the Red Sea was a miraculous event mixed with natural elements, not entirely unlike a phenomenon that saved the Dutch fleet during a seventeenth-century war with England (see at Ex. 14:21). In so holding, Shadal rejected on the one hand the extreme attempts by some moderns to naturalize the Exodus miracles, and on the other hand any fanciful embellishments by more traditional scholars that “unnecessarily overloaded the Torah’s account with signs and wonders.”

- In the phrase *tehomot yekhasyumu* (“the depths covered them”) in the Song of the Sea, the grammatically strange and unique word *yekhasyumu* is best explained as a use of onomatopoeia—that is, the employment of an imitative and naturally suggestive word for rhetorical effect—because the double “u” sound arouses an impression of darkness and depth and thus portrays to the listener’s ear the enemy’s sinking into the deep waters (see at Ex. 15:5). In fact, Shadal’s treatment of the entire Song is the pearl of his Exodus *perush*. In the course of his commentary on chapter 15, he includes, among other things, (1) a discussion of why ancient Hebrew poetry contains traces of Aramaic, (2) a thorough explanation of the poetic device of parallelism, (3) an essay on the derivation and semantics of the word *kodesh* (“holiness”), and for good measure, (4) a stinging diatribe against
the philosophy of Spinoza.

- One of the purposes behind the collection of the silver half-shekel for the Tabernacle was to diminish the people’s fear of the “evil eye” (see at Ex. 30:12). They were being counted, and the people believed that a census might arouse the evil eye unless they paid a “ransom” to help build the sanctuary. God did not wish to abolish the folk belief in the evil eye altogether, since it had the beneficial effect of keeping the people from putting too much trust in their own might or wealth. In fact, said Shadal, what the common people attributed to the evil eye—and modern scholars just as misguidedly dismissed as coincidence—was a Divinely decreed phenomenon of nature, that “pride goeth before the fall.”

Shadal on Exodus is equipped with explanatory notes, a source index, a subject and author index, and a list identifying the many and varied authorities that Shadal cited.

EDITED 12.17.2015 here are a few sample pages:
Shevot

an idiom for paying attention, as in, "Which hearken not to the voice of
counselors" (Ps. 58:6). "And hearken to the voice of them that contend with
me" (Jer. 18:19).

The meaning of this verse is, "If they do not believe you after the first
miracle—which would happen only because they would not observe it
carefully to investigate it properly, for in their anxiety and hard labor their
minds would not be clear enough to examine what they saw, and thus they
would fail to recognize the greatness and truth of the wonder—then they will
believe you after the second miracle." It was not that the two miracles would
prove the prophet's agency better than one, for the first had no fault or flaw
and was as trustworthy as a hundred witnesses. Rather, those who might not
carefully observe the first on account of their distress would observe the
second, and as a result they would believe. The phrase "if they do not believe
you..." means that those who do not believe the first will believe the second.

they will believe (va-lo'yunen la-kol, lit., "they will believe the voice of"). The
seemingly superfluous word  la-kol was added after "they will believe" in
order to make the phrase parallel to the one preceding, va-lo yishma'nu la-kol.

the second (ha-ebaron, lit., "the last"). The miracle after, not literally "the
last" [see next v.]; a similar use of the term ebaron is, "Leah and her children
behind (aharonim) [and Rachel and Joseph last (aharonim)]" (Gen. 33:2).

4.9. "If, then, they do not believe even these two miracles, and they do
not listen to you, you will take of the water of the Nile, and you will pour
it on the dry ground; and that water which you will have taken from the
Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

4.16. And Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord! I am not a speaker,
neither was I one in the past, nor (did I become one) after You spoke to
Your servant; but I am slow of mouth and slow of tongue."

I am not a speaker, etc. (lo etz doverim enehu, lit., "I am not a man of
words"). Rashbam long ago revolted against the theory that Moses was a
stammerer, and said, "This idea is not contained in the words of the Tanurim
and Amoraim, and one need not mind the irreligious books." He maintained
that Moses was not fluent in the Egyptian language, but this, too, is truly
unlikely, since Moses had been raised in Egypt and at the king's house.

But Eliahu upheld the view that Moses was a stammerer, and he interpreted
the phrase "and I will teach you that which you must speak" [below, v. 12] to

73
Shadal on Exodus

mean that God would put in his mouth words that did not contain the letters that were difficult for him. If so, let San Ezra show us which letters are not found in the passages that Moses spoke to the entire people—a fact from the fact that it is blasphemous to say that God would choose as His messenger, who would give the Torah to His people, a man who would have to choose the words that he could pronounce.

The truth is that Moses was not a “man of words”—i.e., a powerful orator who could speak at length before any audience and not cringe before anyone—in conformance with what is written of him, “While Moses himself is the meekest man there is on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3) (and thus did not defend himself against the complaint of Miriam and Aaron). This is somewhat similar to Jeremiah’s statement, “Behold, I cannot speak” (Jer. 1:6), except that Jeremiah was able to add, “For I am a child” but Moses was old. It was even more difficult for him, after having spent so many years as a shepherd, to go before a great king and argue with him.

God answered him, “Who is it who made a mouth for man, or who is it who makes one mute,” etc. (verse 1)—that is, is it not in My power to remove your slowness of tongue?—“Now then, go, and I will be with you, and I will put words in your mouth until you are a man of words to the proper extent and you do not lack the power of speech.” This change, however, was not to come upon Moses suddenly in that instant, but little by little, for it was not to be a physical change but a spiritual one in the powers of mind and strength of heart. For this reason, Moses did not feel any change in himself at that time, and so he said once more, “Charge anyone [else] whom You want to change” (v. 13). We have further proof of his lack of self-confidence at that time from God’s statement to him, “Go, return to Egypt, for all those who sought [to take possession of] your person are dead” (v. 19).

If Moses had been a stammerer, inevitably God would either have cured him or not cured him, if He had cured him, Moses would have felt the change in himself immediately and would not have refused again, while if He had not cured him, the statement, “Who is it who made a mouth for man” would

33. Such an expedient was in fact resorted to by Lionel Logue, speech therapist to King George VI. To circumvent the King’s stuttering problem, Logue would study the text of a royal address, “spotting any words that might trip the King up, such as those that begin with a hard ‘k’ or ‘g’ sound or perhaps with repeated consonants, and wherever possible, replace them with something else.” (Mark Logue and Peter Conradi, The King’s Speech: How One Man Saved the British Monarchy, [New York: Sterling, 2010], p. 7.) However, Shadal is no doubt correct in suggesting that a search of all of Moses’ recorded public statements would fail to reveal the consistent omission of any particular phonemes.

74
have been sheer mockery, Heaven forbid. Some interpret the statement to mean, “I know that You are a stammerer, for I purposely made you a stammerer, but nevertheless I am commanding you to go.” But who could not see that this is not an answer that would have persuaded Moses to go, for Moses would have said to himself, “If He wants me to go on His mission, let Him first cure my defect.”

In addition, the subsequent statement, “There is indeed Aaron your brother, the Levite” (Exod 4:14), clearly appears to mean, “I know that he would not refuse like you, but would take it upon himself to speak.” If the meaning had been, “Is not Aaron a stammerer like you, and yet he will speak,” the statement would have concluded with the words *he yodshbe* (“he will speak”) without the word *yadsh be* (“I know”).

4:11. And the Lord said to him, “Who is it who made a mouth for man, or who is it who makes one mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?

*Who is it who made a mouth for man.* “Who is it who gave man his powers and his wholeness, and who makes a man disabled from the start of his formation and lacking one of his powers? Who is it that gave man a mouth, and who makes some of them mute from birth, or deaf from birth or in nino so as to remain mute, as a result of not hearing others speak? Similarly, who made one seeing or blind, that is, who gave man the power of sight, and who made this power diminished? Is it not I, the Lord?”

The mute and the deaf are both mentioned here in connection with the question. “Who is it who made a mouth for man,” for they both lack the power of speech. Afterwards the sighted and the blind are mentioned, that is, the power of sight and the lack of that power. Let the lying lips be dumb which say that the phrase ought to read “or lame” [gmond] [instead of *pikke*’eh, “seeing”] or blind,” for the intent of the verse is not merely to attribute disabilities to God but rather to say that it is God Who grants powers and wholeness, and from Whom also proceed disabilities and lack of powers, and hence all the beginning of the statement He says, “Who is it who made a mouth for man?”

4:12. “Now then, go; and I will be with you, and I will teach you that which you must speak.”

4:13. And he said, “Please, Lord, change anyone (else) whom You want to change.”
Shadal on Exodus

vocalized nūbā'ō [as in the pu'ol, or passive intensive conjugation] rather than nūbā'ē [as in the active pu'ēl conjugation], to indicate that they did not fall into the waters on their own or by accident, but were thrust in by force.

15:5. “The depths covered them; they sank in the abyss; like stone.

The depths (vilowma). Deep waters.

covered them (yēḥāywm). [In the syllable ya.] the final ha of the root hāsh (“to cover”) becomes a yod, as in natayy [from natаг] and yirbyyem [from rvag]. Because of this added yod, the dagēsh that normally would have appeared in the [preceding letter] samekh was dropped, as in the word shālmōmm (Ez. 11:13; see my comment thereon). The normal form of the word would have been yēḥāywm, or with the added yod, yēḥāyym, but the final -a was added by way of poetic usage, as in the words tōrūmē and nīē tome (below, v. 17), although [according to that model] it should have been vocalized with a holēm [i.e., yēḥāywm].

Hebrew grammarians (including R. Elijah [Levi] in his Sepher ha-Harkoṿ [Rome, 1518], as well as Rashbaa, say that the [letter mem in yēḥāywm] is vocalized with a shānḳ in order to match the pronunciation of the preceding yod which is also vocalized with a shānḳ. This explanation seems worthless to me, for we find examples of such vowel-matching only with respect to two words, as in:

- hāko ve-hago (Ez. 59:13);
- nīṭāmē laḳha ve-nīmā ṣāḳa (2 Sam. 3:25);
- nīṭāmē ṣaw nīmō aw (Ezek. 43:11).

However, we find no such thing with respect to the vowels in a single word; to the contrary, we find that the Hebrew language prefers variation in such cases. Thus, we say yahpotz and not yahpotz, yahšev and not ya‘šev, ahul/ aḥal and not aḥul/aḥal, yokhal and not ya‘okhal, ye‘elah and not ya‘elah.

In vain do these grammarians cite support from words such as vi-yīrēh, she‘līv, and she‘elēh, as Ibn Ezra comment on vi-yīrēh (Deut. 4:11): “Since the yod was deprived of a vowel following the hōnek of

19. Shadal’s comment observes that shālmōmm is a variant of xīlīmōmm, and that the introduction of the letter mem took away the dagēsh that would otherwise have appeared in the lamed.
The book may be ordered now on Amazon or on the Kodesh Press website.

Toil of the Mind and Heart: A
Meditation in Memory of Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine

Toil of the Mind and Heart: A Meditation in Memory of Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine

by

Eli Rubin

Rabbi Eli Rubin is a writer and editor at Chabad.org, and works to further intercommunal and interdisciplinary study of Chassidism. Many of his articles can be viewed online here. This is his first essay at the Seforim blog.

A new anthology mines the oral teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi for new insight into the historical development of his leadership and the crystallization of his ideology, and also charts the impact of Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin and Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk on the emergence of Chabad as a distinct Chassidic movement. “HaRav: On the Tanya, Chabad thought, the path, leadership and disciples of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi” ed. Rabbi Nochum Grunwald, Hebrew, 798 pp. (Mechon HaRav, 2015) (link).

In memory of the acclaimed Chabad scholar Rabbi Yehushua Mondshine who passed away one year ago, on the final day of Chanukah, 5775.[1]

Introduction

– From Liozna to Liadi

The past few years have seen many new publications shedding light on the life and times of Rabbi
Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad school of Chassidism, and making his teachings more accessible.[2] For the most part, however, the historical and the ideological domains have been treated in relative isolation from one another. Moreover, while R. Schneur Zalman’s magnum opus, the Tanya, has been a frequent object of study, less work has been done on the vast corpus of his oral teachings, transcriptions of which now fill some thirty published volumes.[3]

HaRav: On the Tanya, Chabad thought, the path, leadership and disciples of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, appeared just a few months ago as a rather belated marker of the 200th year since Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s passing on the 24th of Tevet 5772 (January 1813),[4] and comprises a collection of articles, teachings and commentary, on the topics referred to in the volume’s subtitle. Rabbi Nochum Grunwald, the volume’s editor and primary contributor, is a leading Chabad thinker and historian, and the editor of the Heichal HaBesht journal. Other contributors include Chabad scholars Rabbi DovBer Levine, Rabbi Eliyahu Matusof, Rabbi Aharon Chitrik, and le-havdil bein chaim le-chaim, the late Rabbi Yehushua Mondshine.

Of the volume’s six sections, it is the third—Shaar Ha-Maamarim, focusing on R. Schneur Zalman’s oral teachings—that is the most substantial, in terms of both quantity and content. In a loose series of articles, the volume’s editor, Rabbi Nochum Grunwald, takes several important steps towards the integration of the ideological content of these discourses.
within a broader historiographical context, giving particular attention to
Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s relationship with Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk.
An article by Rabbi Shalom DovBer Levine—in the volume’s penultimate
section—traces the impact of
Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin on Chabad’s emergence as a distinct
school of
Chassidism, adding additional dimension to the developing picture.[5]
Grunwald’s overarching
thesis pivots on Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s move from Liozna (90km
North-West of
Smolensk) to Liadi (Lyady, 70km South-West of Smolensk),
shortly after being
released from his second internment in Petersburg in the
summer of 1801.[6] The
precise reasons for this move remain unclear, but the
distinction between the
Liozna and Liadi periods—also referred to as the periods
“before Petersburg”
and “after Petersburg”—appears in a variety of Chabad
historiographic
traditions to mark an array of changes in his role as a leader
and teacher of
Chassidism. As one source has it, “when he dwelt in Liozna the
quality of emotion toward G-d radiated from him,
whereas afterwards, when he dwelt in Liadi, it was not so;
there the quality of intellect radiated from him.”[7]
Grunwald’s discussion
of how this shift developed is complicated by Levine’s
account. And though
their parallel theses are both presented in the present
volume, it remains the
task of the reader to integrate them.

Transcendence
and Interiority
In a 1903 talk
delivered by Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn (Rashab), the
fifth rebbe of
Chabad-Lubavitch, he distinguished between the type of teaching that entirely *transcends* [מקיף] the students/listeners, but overwhelms, encompasses and transforms them instantaneously, and between the type of teaching that is directed to the *interiority* [פנימיות] of the students/listeners, to permeate their intellects, so that they can then transform themselves from within:

Before he returned from Petersburg the second time his Chassidic teaching would burn the world, for it was of transcendent quality... there was no one who would hear Chassidic teachings from him and remain in their previous condition. But after Petersburg it changed and it wasn’t so, because then... the Chassidic teachings began to be of internal quality... Through the accusations that were in Petersburg the interiority specifically was revealed...

Before this... the Chassidic teachings were specifically of transcendent quality... which causes very intense inspiration, and such examples are also found in *Likutei Torah*... But the ultimate intention is the quality of interiority specifically, for with the coming of Moshiach specifically the interiority will be revealed... and the quality and advantage of interiority is achieved specifically through great and extremely immense toil... with service of the mind and the heart...[8]

Here and elsewhere it is clear that the Rashab didn’t simply rely on Chassidic traditions alone, but drew philological insight from his own knowledge of the relevant texts.[9] It is this philological project that Grunwald seeks to expand, and following the Rashab, he rejects the suggestion of other scholars that the
teachings of these two periods are primarily distinguished by their relative length.[10] Instead he describes six features that, in his opinion, characterize the teachings of the earlier period. It appears that the most central of these features is the almost exclusive focus on the practical challenge of serving G-d at the highest possible level. Theoretical issues are only mentioned and engaged with to the degree that they are directly relevant to the specifics of divine worship.[11]

Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s preoccupation with this challenge is clear from *Tanya*, which began circulating in the early 1790s and was published in 1796. This work, as described in the author’s introduction, is comprised of "answers to many questions, asked in search of counsel… in the service of G-d."[12] As Grunwald notes, the Tanya is a systematic presentation of the solutions and advice that its author provided in private audiences (*yechidut*) on an individualized and more immediate basis. “During this period,” Grunwald concludes, “the distinction between private audiences and the oral delivery of Torah was almost non-existent.”[13]

The purpose of the oral teachings during the earlier period, accordingly, was to directly inspire religious transformation by providing practical direction and immediately applicable solutions. They therefore do not digress into involved discussion of complex theoretical questions and abstractions,[14] nor do they linger on the stylistic niceties of orderly progression.[15] Instead they drive directly to the point, emphasizing it with sharp language[16] and vivid
imagery,[17] and uncompromisingly demanding utter submission to the exclusive reality of divine being (“ain od milvado”). In the earlier period, Grunwald notes, such Chassidic exhortations “are not complicated by a mantle of explanation or justification, but are [delivered] straight… penetrating the gut.”[18]

In the later period, conversely, Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s oral teachings were often devoted to the theoretical explanation of a particular concept or issue, or to several related concepts. Here we find detailed and orderly expositions on the nature and purpose of the Torah and the mitzvot generally, or of particular mitzvot and festivals, as well as on complex Kabbalistic ideas. “In the extant discourses [from before Petersburg],” Grunwald writes, “it is almost impossible to find a delivery that is dedicated entirely to the clarification of an aspect of the cosmic chain of being [seder hishtalshalut], in order for it to be understood in depth and in conceptualized form. As a case in point, after Petersburg Rabbi Schneur Zalman delivered a discourse on the topic of ohr ain sof and tzimtzum nearly every year… but before Petersburg we don’t find anything like this at all.”[19]

Grunwald acknowledges that this distinction is a generalization, that in each period one can find anomalies, and that there is far more to say about the development of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s oral teachings with the passing years. But the distinct and rather rapid change in emphasis is clear enough to demand a
broader historiographical explanation. The question is sharpened when we consider that the second part of Tanya, Shaar Ha-yichud Ve-he-emunah, which was circulated and published during the earlier period, does provide a systematic and thorough account of the unity and singularity of divine being, vis-à-vis the created realms. The orderly conceptualization and contemplation of esoteric concepts was already then a fundamental element of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s approach to the service of G-d. [20] (So fundamental, in fact, that—as discussed elsewhere in the present volume—Rabbi Schneur Zalman originally intended Shaar Ha-Yichud to be the first section of Tanya, rather than the second. [21]) Why then do we not find more of this kind of material in the oral teachings dating from this era?

The Making of a Tzaddik [22]

Conventionally, the onset of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s leadership—and the establishment of Chabad as a distinct school of Chassidic thought and practice—is dated to 1783, when he settled in Liozna, or to 1786, when Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk wrote from the Holy Land prevailing upon him “to draw close the hearts of the faithful of Israel, to teach them understanding and knowledge of G-d.” [23] Grunwald, however, argues that throughout the Liozna period Rabbi Schneur Zalman continued to see himself—not as an independent leader of a Chassidic community, nor as a tzaddik in his own right, but rather—as a personal mentor and guide acting as the appointed
representative of the Chassidic leaders in the Holy Land.[24]
One source that Grunwald would have done well to cite to strengthen and crystalize this nuanced conception of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s role is a 1786 letter by Rabbi Avraham responding to the complaint of the Chassidic community in the region of Lithuania and Belarus—which, along with Rabbi Menachem Mendel, he continued to lead from afar—that they were unable to hear Torah directly from the mouths of the Tzaddikim in the Holy Land. Rabbi Avraham instructs them to focus less on their desire to hear new wisdom, and more on the practicalities of action:

If only you would place action before hearing, and our sages already said (Avot, Chapter 3) “Anyone whose wisdom is more than their actions etc. [their wisdom will not hold.]” And in my opinion it is tried and tested that too much wisdom is detrimental to action… Commit your eyes and heart to one thing of Chassidic teachings that you have heard, and strengthen it with nails that it should be imprinted and dug into your heart… and due to this you climb and ascend… to exile materiality bit by bit…

And as for action you have a master, our honored friend and beloved, the beloved of G-d, precious light… our teacher the rabbi, Shneur Zalman… filled with the glory of G-d, with spirit, wisdom, understanding and knowledge to show you the path…[25]

Strikingly, Rabbi Avraham encouraged the Chassidic community to turn to Rabbi Schneur Zalman only
as a master of “action,” as one who can guide them along the methodological “path” of practical service, but not as an independent tzaddik from whom to “hear” new wisdom.[26] More than a decade later Rabbi Avraham’s opinion “that too much wisdom is detrimental to action” would become a cause of contention between him and Rabbi Schneur Zalman.[27] Yet, even following the passing of Rabbi Menachem Mendel in 1788, and even as the crowds seeking Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s counsel turned Liozna into a bustling Chassidic court, the latter continued to restrict his instruction to the practicalities of actual service of G-d. In his introduction to Tanya too, in the same breath that he emphasizes that its content consists entirely of “answers to many questions, asked in search of advice... in the service of G-d” he continues to emphasize his deference and debt to “our masters in the Holy Land.”[28] But not all Chassidim in the region were so eager to accept Rabbi Schneur Zalman as their mentor. A strong contingent looked for guidance and inspiration to his contemporary, Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin, who emphasized ecstatic faith and the centrality of the tzaddik, and was famed as a seer and wonderworker. As documented by Levine—following the earlier work of Rabbi Avraham Abish Shor–Karliner loyalists persistently lobbied the tzaddikim in the Holy Land to appoint Rabbi Shlomo in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s place, or to allow them to travel to visit him in Ludmir, Galitzia, where he settled circa 1786. Such agitation was consistently rebuffed, but never entirely quelled.[29] Rabbi
Shlomo was shot by marauding cossacks in 1792, and the Karlin legacy was continued by Rabbi Asher of Stolin and Rabbi Mordechai of Lechevitch.[30] Despite the relative peace that reigned during this period, Rabbi Avraham continued to exhort the Chassidim to seek counsel from Rabbi Schneur Zalman alone into the early months of 1797, when he had apparently not yet seen the recently published Tanya.[31]

The period from 1788 to 1797 is described by Grunwald as an intermediate one, in which Rabbi Schneur Zalman came to ever increasing prominence and also crystallized the distinctly systematic approach to the service of G-d presented and published in Tanya. Neither by restricting himself to topics directly related to practical worship, nor by describing himself as a “compiler” (melaket) of a “collection of sayings”—rather than as the author of an independent work of Chassidic thought and instruction—was he able to mask the originality of his approach. No reader of the Tanya can evade the primacy given to intellectual contemplation, to toil of the mind, as the fundamental basis of heartfelt service and actual practice, a primacy that is further underscored by the discussion of divine unity in Shaar Ha-yichud Ve-ha-emunah.[32]

As Levine explains, the crystallization of this systematic methodology to the point of publication was seized by Karliner loyalists as an opportunity to press their case before Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk, eliciting his sharp critique of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s path in a series of letters penned between the latter part of 1797
and the summer of 1798.[33] Paradoxically, it was precisely this critique that led to Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s emergence as a Chassidic leader of a different stripe, and ultimately as an autonomous tzaddik in the fullest sense of the term. In Grunwald’s words:

Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s two great confrontations, with Rabbi Avraham on the doctrine of Chabad, and with the Lithuanian mitnagdim on the doctrine of Chassidism, transpired and erupted at approximately the same time. The period from 1798 [when he was first arrested and taken to Petersburg on mitnagdic charges of treason] until after the second imprisonment marked the birth pangs that brought forth the shining era of the Chabad doctrine and Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s leadership… It is due to this [difficult] period that we merited the doctrine of Chabad in all its greatness and depth.[34]

According to Grunwald the distinction between the Liozna and Liadi periods is far greater than has previously been understood. Much has been made of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s unwillingness to deal with the worldly concerns (mili de’alma) of his constituents, and of the rules he imposed to regulate the throngs who traveled to Liozna to meet with him and receive spiritual guidance in person (takonat liozna).[35] But according to Grunwald the documentary record attests that these kinds of restrictions were only imposed during the Liozna period, when Rabbi Schneur Zalman insisted that his role was only that of a spiritual guide.[36] In the Liadi period, when he no longer acted as a
personal mentor
and took on the full responsibility of autonomous leadership,
he no longer
protested against those who came to him with their worldly
concerns, and
imposed no regulations on those who wished to come and hear
Torah from his
lips.[37]
The focus of Rabbi
Schneur Zalman’s leadership now shifted from the personal to
the public, from
direct inspiration and methodological instruction, to the
coherent formulation,
exploration and dissemination of a theoretical edifice
accessible enough to be
studied, assimilated and acted upon by every aspiring Chassid.
It was only after
Petersburg that Rabbi Schneur Zalman began delivering oral
teachings each and
every week, and often several times in a single week. It was
in the later
period too that new emphasis was placed on the systematic
transcription of
these teachings not only by Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s brother,
Rabbi Yehudah Leib,
but also by the former’s sons Rabbi DovBer (the Mitteler
Rebbe) and Rabbi
Moshe, his grandson Rabbi Menachem Mendel (the Tzemach
Tzdeek), as well as by
noted Chassidim such as Rabbi Pinchas Reitzes. These teachings
were not simply
instructive or inspirational, each was a new window onto the
transcendent
philosophy of Chabad, to be carefully preserved, reviewed,
studied, assimilated
and applied, transforming the Chassid from within.[38]
Cerebral
Love
According to Grunwald,
the theoretical emphasis that emerged in the Liadi period also
constituted a
substantial shift in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s approach to prayer, and, more broadly, to the service of G-d with love and awe.[39] In Tanya, Chapter 16, Rabbi Schneur Zalman distinguishes between love that is revealed openly in one’s heart, “so that one’s heart burns like flaming fire, and desires with heartfelt fervour, longing and yearning,” and love “that is hidden in the mind and concealed in the heart.” Both are the product of mindful contemplation of the greatness of G-d’s infinitude. Both provide the impetus to bind oneself to G-d through the Torah and its commandments. But the former bursts forth as an emotive outpouring of love (hitgalut ha-lev), while the latter remains “enclosed in the mind and the concealment of the heart” (mesuteret be-mocho ve’taalumat libo). Rabbi Schneur Zalman establishes it as “a fundamental rule in the service of ordinary people (beinonim)” that though open love is apparently more ideal, mere mindful animation is “also” acceptable impetus for Torah study and mitzvah performance “since it is this understanding in one’s mind and the concealment of one’s heart that brings you to toil in them.” In a later teaching Rabbi Schneur Zalman specifically refers to this passage in Tanya, but argues that a more cerebral experience of love is actually preferable, rather than merely acceptable. For one thing, emotional experience is fleeting while cerebral animation achieves a permanently effective transformation. For another, an open experience of ecstatic love may itself be so spiritually satisfying that one will no longer seek to bind oneself to G-d through actual Torah study and practice of the commandments.[40]
Though the text in question bears no date, Grunwald devotes an entire article to a survey of several similar examples, each of which date from the period following the second imprisonment specifically. Yet Grunwald fails to note a fundamental distinction between these two texts: Tanya speaks of an individual whose “intellect and spirit of understanding is insufficient” and consequently suffers from emotional indifference. But the oral teaching he cites clearly addresses an individual who possesses the intellectual and spiritual capacity to experience open love, but is enjoined to use the intellect to exercise emotional discipline in order to cultivate a more pervading experience of submissive subjugation (bitul) before G-d.[41]

Contrary to Grunwald’s suggestion, this later text does not present a complete reversal of priorities when compared to Tanya.[42] It instead introduces a loftier form of service, through which toil of the heart is further refined rather than abandoned. As Grunwald explains elsewhere, emotional enthusiasm—even when directed towards G-d—is essentially a form of self-expression and self-affirmation, whereas the Chabad ideal is to internalize the recognition that nothing exists other than G-d.[43] Ecstatic experience can accordingly be counterproductive, and as already mentioned, may well remain limited to the realm of emotion. A loftier—and more thoroughly transformative—mode of worship uses the mind to exercise emotional self-discipline, subduing self-expression and subjecting the entirety of one’s
being to the mindful apprehension of divinity and the practical service of G-d. [44]
The distinctions are perhaps not as sharp as Grunwald portrays them, but the shift is certainly a real one. In the earlier period Rabbi Schneur Zalman instructed his disciples to use their intellectual capacities to inspire emotional expression and exuberance (as reflected in Tanya). In the later period he taught them to cultivate a more contained and constant form of internal animation, channeling mindful enthusiasm directly into the practical service of G-d–Torah study and mitzvah performance—rather than allowing it to overflow into the heart unbridled. [45]

A related point, addressed in a different article, is the debate between Rabbi Schneur Zalman and Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk on the complex relationship between faith and knowledge. In 1805 the former delivered a series of discourses on the topic, elicited by the latter’s renewed critique, and Grunwald’s rich treatment of the sources further underscores the centrality of such theoretical issues in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s later teachings. [46]

As we have seen, the transition between the Liozna and Liadi periods was rooted in the parting of ways that transpired between Rabbi Schneur Zalman and Rabbi Avraham. One result of this transition—Grunwald further argues—was the subsequent parting of ways between Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s oldest son, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, and his foremost disciple, Rabbi Aharon of Strashelye. As has been most extensively
described by Naftali Loewenthal, these two personalities clashed precisely over the question of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s approach to emotional enthusiasm, particularly during prayer.[47] Rabbi Aharon first came to Liozna at the age of 17, shortly after Rabbi Schneur Zalman settled there in 1783. Rabbi DovBer would have been less than ten years old at the time, and he did not begin transcribing his father’s teachings until 1798—that is, at the very end of the Liozna period. Grunwald accordingly asserts that the eras in which they each matured as students of Rabbi Schneur Zalman can be broadly distinguished along the lines of their later disagreement.[48] While this claim rings true, it is complicated by the facts that Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi DovBer were close associates for many years, and that by 1798 the later would already have been 25 years old.[49]

Grunwald enriches his analysis of the relevant transcripts with several recollections and comments of the Tzemach Tzedek.[50] One example is a note in the latter’s own hand, appended to a teaching in which Rabbi Schneur Zalman categorically rejects any emotionalism, preferring the cerebral approach “even if it is only superficial and somatic… with very brief contemplation, and coldness…” The Tzemach Tzedek recalls that this extreme formulation was directed towards a particular individual whose enthusiastic conduct needed to be reined in, and was not necessarily intended to be applied more generally. More applicable is the general thrust of this teaching, which gives ultimate primacy
to “the quality and substance of internal subjugation (bitul) in the mind and heart, in the aspect of prostration... without any detectable movement.”[51]

Another source records that seeing the Tzemach Tzedek’s note, one of his grandsons asked him if the specific individual referred to was Rabbi Aharon of Strashelye: “And his grandfather answered him... G-d forbid! I was not thinking of him, for he experienced G-dly enthusiasm...”[52]

Grunwald relates this remark to a distinction drawn by Rabbi Schneur Zalman himself between the worship of an ordinary individual and that of a tzaddik, who is not susceptible to the pitfalls of ecstatic love and emotional enthusiasm. Regarding the difference between Rabbi DovBer and Rabbi Aharon, he refers to the vivid image provided by the Rebbe Rashab: Like a burning stick of hay. When it is dry it burns with a flame. It burns through and nothing remains. [Such was the service of Rabbi Aharon] But when it contains moisture its substance is entirely burnt through, and yet [its form] remains standing. Touch it. It is nothing. Yet the form stands. Such was the Mitteler Rebbe [Rabbi DovBer]. This is the love of glowing flame, an all consuming fire, yet the form stands.[53]

Of Angels and Other Things
Notable both for its topical interest and for the broader significance of its central point is an
analysis of the treatment of angels in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s teachings by Rabbi Aharon Chitrik. “Chabad teachings... present comprehensive and deep explanations, extending to very specific details of the nature of angels: their creation, their character, their station, their role, their subjugation to G-d, prayer and song, their constant service, their free-will or lack thereof, etc. etc.” But these discussions, Chitrik convincingly demonstrates, do not reflect any intrinsic interest in angels at all. Angels are only the focus of such intense discussion as a counterpoint from which we can achieve a better understanding of the unique nature of the Jewish soul, and its mission on this physical earth.[54] In an 1804 discourse explicating this point, Rabbi Schneur Zalman extends this principle to all Kabbalistic discussions of the cosmic chain of supernal realms: Ultimately all such theoretical investigations are but a stepping stone to achieve direct knowledge of G-d’s essence.[55] Two additional articles are devoted to the Tzemach Tzedek’s intensive engagement with his grandfather’s discourses, firstly from a theoretical perspective,[56] and secondly as editor and publisher of Torah Ohr and Likutei Torah.[57] In Grunwald’s apt and illuminating formulation, the Tzemach Tzedek is to Rabbi Schneur Zalman as the Tosafists are to the Talmud Bavli: Surveying Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s different treatments of the same or related topics, the Tzemach Tzedek seeks to compare them and combine them, ironing out apparent
conflicts through innovative explanation, differentiation, and harmonization,
and also to contextualize the former’s teachings within the broader Jewish
tradition of philosophical and mystical thought.[58]
For all the rich depth,
analysis and insight of Grunwald’s scholarship, his work in
this volume tends
to suffer from a certain looseness of form. Moving from text
to context, from
observation and analysis to elaboration and speculation, order
and balance is
sometimes lost; some points are too often repeated, others
scattered in
footnotes or hardly developed at all. His article on the
Midrashic notion of “a
dwelling in the lower realms,” as developed in Rabbi Schneur
Zalman’s thought,
abounds with relevant sources, thoughtful comparisons and
observations. Yet it
runs to nearly sixty pages and reads more like a voluminous
draft than a
tightly argued thesis.[59]
At the outset, Grunwald
takes stock of the various perspectives within the Jewish
tradition from which
the purpose of the Torah and its commandments can be
viewed—the Halachic, the
philosophic and the kabbalistic—before proceeding to the
unique contribution of
Chassidism. Self admittedly his analysis is too sweeping. But
it could also be
better grounded in the relevant texts.[60] His conclusion that
the Chassidic
object of “a dwelling in the lower realms” is tied to the
revelation of divine
unity is in particular need of justification and elaboration.
His initial
discussion of the philosophical purpose of the Torah and its
commandments
similarly highlighted divine unity, a point that will further
confuse many readers. The Rebbe Rashab explicitly discussed the Chassidic renewal of this midrashic conception in terms of its relationship with philosophical and kabbalistic approaches, and Grunwald is as familiar as anyone with the relevant sources. But it is not till footnote 99 that the first discourse of Yom Tov Shel Rosh Hashanah 5666 (“Samach Vav”) makes an appearance.[61]

Given the immensity of Grunwald’s project, as editor of this volume and its chief contributor, he is to be applauded for his successful effort to share such a great wealth of information and insight. Nevertheless, in several instances Grunwald’s arguments would have been substantively enhanced if he had the time and resources to ensure that they were composed and constructed with more orderliness and concision. In fact, the more one delves into his work, the more one can envision all that remains to be written. Many a brief note, expanded into a fully developed thesis, could be the topic of an independent article.[62]

Moving beyond the direct transcripts of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s oral teachings, the volume includes a substantial collection of short sayings and teachings attributed to R. Schneur Zalman in a wide variety of secondary sources.[63] A second collection draws exclusively on the oeuvre of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1880-1950), whose journals, letters and private talks preserve a rich reservoir of anecdotes and historiographical data passed down from the
first generation of Chabad.[64] Both of these rich collections were compiled by Grunwald and benefit greatly from his critical notes, comments and citations. Also included in this volume is a newly edited edition of the seminal commentary to the Tanya by one of the principal educators in the original Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim, Lubavitch–Rabbi Shmuel Groinem Estherman (d. 1921).[65] Even in its as yet incomplete form this is a substantial text, which bears study and review in its own right. Another article gathers information on the period spent by Rabbi Schneur Zalman in Mohyliv-Podil’s’kyi on the River Dniester, following Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk’s ascent to the Holy Land.[66] Similar articles are devoted to some of the former’s Chassidim, including, but not limited to, the well known Rabbi Binyamin of Kletzk[67] and the lesser known—but perhaps equally influential, and certainly more intriguingly named—Rabbi Dovid Shvartz-Tuma.[68]

Subjective Transformation

Although the importance of Halacha for Rabbi Schneur Zalman and his work as a legal authority receives little attention in this volume, there are two notable exceptions. The first is Grunwald’s discussion of the relationship between the legal focus on physical activity and the mystical/Midrashic notion that G-d desired a dwelling in the physical realms specifically.[69] The second is a discussion by Rabbi Noach Green juxtaposing the objective rule of law in cases of monetary disputation
with a more subjective process of arbitration and compromise. Rabbi Schneur Zalman preferred the subjective approach in practice, and also devoted several discourses to the mystical basis of that preference, explaining that this was the surer way of transforming our lowly environment into a “dwelling” for G-d.[70] As Green puts it: “The truth of Torah is imposed objectively, without actually refining the lowly material. Whereas the kindness of Torah is in accord with the nature of creation, and comes to refine the material as it is.”[71]

This preference—for subjective transformation rather than submissive acceptance of objective law—correlates with the ultimate focus of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s broader educational project. As we have seen, during the Liadi period his teachings delved deeply into the most esoteric of kabbalistic doctrines. But their purpose was ultimately focused on the conjunction of the highest highs and the lowest lows: direct knowledge of G-d’s essence and the physical practice of the commandments. As is often noted in Chabad teachings, this overcoming of the cosmic hierarchy will only be accomplished fully with the advent of the messianic era. But the period of the exile is not merely a ceaseless struggle between our reality and our ideals, and messianic revelation is not simply bestowed from above. As Rabbi Schneur Zalman asserts in Tanya, it is achieved through our subjective toil throughout the era of exile.[72] But the question remains to be asked: Why did Rabbi Schneur Zalman place such
an emphasis on the assimilation and contemplation of theoretical ideals, which most of us cannot yet adequately replicate in practice? Why did he not restrict his instruction to the more directly attainable elements of divine service, as he had in the Liozna period?

A fascinating array of sources related to these questions are collected in another article by Grunwald.[73] One example attributes the following distinction between toil of the heart and toil of the mind to Rabbi Schneur Zalman: G-d promises that with the messianic advent “I shall remove the heart of stone... and give you a heart of flesh,” but nothing similar is said of the mind. In the realm of the heart, of emotional inspiration and refinement, we may ultimately rely on divine intervention. But we must first ready ourselves for such revelation intellectually, independently toiling to “subjectively assimilate, and affix in our minds, all the stations that will be achieved with the messianic advent.”[74] Grunwald argues that for Rabbi Schnuer Zalman this kind of intellectual work isn’t simply a technical condition to the messianic revelation. It is actually central to his vision of such revelation as something achieved through human toil, through the subjective transformation of our lowly reality into a lofty messianic state. It is only if we have internally readied ourselves that the messianic advent can be complete, with the mindful quality of interiority openly spilling over into our hearts.[75] In the words of the Rashab, cited earlier in
this article: “The ultimate intention is the quality of interiority specifically, for with the coming of Moshiach specifically the interiority will be revealed…”[76]

Notes:
[2] Notably, the new and improved edition of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s Igrot Kodesh (Kehot Publication Society, 2012), edited by Rabbi Shalom DovBer Levine, and the still ongoing publication of all extant transcripts of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s oral discourses in the multi volume series Maamarei Admur Ha-zaken. See also Rabbi Shalom DovBer Levine, Toldot Chabad Be-russia Ha-tzaarit (Kehot Publication Society, 2010), and Rabbi Yehushua Mondshine, Masa Barditchev (2010), Ha-maasar Ha-rishon (2012) and Ha-masa Ha-acharon (2012), among other works. In English see, most recently, Immanuel Etkes, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of the Chabad School (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2015). While this is a valuable introductory work that takes advantage of first-hand documentary sources, I have noted elsewhere that its scope is rather limited. See Eli Rubin, “Making Chasidism Accessible: How Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi Successfully Preserved and Perpetuated the Teachings of The Baal Shem Tov,” Chabad.org (10 September 2012), available here. The shortcoming of that work are further highlighted when compared with the

[3] For an important exception see Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite,* 66-76 and 117-119. Though relatively brief, Loewenthal’s discussion is well grounded in the primary sources, and in several ways prefigures insights that are presented with far more elaboration in the present work. Another important work is Roman A. Foxbrunner, *Habad: The Hasidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady* (University of Alabama Press, 1992), which takes stock of some important aspects of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s teachings through a particularly wide analysis of the oral, as well as written, teachings. In certain respects this work similarly prefigures the present volume, but without the diachronic dimensions that will here be highlighted. For further treatments see Eli Rubin, “The Future is Now: Assorted reflections on the oral teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi,” Chabad-Revisited (30 November 2015), available here, and Jonathan Garb, “The Early Writings of Rashaz,” delivered at Johns Hopkins University, April 2015, and available online here.
Etkes’ fleeting discussion of the oral teachings (*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady*, 50-54) relies on secondary sources, and at one point (note 93) confuses Rabbi Schneur Zalman with his great grandson, Rabbi Chaim Schneur Zalman of Liadi. It should be noted that none of these sources, including the present volume, address the two volumes of discourses published by Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s son, Rabbi DovBer: *Siddur Tefilot Mi-kol Ha-shana Im Pirush Hamilot Al Pi Dach* (Kopust, 1816), online here, and *Bi’urei Ha-zohar* (Kopust, 1816), online here.


[4] Such belatedness seems to be something of a custom with such publications. In the introduction to the present volume (p. 15) reference is made to *Sefer HaKan*, a collection of articles on Rabbi Schneur Zalman that was intended to mark the 150th year since his passing in 1962, but which did not appear till the beginning of 1970, and is available online here.

[5] For the relationship with Rabbi Avraham see Loewenthal, *Communicating*

On the relationship with Rabbi Shlomo see the articles of Rabbi Avraham Abish Shor, as cited specifically below.


[7] Cited in HaRav, 401, and attributed to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman of Kopust in the name of his grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek.


[11] This is the second of the six features described by Grunwald, HaRav, 415-416.

[12] Another article in this volume, by the late Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine (HaRav, 609-650), collects extant accounts of such audiences, providing illuminating glimpses of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s interactions as a personal mentor.

[13] HaRav, 415, and at greater length, Ibid., 394-396. See, however, the discussion of Tanya as exoteric in relation to the esoteric aspect expressed in
the oral teachings, as cited by Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, p. 235-236, note 67.


[17] *HaRav*, 416-418. See also Jonathan Garb, “The Early Writings of Rashaz,” delivered at Johns Hopkins University, April 2015, and available online [here](#).


[19] *HaRav*, 415. For an ongoing exploration of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s discussion of ohr ain sof and tzimtzum, on the part of the present writer, see my series [here](#).


[21] See the extended discussion in *HaRav*, 361-375.

[22] A formulation borrowed from Jonathan Garb, “The Early Writings of Rashaz,” delivered at Johns Hopkins University, April 2015, and available online [here](#).


[24] *HaRav*, 391-396. See also pages 421-423 where Grunwald argues that Rabbi Schneur Zalman sought to deemphasize the role of the tzaddik in chassidim altogether. In my view the picture he paints is overly simplistic, and he himself notes that more research is required. As I
have argued elsewhere, while Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s understanding of the tzaddik’s role was different to that of other Chassidic leaders, he understood it to be no less central than they; see Eli Rubin, “The Second Refinement and the Role of the Tzaddik: How Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi discovered a new way to serve G-d,” Chabad.org, available online here. For further comments on the role of the tzadik in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s teachings see below note 28.


[26] In a similar vein see Rabbi Avraham Abish Shor, Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-yisra’el, Issue 167, 137.

[27] See the related discussion of this source in Rabbi Avraham Abish Shor, Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-yisra’el, Issue 157, p. 187).

[28] Elsewhere in the present volume, Rabbi Eliyahu Matusof points out that when, in 1806—that is, in the Liadi period—Rabbi Schneur Zalman published a new edition of the Tanya, this reference to “our masters in the Holy Land” was omitted. Both Matusof (HaRav, 344-380) and Grunwald (HaRav, 398, note 30) see this as evidence that the distinction between the earlier and later periods of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s leadership (as described in more detail below) is to be extended to Tanya as well. In the earlier period it served as a proxy for one-on-one mentorship (yechidut). In the later period (when references to yechidut were also omitted from the 1806 edition of Tanya) it was transformed into the foundation of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s broader project to formulate, explain and
disseminate the unique theoretical edifice of Chabad in terms that were accessible enough to be studied, assimilated and acted upon by any aspiring Chassid for perpetuity. Grunwald’s general thrust also provides an important counterbalance to the argument advanced by Nehemia Polen (Charismatic Leader, Charismatic Book, 53-64) that the Tanya was designed to craft a balance between control and empowerment, enforcing a rigid structure of social stratification, in which the tzadik is placed on a spiritual plain that the average man (benoni) can never hope to reach. Grunwald’s work complicates this sociological interpretation by demonstrating that during the period of Tanya’s composition the sociological structure of the Chassidic community had not yet been crystallized into distinct hierarchies led by individual tzaddikim, but was rather a complex network with a spectrum of different kinds of authorities and leaders, whose homogeneity Rabbi Schneur Zalman did not seek to break. It is my belief that Tanya’s portrait of the tzaddik in contrast to the average man is primarily to be read theoretically and psychologically rather than sociologically. That is, it relates to the inner world of man, rather than to the external world of the community. As Polen acknowledges, the entire distinction between the tzaddik and the beinoni is such that outwardly the latter may be mistaken for the former. Tanya does discuss the role of the tzadik within the community, but it primarily does so using the terms “wise men” (chachamim),
“Torah scholars” (talmidei chachamim), “wise men of the generation” (chachmei ha-dor), and “visionaries of the community” (enei ha-edah), which carry more obvious degrees of social implication. This claim, I believe, is born out by the sources discussed in my article, as cited above, note 24. Moreover, the plural tense of these terms better reflects the less stratified sociological reality of the time.

[29] Levine, HaRav, 661-684; See also the important series of articles by Rabbi Avraham Abish Shor, Karlin Betekufat Galut, in Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-yisra’el, as cited by Levine, Ibid., 662, note 9.


[31] Levine, HaRav, 668-669. During this more peaceful period a match was arranged between Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s widowed son-in-law—Rabbi Shalom Shachne, father of the Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch—and Rivka Rivla, the sister of Rabbi Asher of Stolin. See Shor, Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-yisra’el, Issue 162, p. 139-140.

[32] See the relevant discussions in HaRav, 426-431; Immanuel Etkes, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, 98-100; Jonathan Garb, Yearnings of the Soul (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 50-57. This last source is particularly notable for its emphasis on the respective roles of the mind and the heart in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s teachings, which is also the broader theme of the present essay.

[33] Levine, HaRav, 670-672. See the excerpts appended to Igrot Kodesh Admur Ha-zaken

[34] HaRav, 400. The coincidence of these two ruptures is underscored in a letter by Rabbi Schneur Zalman noting his inability to respond to Rabbi Avraham’s critique until circa 1799-1800, due “to the distress of the times,” referring to his arrest. See Igrot Kodesh Admur Ha-zaken, 341; HaRav, 672.


[36] With regard to mili de’alma see HaRav, 391, note 13; 409-410. With regard to takonat liozna see HaRav, 398, note 29; 408, note 65. See also Levine, Toldot Chabad Berussia Ha-tzaarit, 36.

[37] In one of the very last texts penned by Rabbi Schneur Zalman before his passing he even went so far as to justify and explain this central link between material concerns and the spiritual service of G-d. See sources cited and discussed in the editor’s Introduction to Igrot Kodesh, 39. See also Yanki Tauber, “The Physical World According to Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi,” Chabad.org, available here.

[38] HaRav, 396-398; 388-389, note 6. See also the discussion by Shor, Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-yisra’el, Issue 172, 151-152. Loewenthal, Communicating the Infinite, 71-77. For a similar shift in the role that Tanya came to play in this period see above, note 28.

[39] For Grunwald’s extended discussion see HaRav, 432-461. See also Loewenthal, Communicating the Infinite, 75-77 and 117-119. For a particularly extensive discussion of the nature and role of love and awe in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s teachings see Foxbrunner, Habad, 178-194.
In a discourse delivered in the autumn of 1799 (Maamarei Admur Ha-zaken Ketuvim Vol. 1, 67 [96]), in between the first and second imprisonments (and misleadingly described by Grunwald as “the very beginning of the period following Petersburg”), Rabbi Schneur Zalman describes how to cultivate this cerebral form of love. It is noteworthy that this contemplation is explicitly directed from the mind to the heart:

“Speak to your heart quietly and coolly, which is the opposite of the heated movement of the heart... Settled mindfulness (yishuv ha-da'at) is cool, without any movement, and you shall delve deeply into settled mindfulness with ease and calm (be-nachat), and say to your heart: ‘The infinite revelation of G-d creates [existence], something from nothing, at every moment, it is clear in my intellect that this is so... If so how can I be separate [from G-d]? And [how can] all my thoughts and the capacities of my soul not constantly be cleaving to G-d... ?’

[45] See also Loewenthal, Ibid., where similar argument are made drawing on additional textual examples. Loewenthal also demonstrates an increased focus on abnegation (bitul) in contrast to emotionalism.
See also Levine, *HaRav*, 675-684. Levine, *Introduction to Igrot Kodesh*, 49, points out that the year 1805 is when the term “Chabad” comes into use as a way of expressly distinguishing the followers of Rabbi Schneur Zalman from those of other Chassidic leaders.


See also the accounts transmitted by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn in *Igrot Kodesh* Vol. 3 (Kehot Publication Society, 1983), 477; and in Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Reshimot Ha-yoman* (Kehot Publication Society, 2006), 367.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Ohr Ha-torah*, Bereishit Vol. 3, 603-604 (Hebrew pagination). This last quote—as well as the source quoted above, note 44—further emphasizes the central role that the heart continued to play in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s thought, even in the later period. See *Maamarei Admur Ha-zaken 5570*, 207-210 for a discourse delivered by Rabbi DovBer in the lifetime of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, which similarly emphasizes this point, contrasting between the exteriority of the heart and the interiority of the heart (*pnimiyut ha-lev*). As Loewenthal puts it (*Ibid.*, 122) Rabbi DovBer too demanded ecstasy: “not ecstasy of the
self, but of the nonself…”

[53] Torat Shalom, 213.
[54] HaRav, 563-572.
[56] Rabbi Nochum Grunwald, HaRav, 573-586.
[57] Rabbi Nechemia Teichman, HaRav, 587-606.
[58] Grunwald’s description here is inspired by the comment of the Maharash in regarding the achievement of the Tosafists. See Yam Shel Shlomo, introduction to Chulin.
[59] HaRav, 506-562.
[60] For one relevant text that Grunwald does not discuss see Ma’amarei Admur ha-Zaken 5565, Volume 1, 489–90. For my own discussion of this text, as well as a contextualization of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s approach within the broader streams of Jewish rationalist and mystical thought that differs somewhat from Grunwald’s approach see Eli Rubin, “Intimacy in the Place of Otherness: How rationalism and mysticism collaboratively communicate the Midrashic core of cosmic purpose,” Chabad.org, available here.
[61] HaRav, 544-545. Footnote 99, incidentally, is well worth reading. Among other points there, Grunwald makes explicit reference to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Halakhic Man. Indeed, hints to the similarities and differences between the latter’s approach and that of Rabbi Schneur Zalman are already apparent from the onset of Grunwald’s article. For more on this general topic See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Eternal Duration and Temporal Compresence: The Influence of Habad on Joseph B. Soloveitchik,” in

[62] Take for example page 562, footnote 145, where Grunwald gestures to the question of Jewish chosenness as developed in Chabad thought through the generations. For a lengthy treatment of this topic see Wolfson, Open Secret, Chapter 6. See also Eli Rubin, “Divine Zeitgeist—The Rebbe’s Appreciative Critique of Modernity,” Chabad.org, available here, and Wojciech Tworek, Time in the Teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University College London, 2014), 126-136. None of these treatments deal with the diburificating statement Grunwald points to Likutei Sichot Vol. 16 (Kehot Publication Society, 2006), 477-478: “When will it be achieved in a revealed sense that the Jews are a dwelling for G-d? …Specifically… when, through the Jews, the lower realms themselves become a place that is fit for G-d’s dwelling… Since the intention of a dwelling in the lower realms is [rooted] in G-d’s essence, it is impossible to say that this intention should be compounded of two things…”

[63] HaRav, 3-124.
[64] HaRav, 125-211.
[66] HaRav, 653-658.
[67] HaRav, 701-740.
[69] HaRav, 516-528.
[70] HaRav, 693.

[72] Likutei Amarim, Chapter 37. For an extended discussion of the prominent place of the messianic idea in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s thought, correcting a major gap in previous scholarship, see Wojciech Tworek, Time in the Teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University College London, 2014), especially Chapters 2 and 3. See the related discussion in Foxbrunner, Habad, 85-93, and also Eli Rubin, “The Idealistic Realism of Jewish Messianism: On Chabad’s apocalyptic calculations, and why Jews have always predicted elusive ends,” Chabad.org, available here.

[73] HaRav, 462-472.
[74] HaRav, 469.
[75] HaRav, 470-472.

Screen for the Spirit, Garment for the Soul

Screen for the Spirit, Garment for the Soul
by Josh Rosenfeld

Josh Rosenfeld is the Assistant Rabbi at Lincoln Square Synagogue and on the Judaic Studies Faculty at SAR High School. This is his third contribution to the Seforim blog. His first essay, on “The Nazir in New York,” is available here, and his second essay, “The Princess and I: Academic Kabbalists/Kabbalist Academics,” is available here.

Recent years have witnessed a remarkable trend in the widespread study of Hasidic texts within Orthodox communities that themselves do not self-identify as traditionally Hasidic. Whether in much-discussed Modern Orthodox neo-Hasidic circles or amongst the National-Religious in Israel, Hasidic texts canonical and obscure merit serious teaching, engagement, and even reverence in these communities. One of the earliest expressions of this trend was the introduction of such texts into the curricula of Hesder Yeshivot, and arguably the man most responsible for this was R. Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (Shagar; 1949-2007).

R. Shagar began his career in the Hesder Yeshivot first as a student at Yeshivat Kerem b’Yavneh, eventually returning from the Yom Kippur war to become a popular RaM at Yeshivat
Hakotel, even filling in as interim Rosh ha-Yeshiva when R. Yeshayahu Hadari took a sabbatical. R. Shagar, known as a Talmudic prodigy, branched out to both found and direct other institutions on the cutting edge of the National Religious educational framework, such as Beit Midrash Ma’aleh and Beit Morasha, and finally, Yeshivat Siach Yitzchak in Efrat, with his longtime friend and study partner, R. Yair Dreyfuss (1949- ). After a difficult period of suffering, R. Shagar passed away from Pancreatic cancer on June 11, 2007, a month after the announcement of a committee to begin preparing his voluminous writings for publication.

R. Shagar wrote and taught on a level characterized as “extremely deep”, and despite the resurgence of interest and posthumous publications of his writings, a close student of his once told me “it was not always such a great honor to be counted amongst his students.” There was some opposition to some of his ideas, especially those relating to education and Talmud pedagogy.[1] R. Shagar’s writings exhibit a sustained engagement with, in my opinion, three central themes: postmodernism and its challenge to traditional religion, spirituality and faith in the Modern Orthodox and National Religious, and the development of a viable language, a discourse – based upon traditional texts – to think and talk about the aforementioned themes. R. Shagar’s writings are as quick to quote R. Schnuer Zalman of Liadi as Slavoj Zizek, the Slovenian cultural critic and philosopher.

For English speakers, much of R. Shagar’s oeuvre remains a
closed book,[2] despite the rapid pace with which new material of his – developed from the reportedly hundreds of files he left behind – is being published, and the resurgence in his popularity in Israel. Despite that, a few articles and introductions to his thought have appeared in English.[3]

What follows is an attempt at translation of an excerpt from one of the most recent of R. Shagar’s works, To Illuminate the Openings (4).[4]

The book is primarily a collection of R. Shagar’s discourses on the holiday of Hanukkah, part of the “For This Time” (לזמן הזה) series of R. Shagars derashot on the cycle of Jewish holidays and festivals.[5]

This particular essay, “Screen for the Spirit, Garment for the Soul” is an expansion and presentation of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi’s[6] phenomenological discourse on the candles of Hanukkah. R. Shagar uses the language of philosophy, Maimonides, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to explain the two religious paths that R. Schneur Zalman sees as represented in the candles, wicks, and flames of Hanukkah. In doing so, a rich tapestry of religious thought is woven, with R. Shagar characteristically bringing such diverse thinkers as the founder of Chabad Hasidism and Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz in conversation with each other.[7]
“Screen for the Spirit, Garment for the Soul”
{A Translation and Annotation of R. Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, “To Illuminate the Openings” (Machon Kitve ha-Rav Shagar: Efrat, 2014), 53-61}[8][9]

There is a well-known custom of many Hasidic rabbis on Hanukah to sit by the candles after lighting and to meditate upon them, sometimes for hours. This meditation washes over the spirit and allows the psyche to open up to a whole host of imaginings, gleanings, thoughts, and emotions – that afterward blossom into the ‘words of the living God’, to use the Habad formulation. Therefore, it is instructive for us to look at the physical entity, the elements of the candle and its light as crucial elements in the development of these words of exegesis – the meditation upon the candlelight. For example, in one stage of the discourse of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi[10] (1745-1812; henceforth, Admor ha-Zaken) that we shall discuss, Admor ha-Zaken distinguishes between two different types of light

The Soul and the Commandment

כִּי אַתָּה תָּאִיר נֵרִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי יַגִּיהַּ חָשְׁכִּי )תהילים י״ח, כט(.
כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אוֹר )משלי ו׳, כג(.
נֵר יְהוָה נִשְׁמַת אָדָם )שם כ׳, כז(.

כִּי אָדָם תַּאִיר נֵר יְהוָה לִי (ה)נַעֲלֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה לַעֲרָבָה (בָּאָרָא תָּאִיר נֵר לָי לַגְּבֵרָה).}
emanating from the
candle: and the fact of the matter is
that the candle consists of both the oil and the wick – two
types of light: a
darkened light directly on the wick, and the clarified white light.[11]
This differentiation acts as a springboard for a discourse
upon two pathways in
religious life. To a certain extent, it is possible to posit
that the discourse
is the product of the Admor ha-Zaken’s meditation upon the
different colors of
light in the candle’s flame, and without that, there would be
no discourse to
speak of.

The motif of the candle and the imaginings it
conjures are a frequent theme in scripture and in rabbinic
writing – The Mitzvah Candle; Candle of the Soul; The
Candle of God – in its wake arise many Hasidic discourses
seeking to
explain the relationship between ‘The Soul’ [נֶר נשמה] and ‘The Commandment’ [נֶר מצוה], and between ‘The
Commandment’ and God [נֶר ה׳]. In our study of
the discourse of the Admor ha-Zaken, we will most importantly
encounter the
tension between the godly and the commanded – the infinitude
of the divine as
opposed to the borders, limits, and finitude of the system of
commandments [תרי״ג מצוות]. However, prior to doing so, we
will
focus our attention for a moment on the tension between the
soul and the
commandment – the internal spiritual life of the believer
relative to the
externalized performance of the commandment.

The emergence of Hasidism brought to the fore
the following challenge – does the fact of an increased
individual emphasis
upon internal spiritual life mean that they will of necessity
distance
themselves from the practical framework of Halakha? In a
different formulation, does the focus of Hasidism upon the ‘soul-candle’ mean that the light of the ‘commandment-candle’ will be dimmed? The tension between the two is clear: one’s obligation to do specific things affixed to specific times stands in opposition to one’s attunement with and attention to their own inner voice. Our own eyes see, and not just in connection with Jewish religious life, but that when one prefers their own personal truth, they do not behave according to the dictates and accepted norms of society at large. For example, one who desires to be ‘more authentic’ may be less polite, as the rules of etiquette are seen as external social constructions that dull one’s inner life. Similarly, for this type of individual, when it comes to Halakha, it will be approached and understood as a system that holds him back from his own truth, and not only that, but it sometimes will be perceived as a lie: from a Halakhic point of view, he must pray at specifically ordained times, but in his heart of hearts he knows that right now his prayers will not be fully sincere – but rather just ‘going through the motions’. Must this individual now answer the external call to prayer, or should they rather hold fast to their inner calling, thereby relaxing the connection to the outer Halakhic reality?[12]

In truth, this question has yet another dimension, within which we may be able to sharpen our understanding – the chasm between objective and subjective experience. Should an individual seek out ‘The Truth’ through their own subjective experience, or should they rather find it
in the absolutist objective realm of reality? Once a person apprehends ‘The Truth’ as a construction of their own subjective internal experience, the concept of truth loses its totality and becomes relativized. Truth instead becomes dependent upon one’s specific perspective, their emotions, feelings, and personal experiences. In this sense, Halakha is identified with the absolute and fixed sphere of reality – within which God commanded us, and this type of relativism is untenable in relation to it. (א)

It is possible to argue that the ideal state is when the internal, personal truth is identified with the objective, external truth.[13] The meaning of this situation is that on one hand, the individual’s internal life is strong, on fire, and yet his sense of obligation to this internality is unassailable. This leads to a perspective where the inner life is understood as objective reality, absolute. A person in this type of situation loses their sense of relativity and their inner directives obtain the strength of an outside command, possessing no less force of obligation or truth.

The problem with the situation within which we live is that our inner lives lack strength and force; Our inner lives are prone to ups and downs, steps forward and back. Because of the dullness of our internal lives, they are susceptible to all kinds of outside influences, and thus there is a subsequent lack of authenticity. This is the reason the Shulhan Arukh – not internal spirituality – is the basis for our religious obligations, it is the absolute cornerstone of our lives.
To be sure, divine truth is revealed on a number of different levels and planes in our lives, and it is forbidden for an individual to think that this truth is obtainable only in one dimension – not in the internal or external life alone. An encompassing, total reality takes both lives into account and unifies them – both the internal and external; however, in an incomplete, non-ideal reality, to every dimension and perspective there are benefits and detriments, and we ignore either at our own peril. To this end, our rabbis taught us that we must serve God through both ‘fear’ [יראה] and ‘love’ [אהבה]: and so Hazal said, serve out of fear, serve out of love.'[14]

Admor ha-Zaken

Until now, we have seen the apposition between the mitzvah candle and the neshama candle, to wit – the conflict between the formal Halakhic system and the unmediated spirituality sought by Hasidism. This is a spirituality that has as a central prerequisite the authenticity of action, an authenticity that stands in opposition to the fact that the believer stands commanded to perform certain actions at appointed, limited times. In his discourse for Hanukkah, Admor ha-Zaken deals with yet another tension addressed by Hasidism, especially in the system of Habad Hasidism: What is the connection of physical actions – the performance of the commandments – with the metaphysical, spiritual ‘payoff’ they are supposed to engender, such as an attainment of closeness with God?

Furthermore, the commandments, as they are sensed and experienced through action, are part of the world
of tangibility — the finite and created human reality. Therefore, what connection can these have with faith in the divine infinity? As it appears, the progression of the Admor ha-Zaken is a dialectical approach: one on hand, he presents the commandments in a strictly utilitarian manner without any truly inherent value, but on the other, it is this very groundedness of the commandments in our reality that accords to them their roots in the pure divine will:

It is written: ‘A Mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is Light,’ that the Mitzvot are called ‘candle.’ And it is also written: ‘the candle of God is the soul of Man’, that the soul is called ‘candle’. And in the Zohar it is explained that the Mitzvot are called ‘garments’... and in order to be fully clothed, the soul must fulfill all 613 Mitzvot...

and to explain the matter of the soul’s garments... [that] there are boundless illuminations... for there are countless understandings of the light and the glow, which is an emanation of the infinite light of [God] Blessed be He...

The delights that derive from the infinite light, which is the source of all delights, are without end. Just as we perceive with our senses even... physical delights are also without measure,

for there are infinite ways to experience pleasure... Because of this, the soul – which is in the aspect of the finite – is unable to fully apprehend the revelation of this glow, which is the very being of the divine, except through a garment – a filter – and through that garment and filter [the soul] is able to receive the light and the glow.[15]

The soul requires ‘garments’, for without
these garments and filters, there is no comprehension. I will try to explain what I mean here: for example, when we speak of ‘eternal memory’ [זכרון נצח], are we talking about remembering the content of that person’s life, as if we are recording into a computer a reporter’s notes that are now being entered into the system? Of course that is not what we are referring to. All these moments of a person’s life are ‘garments’, a medium for the real that occurred in them. This real is not something specific, not a definable factor, but rather is the thing that grants meaning to the content of those experiences, even though it itself is undefinable.[16] Thus, ‘eternal life’ is life that retains with it the meaning of these experiences – something which can never be quantified or simply entered into a computer.[17]

This undefinable thing that grants meaning, the ‘lifeforce’ to everything else, is what Admor ha-Zaken calls the ‘glow of the infinite light’ [זרוע מאור אינסוף]. It is not simply ‘meaning’, but rather the ‘meaning of all meaning’. In the discourse before us, as well as in other discourses of his, Admor ha-Zaken draws a line, a parallel, between this glow and the actual substance of delight and pleasure that in our world always appears via a medium, some physical object. Pleasure will never materialize in this world in its pure state – like delight in the earthly realm that always devolves from something outside it, like when we take pleasure in some delicious food or in the study of some wisdom.[18] If so, the commandments are garments through which our world obtains its substance and standing – its
meaning. In the language of Admor ha-Zaken, the commandments act as a conduit for the infinite light to penetrate into our world. That is to say, the commandments as an entire system of life form a space within which a person may experience the eros of true meaning. Through them, an individual may feel alive, that is sensations of satisfaction, excitement, longing, the joy of commandment, and intimacy—all these we may incorporate metonymically into the word ‘light’ or ‘holiness’, that which Admor ha-Zaken would call ‘delight’ or ‘pleasure’.

In order for this light to be apprehended, it must be garbed in the outer trappings of the commandments. This is to say, that the commandments themselves are not the essence of the light and de-light, that they are not the meaningful point of existence, but rather only a garment, that receives its light only by dint of the fact that the subjective experience of holiness and pleasure are felt through it. As Admor ha-Zaken explains in the discourse we are studying: behold, the Mitzvah act... is not the way of the divine infinite light to be infused in them [Mitzvot] unless it is through... the Godly soul itself that performs the Mitzvah, and draws forth through them a revelation of the divine infinite light. As it is written [about Mitzvot]: ‘that the individual shall perform them’—that it is the individual that makes them into Mitzvot, in drawing forth through them the infinite light.[19]

**The Source of The Commandments**

To be sure, it is possible to say that any way of life or cultural system is but a garment for the infinite light, for it is this system which bears the weight of the meaning of life and
the essence of reality [for its adherents]. An individual experiences life through cultural constructs and the social systems — especially the most critical ones such as love, longing, lower/higher fears, loyalty, etc. — all these things grant to life meaning and purpose, something we wouldn’t trade for anything. Therefore, in Hasidism, recognition of this truth is related to the fact that the world was created through ‘ten utterances’ [שנים עשרה] — that is to say, even without a specifically religious language, such as the ‘ten statements’ [עשר דיברות] through which the divine light is revealed. For Admor ha-Zaken’s part, there remains a difference between these systems and the system of the commandments: while it is true that the commandments are a ‘human system’, ideally/from their very inception they are rooted in the infinite reality from which they devolved. At this point, Admor ha-Zaken ceases to see the commandments as merely a garment or tool alone, but rather that they themselves represent constitute a direct encounter with the presence of the divine in our reality. This is to say that the commandments are a system meant to signify and symbolize the infinite itself.[20] They don’t simply give expression to it, but direct us to it as well. How do the commandments symbolize? As a system, they point to the divine will itself, for as a closed system, they lack resolution, purpose. One might even say that it is not that we have here a symbol signifying something that we are meant to understand, but rather that the signified is incomprehensibility itself, the ‘void within the void’ [חור
In order to understand these things, we must pay attention to the differentiation Admor ha-Zaken makes between ‘the infinite light’ [אור אינסוף] and the ‘essential will of the infinite light’ [עצם רצון אא״ס]:

It is impossible for the essential will of the infinite light to be revealed to any created being, unless that divine will is embodied in some physical act, the performance of the Mitzvah... and the root of the Mitzvot is very lofty, rooted in the uppermost realms of the supernal crown, ‘Keter’... until it devolves into our realm through physical actions and things, Tzitzit and Sukkah, and it is specifically in these things that the divine will is revealed, ‘the final in deed is first in thought’ [סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה]... In action heaven was [created] first... but in thought physicality came first... for the light is revealed from the aspect of divinity that encompasses all realms... Thus the performance of Mitzvot, whose root lies in this encompassing aspect of divinity – the supernal ‘Keter’ – cannot be expressed below in the aspect of ‘inner light’ [אור פנימי], [in finite and internal experience], but rather must find their expression in exterior, physical actions, as it is well known that that which in its essence is more lofty and elevated falls to the deeper depths. Therefore, through the performance of Mitzvot, there is created a covering, an encompassing screen, so that through the Mitzvot the [soul] may be able to delight in the delight of the infinite light...[21]

Admor ha-Zaken locates in the commandments a
type of dual identity based on the system he constructs: as a garment [לבוש], they are only a vessel through which the infinite divine light finds expression – the delight of the soul, holiness, all that is perceived as the essence of this world. The commandments themselves are not the inner aspect of life but rather a medium for this interiority. On the other hand, Admor ha-Zaken identifies them with the ‘encompassing’ lights [מקיפים]; a reality that cannot be truly apprehended or experienced within ours. This is to say that the root of the commandments are as vessels, conduits of a reality beyond ours – ‘the essential will of the infinite light’. Manifest in this is a classic HaBaD teaching, which Admor ha-Zaken formulates thusly: that which in its essence is more lofty and elevated falls to the deeper depths.

We locate the root of the commandments, which in reality are purely utilitarian and without their own essential, inherent meaning, in the very essence and core of the divine.

The claim of Admor ha-Zaken is that the source of the commandments is to be found in the the divine will itself. The meaning of the commandments is not resolved through adhering to some system of rules, some ethical or moral ideal, or some historical-progressive idea through which they were conceived.[22] In the most simple sense, God ‘wanted’ commandments, and through this there developed a system with meaning and sense, which we might call ‘wisdom’ [חכמה], but that system does not fully define the will of the creator, nor is it necessary in the absolute sense. In the aforementioned discourse, Admor ha-Zaken holds that the actual ‘end’ action precedes the thought that somehow explains and gives it
meaning, because in truth it is the action, the physical performance of the commandment is affixed to the divine will that warrants it to be done this particular way and no differently – for no humanly discernable reason. This is the way of the divine will, to ‘desire’ without dependence upon any externally motivating factor. One might say that as they [the commandments] are affixed in the divine will, the commandments as such signify a degree of arbitrariness and happenstance.[23] The commandments serve as a reminder of the ultimate unknowability of the divine will that tautologically ‘desires because it desires’. This is also the reason why the commandments primarily take the form of actions and not intentions. As actions, the commandments manifest themselves as closed, sealed objects, their meanings not easily teased out nor defined by the meanings attached to them – ultimately, there is just the [darkness and] light and the delight that we are able to attain through it.

Notes:
[1] For example, see “Shnayim Ohazin: A Conversation Between R. Aharon Lichtenstein and R. Shagar”, Shma’atin Journal vol. 136 (Nissan 1998); also appearing in Meimad, Vol. 17, August 1999; see further the synopsis and translation by Rachel Schloss for the Lookstein teacher’s resource archive here; See also questions posed to R. Uri Sherki, a popular National Religious lecturer and teacher on the topic of R. Shagar and postmodernism, here.
[2] Two of R. Shagar’s monographs have been released in English: Chance and Providence (פור היא הגורל), trans. Naftali

[3] To my knowledge, the most extensive study of R. Shagar in English to date has been conducted by Miriam Feldmann Kaye of the Van Leer Institute and Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Dr. Kaye holds a PhD from the University of Haifa, and her doctoral dissertation deals extensively with the encounter of Judaism and postmodernism in the thought of R. Shagar and Tamar Ross. It is forthcoming as Jewish Theology in a Postmodern Age published by The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization [2017]. Kaye’s draft study, “Hasidic Philosophy in the Age of Postmodernism and Relativism: The Case of Rav Shagar” was discussed at the March 2015 Orthodox Forum, “The Contemporary Uses and Forms of Hasidut” chaired by R. Shmuel Hain and R. Shlomo Zuckier. Hopefully Kaye’s fascinating paper will see light in the upcoming volume of in the Orthodox Forum series.

Ilan Fuchs deals, inter alia, with R. Shagar’s perspective on Torah learning for women and Orthodox feminism in Women’s Torah Study: Orthodox Education and Modernity (Routledge press: New York, 2014), 209-220


[5] Other volumes that have already been released include In the Shadow of Faith (בצל האמונה) on Sukkot, A Time for Freedom (זמן של חירות) on Passover, and On That Day (ביום ההוא) on Israeli national holidays.


[7] R. Shagar is accused of a certain naivete with regard to the possibility and rigor of this type of thinking, see Kosman, idem. and see also the editor’s introduction to R. Shagar, Luhot ve-Shivrei Luhot (Yediot Ahronot, 2013); 407 pp. for a discussion of the autodidactic nature of R. Shagar’s engagement with general philosophy, specifically postmodern thought.

[8] לכב׳ ראש השנה לחסידות יום שיחרור אדמוה״ז. זיע״א י״ט כסלו ה׳תשע״ו

[9] Thanks is due to R. Eli Rubin for his insight and comments.

[10] R. Hershel Schachter once quipped that perhaps the name “Schneur”
was a portmanteau of שְׁנֵי אוֹרָה (= two lights), in the naming after two different people with the name “Meir” – quite appropriate for one who was able to draw such deep meaning from even the two lights within the candle’s flame.


[12] A prime example of this would be the controversy surrounding the practice of postponing prayer times. During the formative years of Hasidism, many Hasidic leaders (such as the the Seer of Lublin, The Holy Jew, and The Kotzker Rebbe) held that in order to focus the heart properly for prayer it is permissible to delay the time for prayer, despite violating the clear Halakhic guidelines governing it in the Shulhan Arukh.

[13] Thus we reduce conflict between the soul-life and the practical-life. See further torah no. 33 in Lectures on Likkutei Moharan vol. 1, 295-310; torah no. 6, ad loc., 68.

[14] Commentary of R. Ovadia Bartenura on the Mishnah, Avot 1:3. I will point out, however, that it is basically impossible to impose upon someone a completely external commandment, and so in this way even the ability to follow an external command is a matter of personal prerogative, and therefore related to the realm of personal freedom. This is to say that the internality of a person itself transitions between many different phases – sometimes appearing as the freedom to be unfree/limited and inauthentic.

[15] Torah Ohr, ad loc. 32d.

[16] We must differentiate between ‘sense’ and ‘meaning’ [english in the original; JR]. As we shall soon see, ‘the glow of the
infinite’ [that is to say, the ‘spiritual background radiation’, the reflection of the infinite source of light illuminating our moon-world; JR] is what gives ‘sense’ to ‘meaning’ [without it, the slip into nihilism begins; JR]. As long as ‘sense’ is completely attached to the level of content — words, actions, situations — ‘meaning’ becomes the internal, animating force behind these, granting these things spiritual ‘weight’.

[17] There is a touch of autobiography here. R. Shagar worked extensively on notes and files from his oeuvre, hundreds of which were saved on his computer, from which the Institute for the Publication of the Works of R. Shagar compiles, edits, and publishes his voluminous writings posthumously.


[19] *Torah Ohr*, ad loc. 33c.


An Obscure Diagram in the Bomberg Shas

By Eli Genauer

A recent book auction by Kestenbaum featured the following listing:

**AUCTION 65: JUNE 25TH, 2015**

**LOT:**


Daniel Bomberg, Venice: 1520.

*This Tractate contains the only appearance of a printed text illustration throughout the entire Talmud issued by Bomberg (see f. 43r).*

The reference to (see f.43r) indicates that this singular printed diagram in the Bomberg Shas appears on Daf 43A in Sotah.

It is a diagram of the configuration of trees in a particular orchard and it looks like this...
We find other instances of a Bomberg edition of tractate Sotah being offered for sale, and they contain the same basic information.

Kedem Auctions Auction no. 40 – Books, Manuscripts, Rabbinical Letters
Wednesday, September 3, 2014 – 17:00
Books & Manuscripts
Tractate Sotah – Venice, 1520 – Bomberg Printing, First Edition
Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah – with Rashi commentary and Tosfot, Piskei Tosfot and Rambam’s commentary on the Mishna.
Venice, 1520.
Printed by Daniel Bomberg, first edition.
On Leaf 43, 1 is an illustrative sketch on Rashi commentary. This is the only printed sketch found in the Bomberg edition of the Talmud. Bomberg left the rest of the places which were designated for sketches and illustrations.
Folio 43r. provides the only example of the inclusion of a printed diagram in the Bomberg Talmud. In all other tractates, Bomberg simply left a blank space in which an individual could insert a diagrammatic drawing.
Talmud, Rashi and Tosfot, and their space remained empty, except for Sotah 43A, where we find a diagram in Rashi.

He seems to be saying that not only in the Bomberg first edition was this the only diagram included, but also in subsequent Bomberg editions this remained the only diagram included. He even casts a wider net and says that this was the only diagram included in any set of the Talmud until the Berman edition of Frankfurt an Der Oder printed from 1697-1699.

Is this correct?

I would have to say it is mostly correct but not completely.

The Israel National Library website contains the following page:

It can be accessed at http://aleph.nli.org.il/nnl/dig/bk_sub.html

It is a wonderful source for early printed books and it contains every tractate of the first edition of the Bomberg Shas. What may a bit less known is that it also contains one tractate of the third edition of the Bomberg Shas, Masechet Zevachim, printed in 1548. (1)

If we look at Daf 53B, we are confronted with the following
A close up of the bottom of the page looks like this
At first I thought that this diagram of the Yesod of the Mizbeach had been drawn in by hand, but an analysis of the difference in the way this page was set up versus the same page in the first two editions lead me to conclude that this diagram was added by the Bomberg editors intentionally and was included as part of the printed page. Aside from that, I had the privilege of looking at this same page in a different copy held by the JTS Library with Sharon Lieberman Mintz, (JTS Curator of Jewish Art) and she confirmed that this mechanical drawing and the one available online at the NLI website were exactly the same. If we look at the 1520 edition, we can see the problem that the editors faced. Here is both 53A and 54A.
closer look at the bottom of 53B, where the diagram appears in the third edition.
After a lengthy explanation by Rashi on the makeup of the Yesod, he adds the word “Kazeh”. It is right at the bottom. Usually, we would find an empty space there, but alas, there is no room.

The empty space where the diagram should go is not on the bottom of 53B, but rather on the top of 54A. It has nothing to do with the Rashi that begins with the word “Retzuah”.
So it is possible that by the third edition of Zevachim, the Bomberg editors decided to fix that. They set the type for 53B in a different manner, allowing them the space for a diagram, and they even included the diagram. I thought I might find other diagrams in this third Bomberg edition and spent an afternoon at the JTS Library looking through various Masechtot of that edition, but did not find another diagram. As far as I know, this was the only diagram added to the third edition. There is no way to know for sure why the Bomberg editors added this one, just as there is no way to know why the diagram on Sotah 43A was included in the first edition. But at least one can see
what might have bothered them here.
[1] I refer to this as the third edition although there is much discussion as to whether this might actually be a fourth edition. For more background on this, please see Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud (A History of the Early Printed Editions of the Talmud)* Im Hasefer, Brooklyn, NY 1992, pages 167-180