

*Leah &  
Bentzy*

TESHURAH FROM THE WEDDING OF  
BENTZY & LEAH ZIRKIND  
12 KISLEV 5779



ב"ה

# Welcome to our Simcha!

It is such a great joy for us that you have been able to join us for the wedding of our children Leah Miller and Bentzy Zirkind. Thank you for making this day so special with your presence and energy. We bless you from our hearts with sweetness and joy in your life.

We've followed the custom of sharing a Memento (*Teshurah*), with all our guests. This little booklet contains some fascinating stuff which has never been published before, so please take it with you and enjoy it at your leisure.

The *Teshurah* has three sections:

1. An account of the discovery of a beard-tuft of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory.
2. A selection of unpublished letters written by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory. We are grateful to the Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Shalom Mendel Simpson for sharing them with us.
3. An essay written by the Kallah's father, Rabbi Chaim Miller, entitled: *Do we Learn Kabbalah: Attitudes to the Study of Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah, from the Dawn of Chasidism to Present Day Chabad.*

*With blessings,*

*Rabbi Chaim and Chani Miller*

*Mendy and Hindy Zirkind*



# BEARD TUFT

## from the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn



Remarkably, a tuft from the beard of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, has been preserved for posterity. The tuft was obtained by the Rebbe's nurse, Sheina Matla (Mania) Lotz (1917-1992), and is now in the possession of her son Herb Rosin, of Cherry Hill New Jersey.

Since Judaism attributes a certain sanctity to beard hair, many have the custom of not disposing of hairs that fall from the beard, placing them instead inside a *sefer* (holy book).<sup>\*</sup> Over an extended period, of possibly several years, Mania collected the hairs that the Previous Rebbe had placed in *sefarim*, eventually accumulating a sizable tuft.

<sup>\*</sup>See Rabbi Yizchak Lipiatz, *Sefer Matamim* (Warsaw, 1909), p. 43b; Rabbi Asher Zelig Margolios, *Amudei Arazim* (Jerusalem, 1932), p. 76. For accounts of the discovery of beard hair from the *Ba'al Shem Tov* in *sefarim* see: Rabbi Shlomo Zucker, *Zecher Tzadik Livracha* (Kleinwardein, 1938), p. 34; Rabbi Yisrael Friedman, *Kerem Yisrael* (Lublin, 1930), p. 2a. For full treatment of this topic see Shlomo Weinberger's article in *Kovetz Beis Va'ad L'Chachamim* (Monroe, NY), Nissan 2011, pp.412-425.

I have personally seen the tuft, and the above picture, which Herb snapped with his phone and kindly sent to me, fails to capture its striking appearance. The Previous Rebbe's hair was red, and even this sample, collected in the last years of his life when his beard had whitened, contains many red hairs of an extremely rich and vibrant color. The redness of the tuft is, in fact, so very remarkable that the beard becomes "alive" for a moment, when you first catch a glimpse of it.

# UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

from the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

## 1. TWO SCHOOLS OF MEDICAL THOUGHT

By the Grace of G-d

25th of *Tishrei*, 5716

Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter of the beginning of September. My reply was delayed on account of the intervening Holy Days.

Inasmuch as you do not mention about your health, I trust that everything is in order, and I shall always be glad to hear good news from you.

In reference to what you write about the two schools of medical thought namely, one that favors artificial means and external treatment, and the other favoring natural recovery, seeking to bring about an improvement in health through the internal strengthening

of the natural powers of the organism itself; and for some reason you think that the Jewish religion prefers the first method—

In general, you are mistaken in this view, inasmuch as our religion has expressed no specific preference for one or the other. On the other hand, one of the greatest adherent of the naturalistic school was none other than the great Maimonides, who was both the outstanding Talmudist and Codifier, as well as one of the greatest physicians of his age, whose influence in medical science is felt to this day. At the same time, he is also one of the greatest authorities on Jewish Law to this day. In his famous Code of Jewish law, he strongly defends the naturalistic approach (cf. *Hilchoth Deoth*).

Your defense of the naturalistic school does not entirely hold good, as can also be seen from Maimonides, quoted above. Your arguments that there should be no interference with the course of nature and the Divine order, and to permit the organism itself to recover without outside interference, etc., would be valid if we were dealing with a perfect organism in its perfect natural state. Unfortunately, such a thing hardly exists, for there is no perfection in this physical world; largely due to the fact that extraneous factors come into play, such as accidents, war, and the like, or an unnatural way of life, such as over-indulgence in food, and material pleasures. In a case of an organism thus affected, it cannot be argued that no extraneous methods be used to correct that which has been caused by extraneous forces, and that nature itself will do the job. Moreover, the maladies of present day are often the result of cumulative effect, not only of the individual himself, but of generations that sinned against the Divine Order.

Needless to say, it isn't my intention to convey the idea that I leave no room at all for the naturalistic method of treatment. My only intention is to exclude the extreme form of application of this method, as the best method is the combination of both, in the proper ratio, which depends in each case on its own merit.

Finally, I would also mention that here too we find an analogy between the physical and spiritual, especially in the life of the Jew. I mean to say that the spiritual health of the Jew is determined by his daily conduct. In accordance with the Torah and *Mitzvoth*, and,

similarly, his physical health is dependent upon his spiritual health, which is the natural way of life for the Jew. Hence, the observant Jew, who has led as nearly perfect life as possible, requires no special precautions to guard himself against temptation, etc., whereas the one who is not so well equipped, must take precaution upon precaution, and set a fence around a fence to protect himself through doing even a little better than the minimum required by the Torah.

It is surely unnecessary to elaborate on this.

With prayerful wishes to hear good news from you, and with blessing,

## 2. JEALOUSY AMONG SISTERS

By the Grace of G-d

3rd of *Cheshvan*, 5721

Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter of October 18th, with the enclosure.

In reply, I want to say at once that the situation seems to me much better than your brother-in-law described it, for the reasons for your younger daughter's condition are not at all complicated. The causes seem to lie in the fact that your daughter is subconsciously jealous of her older sister, and such a feeling manifests itself by a desire not to be interested in those activities where the person is unable to compete successfully. Therefore, your younger daughter shows little inclination to engage in the activities in which her sister is more successful than she. However, since such is the attitude of jealousy, creating a subconscious feeling of guilt one is prone to compensate for it by an outward show of attachment. That is why she flies to the defense of her sister if anyone should say anything disparaging against her. All this confirms my general view of her

conduct. I trust that her therapist fully agrees with this diagnosis, as he knows her better than I.

At the same time this diagnosis suggests also the method of therapy, namely, that every effort should be made to restore her confidence by offering her opportunities to engage in such activities where she can take a leading part and excel herself. Needless to say this should be done in a gradual way, for, in her present state of mind she would be reluctant to undertake responsibilities all at once. But surely, both at school and in other cultural circles, there are opportunities for her to develop her artistic and other talents. It would be psychologically beneficial to her if the activities would be of a kind in which her sister does not participate. The choice of such activities is fairly wide, and they could be cultural, charitable, or youth work among Jewish youth, and the like.

You do not mention anything about her physical health, especially in regard to puberty. It often happens that where these aspects can be regulated and normalized, there is an immediate improvement in the state of mind, for the emotional life is closely linked with the physical.

Finally, and this is just as essential, the physical and mental life of the Jew is directly linked also with the spiritual life. I trust, therefore, that your daughter will take every effort to live up to the Jewish way of life in accordance with the Torah, which is called the Law of Life, and the *Mitzvoth* whereby Jews live, since these are the channel and vessels to receive G-d's blessings. Needless to say, the parents themselves have to show a living example.

I would suggest that you have the *Mezuzoth* of your home checked, to make sure that they are Kosher. No doubt you also know of the good custom of Jewish women to put aside a small coin for *Tzedoko* before lighting the candles.

Hoping to hear good news from you,

With blessing,

### 3. “MORE THAN I CAN EXPRESS HERE IN WORDS”

By the Grace of G-d

4th of Iyar, 5738

Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greeting:<sup>1</sup>

To begin with a *Brocho*, I want to convey to you my sincere appreciation of your good wishes for my health and in connection with my birthday.

I prayerfully reciprocate your good wishes by reiterating the Divine Promise to our Father Abraham, I (G-d, the Source of all blessings) will bless them that bless you.

Accordingly, may G-d bestow His generous blessings on you and your children and all yours, in all needs, especially to have true Yiddish *Chassidish Torah Nachas* from each other and from each and all of your children, and to enjoy it in good health and *Hatzlocho* in all affairs.

I was particularly pleased that your good wishes were accompanied by your recently concluded work which, I trust, is the forerunner of further accomplishments in this area as well as in related fields, for which I wish you a special *Hatzlocho*.

I am particularly appreciative of your devoted and untiring effort to prepare for publication the paper of my late brother, *Olov HaSholom*. Although it is not in my field, I can see clearly that this was not simply a case of editing, but represents almost a total revision and reworking of the paper. In addition to being instrumental in the publication of it as perfectly as possible, it is also a case of *Gemilus Chesed* for one who is in the World of Truth, which is designated

1. This letter was written to Professor Paul Rosenblum thanking him for his assistance with the posthumous publication of an academic paper that had been written by the Rebbe's brother. For details see Rabbi Chaim Miller, *Turning Judaism Outward* pp. 310-312.

as “*Chesed Shel Emes*,” and is one of the highest forms of *Chesed*. I appreciate what you have done more than I can express here in words.

Again wishing you and all yours good health and prosperity, materially and spiritually.

With blessing,

## 4. MEDICAL DISCOVERIES

By the Grace of G-d

8th of *Tishrei*, 5719

Brooklyn, NY

Greeting and Blessing:

After the long interval I received your letter of September 18th. Although you do not mention it, I trust that you spent the days of *Rosh Hashanah* in an Orthodox congregation and atmosphere, and that your prayers have been accepted, together with those of all our fellow Jews, for a happy New Year.

As requested I will remember your brother in prayer for an improvement in his health. In my opinion it would be advisable that the physicians treating him should be in communication with the Memorial Hospital in New York City where are concentrated the latest developments concerning the treatment of cases such as his, from all parts of the world. I am sure that the physicians in \_\_\_\_\_ are in acquaintance with the physicians at the Memorial Hospital and it would not be difficult for them to be in close contact with each other. I know, for example, that a new discovery was recently made, but which is still under research, and hence is not generally known, not even to the medical profession. Of course, I do not know if this particular treatment, which is based on a medical substance, is applicable to your brother's condition. Nor has this substance even

been given a name yet. But it is only by personal contact that such advanced information may be obtained.

I am glad to read that your company is making progress and I hope that it will continue to do so at an accelerated pace, and that you will have good news to report about this and all other things.

No doubt you have received my letter and good wishes for the New Year, and I reiterate my prayerful wishes for a *Chasimo uGemar Chasimo Toivo*.

With blessing,

## 5. "THE HAPPINESS OF A HUMAN BEING"

By the Grace of G-d

In the Days of Repentance 5719,

Brooklyn, NY

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter of August 21, in which you write about the way of life that your son has recently chosen for himself, having become more religious and observant, devoting time to the study of the Torah, etc., all of which has seemingly filled you with anxiety, as your opening sentence expresses it: "Where are our children going?"

Since your profession is connected with the science of medicine, especially chiropractic, which even more than the other branches stresses the importance of the nervous system for the proper functioning of the entire organism, and no doubt also with the emphasis on the need of the nerves' functioning without outside pressure, it makes it easier for me to explain my position in regard to the question raised in your letter.

My position is based on the authority of our wise ancients, whose views pertinent to our subject matter have been gaining increased

recognition even by modern medical science, namely, that physical health, not to mention spiritual, or, to use a modern idiom, “peace of mind,” is conditioned upon inner security, and the absence of mental (I would say, spiritual) pressures, since any such pressure brings disorder in the normal and proper functioning of the nervous system, thereby affecting sooner or later the proper functioning of the organism. In other words, the most important factor in the happiness of a human being is not so much the externality of things *per se*, but that the person should feel free to conduct his life in accord with his inner spiritual faculties, convictions and desires.

Not many years ago, “peace of mind” was variously predicated on the attainment of certain goals: To the materialistically inclined it meant the amassing of wealth, which they felt would give them security; others sought security in scientific progress, considering modern science as the panacea of all human ills; still others sought security by identifying themselves with a certain movement or ideology, such as socialism, communism, fascism, etc. Finally, there are those who can find security only in religion and faith.

In recent years, however, especially in the last decades, it was clearly demonstrated that wealth offered no security, for we have seen how economically “secure” families have been impoverished overnight. Similarly disappointing have proved political regimes and social movements and “isms” of all sorts. As a result, an overwhelming feeling of insecurity has taken root among growing youths and thinking adolescents, reflected in their vacillation from one extreme to the other, in emotional and mental disturbances, in Juvenile delinquency and rebelliousness, etc., which have spread alarmingly in recent years, as is even better known to the medical profession than to laity.

In the present disturbed society and environment it is, therefore, more vital than ever before that the young generation should feel *terra firma* under their feet. This solid basis can be provided only by finding religion. Consequently, when one’s own child has happily found this security, it should be regarded as G-d’s greatest blessing. For far from being a disturbing factor to their happiness, it is The Factor, one and only, which will ensure their true happiness. It goes without saying that nothing should be done to jeopardize this

factor, not even by any form of pressure, which could only bring disturbance and distortion and unavoidable consequences.

If it is detrimental to bring pressure to bear on any spiritual factor, how much more so in regard to faith. For the essence of our faith is to accept G-d and His precepts as an area which lies above and beyond human comprehension. For, on the one hand to profess faith in G-d and Divine Power and Authority, and on the other to place His commandments under the scrutiny of one's own human intelligence, picking and choosing only that which seems to him "rational", is a contradiction in terms, since no matter how intelligent a person is, his intelligence is finite and limited and cannot be used as a yardstick in the realm of the Infinite. It would therefore be just as illogical and unjustified to attempt any kind of pressure to influence somebody else against his religious beliefs and dictates.

I do not know your son personally, but I have had occasion to meet your daughter-in-law several times while she was a student at Beth Jacob. Since she has chosen your son as her life's partner, I can safely assume that your son's natural faculties and inclinations tally with hers. I therefore congratulate you and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ on having been blessed with such a fine son and daughter-in-law. I am quite confident that if they follow the way of life which you describe, they will be increasingly happy, and you and your wife will have ever growing *Nachas* from them, for, in the final analysis, children's happiness is the parents' true *Nachas*.

Before closing, may I refer to your observation towards the end of your letter about...

...not neglect the physical body; on the contrary, it considers it of paramount importance, and this is, in fact, the basis of the Jewish law that where there is any danger to life or limb, all other laws, even those concerning *Shabbos*, *Yom Kippur*, etc., are suspended. I do take issue, however, on the point of "duality" which would treat the physical and spiritual as two-separate entities. The essence of Jewish monotheism, on the contrary, is that there is unity everywhere, and the body and soul likewise constitute one whole, each complementing the other in complete harmony so that any separation of the two is forced and not natural. This should provide

also my commentary on your question, was it the intention of the Creator that religion should stand still... Should we travel by camel while others travel by air and thus turn back the clock of progress?

He who believes in the Creator as the term implies, not in an abstract sense, or that having created the world the Creator retired to the seventh heaven taking no further interest in His handiwork; but that He constantly creates and guides the destiny of the universe and each and every particular thereof—which indeed is the basis of most deistic religion—and must also realize that no human progress, scientific or otherwise, is possible without His knowledge and will, and that such progress, too, is not exempt from His jurisdiction. Hence, all progress must be utilized for the true benefit of the world, and of mankind in particular. But man has freedom of action and can use such progress for better or for worse. At any rate, to use your parable, surely the fact that one can travel by air does not necessitate that everyone should become a pilot or flight engineer, and it only means that nowadays a person has greater facilities to achieve the real and ultimate good, of which even modern progress should be the servant. There is no greater danger to mankind than in separating technical and scientific progress from morality and true humanitarianism based on Divine Authority, as has to our profound sorrow been demonstrated by the so-called most progressive (scientifically) nations of the world, whose scientific and technological progress has been matched only by their beastliness.

Much more could, of course, be said on the subject matter of our correspondence, but I trust that I have made my position clear to you, and for a person of your standing it will be adequate. I am firmly convinced that the path chosen by your son which, as is evident from your letter, is in complete harmony with that of his wife, is the one that assures their true happiness, and I prayerfully hope that you and your wife will give them every encouragement in that direction.

## 6. THE VALUE OF INDEPENDENCE

By the Grace of G-d

5th of *Kislev* 5729

Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greetings:

I duly received your letter postmarked November 20th, as well as your previous letter.

In reply to your correspondence, and pursuant to our conversation during your visit here, I want to reiterate that every person, in order to be able to express himself fully and be successful in his work, must have a certain measure of independence. This is particularly true in the case of a person whose main activity is intellectual and spiritual, especially in the field of research, where independence of thought and decision is a basic condition of the scientific approach. And inasmuch as a human being is a single entity, it is inevitable that inhibitions in one area or another is bound to have an effect on other areas of one's activity.

The above does not imply that a wife should completely withhold her opinions or suggestions which she considers it her duty to express to her husband. On the contrary, no person should withhold any idea that can be beneficial to any Jew, not to mention when it concerns the best interest of husband and wife, both of whom are like one entity. Nevertheless, you ought to leave your husband a considerable measure of independence in making final decisions. And knowing you and him, I am certain that the proper decisions will be made.

I am gratified to note from your writing that your husband has resumed his research in earnest, and may G-d grant that it be with much *Hatzlocho*.

As for the question of taking time out as a consultant, *etc.*, it is my opinion, as I mentioned in our conversation, that if this will not

interfere with his research work, it will be all right. For, as I have emphasized, his essential work lies in the field of research, and it should have primary attention, all the more so since there has been a considerable interruption.

With regard to the question of stocks, my opinion is that they should not be sold if there would be a loss, G-d forbid. Otherwise, stocks should be sold on the advice of an experienced broker at such time the broker thinks is right for the particular stock.

Generally speaking, I have no right to withhold my general opinion that it is not a good idea to invest in stocks the major part of one's savings. In addition to the consideration that such an investment would be of questionable financial prudence, there is also the factor of the nervous strain that the stock market fluctuations cause to the investor. Also, because such a situation is completely independent of the investor's intelligence and judgment, or at any rate, largely so.

Finally, the present day and age is full of unpredictable developments, and the market is highly sensitive to national and international events. In view of all this, those who ask my advice with regard to the stock market, my usual advice is to rather forgo a percentage of dividends, and invest in more secure and suitable investments.

I emphasize "those who ask my advice." However, since you have not asked my advice, I will not say that you should necessarily act accordingly. My G-d grant that whatever you decide should be with *Hatzlocho* to enjoy your *Parnosso*, and to use your earnings on good, wholesome and happy things, especially in the advancement in matters of Yiddishkeit in general, and Torah-true education of the children in particular, and that you and your husband should bring them up to a life of Torah, *Chuppah* and Good Deeds, in good health and ample sustenance.

May G-d grant that you should have good news to report, including also good news about having been successful in finding a suitable apartment in a desirable neighborhood, as you mention in your letter.

With blessing,

P.S. While the letter was addressed to you, since it is in reply to your letter, it goes without saying that you may show it to your husband, and convey to him my best regards at the same time.

## 7. LIFE'S PROBLEMS

By the Grace of G-d

8 *Cheshvan*, 5713

Brooklyn 13, New York

Blessing and Greeting:

I have duly received your letter, but due to the intervention of the month of *Tishrei* and all the festivals in it, I was unable to reply to it sooner. In the meantime you have no doubt received my good wishes for the New Year.

Referring to your letter and various questions and problems about which you write, I want to dwell on Item 6 of your letter, which contains the key to all the other problems. In this paragraph you mentioned that you feel depressed and cannot see any reasons for a brighter future. You ask how you can get rid of your fears.

The answer is completely simple. When a person will reflect, in a logical way about the creation and the order and precision and laws that are to be found in nature, the conclusion must be inescapable. There is a tremendous system of order in the universe, and strict laws, and, therefore there can be no doubt that the world is regulated by plan, order and purpose.

The very fact that there is order, purpose and law in the universe, must lead one to the conviction that all that is good, since evil is the opposite of order and system, and is associated with chaos.

No matter how much importance a person attaches to ones own self and ones own problems, he must recognize that if there is such order in such a complicated universe, how much easier it is to bring about law and order in ones own small universe—a thought which should lead to satisfaction and peace of mind.

If there are people who complicate their lives, it is because people have free choice of action and mind. But this very fact of the human being having a free will is part of the entire system of goodness and purpose in the world, for it was G-d's design that the human being should not be an automaton but should be able, freely, to choose eternal life and goodness.

If we consider all of the above, we must come to the firm conviction that if man would not upset his own life through circumstances depending upon his free will, he would inevitably come to the good. Even if, temporarily, one finds oneself in an unpleasant or painful situation, it is surely infinitely insignificant by comparison to all the good that will result from it.

By way of illustration: If you see a person working a job for somebody else, it would seem at first glance that the employer is exploiting the knowledge, experience and energy of the employee, and that the employee seemingly has no immediate benefit from his toil. To him who is unaware that at the end of the week the worker will receive his pay envelope, it would seem the height of cruelty and injustice to exploit another human being in this fashion. But come pay day at the end of the week, the worker will receive full compensation for his sweat and toil, which will enable him to support himself, his wife and family. It will then be clear that not only is there no injustice or cruelty in such work, but that the work is amply compensated.

Similarly in one's personal life. If it seems to one that there appears to be no purpose in his personal life and that there seems to be, rather, more pain than pleasure in it, it is only because one cannot foresee the future and the results of the circumstances which have caused such pain and exertion.

However, the firm faith and knowledge that the Almighty is Master of the universe, and that every human being is but a small part of it, and, therefore, the Almighty is Master also of the personal life of each human being with all that happens in it, also gives the certain knowledge that no matter how ones life is shaped, there must be justice in it and each human being will, sooner or later, depending upon his merit and energy, eventually see that that is so.

In the light of the above, you may be quite certain that there is a good answer to all your problems and that eventually all the complications will be resolved satisfactorily. Needless to say, one has to seek to solve ones problems, but there can be no room for a feeling of depression and certainly no room for a feeling of dependency, which can be nothing but destructive.

With regard to Item No. 1, in which you complain about lack of good health, it is no doubt largely due to the state of nervousness and depression you are in. I am sure that if you will try to correct this, which depends entirely on you, you will also find a considerable improvement in your health, and you will also be able to respond much better to the treatments which specialists give you.

The same applies to Items No. 2, 3 and 4. If you will develop a more optimistic view on life it will give you a more cheerful disposition, your job will not appear so difficult and tedious, and you will not feel so unhappy about it. This will also help you to get your suitable match in due course.

With regard to Item No. 5, concerning the “*Ayin Hora*” the best thing is to dismiss it from your mind and give a few cents every morning for *Tzedoko* before the prayer of *Shema*.

Item No. 7, regarding psychiatric help. If you mean seeking psychiatric advice through a visit or two, and the psychiatrist in question is one who understands the atmosphere in the Jewish religious home, there can be no objection to it. However, I would not recommend that you undertake lengthy psychiatric treatment, since you yourself could do considerably more for yourself than any psychiatrist can do for you.

I have turned over your contribution to our Special Charity Fund, from which help is given anonymously to deserving cases, which is one of the highest forms of *Tzedoko*, and I trust that it will add to your merits to become one who is happy with his lot and soon to see with your own eyes that you have good reasons to be happy.

With prayerful wishes and blessings,

## 8. THE FAMILY UNIT

By the Grace of G-d

8th of *Tishrei*, 5744

Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greeting:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of Sept. 8th, in which you write about your mother. May G-d grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

I trust there is no need to explain to you at length that since all blessings come from G-d, and the channel to receive them is through the everyday life and conduct in accordance with His Will, namely in accordance with His Torah and *Mitzvoth*, every additional effort in this direction, though a must for its own sake, widens the channels to receive G-d's blessings in all needs.

There are *Mitzvoth* which are connected with particular blessings, and when those blessings are needed, it calls for special care to observe those *Mitzvoth*, within general adherence to the Jewish way of life. In regard to your mother and her state of health, it is particularly important to be extra careful in regard to the *Kashrus* of foods and beverages.

A further important point is that inasmuch as all the members of a Jewish family constitute one entity, like one body, where a benefit

to one part is a benefit to all, every additional effort on the part of members of the family, particularly of children in relation to parents, to strengthen their own adherence to the Torah and *Mitzvoth* in the everyday life, is bound to have a good effect on the entire family, especially the one who needs it most. And, needless to say, there is always room for improvement in all matters of goodness and holiness. Torah and *Mitzvoth*, which, though a must for their own sake are also the channels to receive...



# DO WE LEARN KABBALAH?

## Attitudes to the Study of Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah, from the Dawn of Chasidism to Present Day Chabad

by *Rabbi Chaim Miller*

In the contemporary Chabad community, study of the primary texts of Kabbalah is not emphasized. Chabad Chasidic thought (Chasidus) is studied extensively, as are the sermons (*sichos*) of the Lubavitcher Rebbes, texts which themselves are rich in citations from, and commentary on, Kabbalistic sources. However, for reasons I will explore in this essay, Kabbalah study from primary texts, such as the Zohar and works of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (*Arizal*), is relatively uncommon in Chabad. This has been noted by the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe himself: “*Generally speaking, Kabbalah study was not common, even among Chabad Chasidim.*”<sup>1</sup>

1. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos 5745, (Vaad Hanachos Lahak, 1985) volume 2, p. 1147*. The Rebbe stressed that “Kabbalah study was not common, *even among Chabad Chasidim*” since, of the various strands of Chasidic thought, Chabad Chasidus is particularly rich in its use of Kabbalistic sources (see below section “Lurianic Kabbalah

Is this omission intentional, a matter of principle? Or is Kabbalah study deemed worthwhile by Chabad, but neglected merely due to the priority of other activities?

In other words, has Chabad adopted an *exclusivist* position toward Jewish mysticism, that only the study of Chasidus is to be pursued; or is it more *inclusivist*, seeing value in a broader curriculum of Kabbalah study, while retaining an emphasis on its own particular school of thought?

As we shall see, there are sources that point in both directions. My impression is that, notwithstanding some comments which appear to be strongly exclusivist, the position of contemporary Chabad is, in fact, inclusivist. Before offering my analysis, let us avail ourselves of the relevant statements on this issue.

## ZOHAR STUDY IN EARLY CHABAD

While there is much internal consistency between the teachings of the seven Chabad Rebbes, some of their positions have shifted over time. An example of this, relevant to our discussion, is a strong emphasis by the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, on Zohar study, which did not persist in later generations.

In *Likutei Torah*, a volume of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's discourses published in 1848, the author recommends that, before prayer one should prepare through:

*"The study of mussar (ethical texts), particularly the words of mussar found in the Zohar, a term which means 'illumination.'"*<sup>2</sup>

This echoes a similar practice taught by the founder of Chasidism.

in Early Chabad"). One might therefore expect that Chabad Chasidim in particular might be inclined to Kabbalah study.

2. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Likutei Torah* (Zhitomir 1848; new edition Kehos, 2002), *Deuteronomy* 43c.

*“The Ba’al Shem Tov instructed people that before each prayer they should study a passage of Zohar or Tikunei Zohar.”<sup>3</sup>*

In the compendium *Meah Shearim*, published in 1912, a more rigorous program of Zohar study is recommended by Rabbi Shneur Zalman:

*“A person should conduct himself as follows: Immediately after prayer, he should study Mishnah and Shulchan Aruch, i.e., rulings in Jewish law (halacha pesuka). Regarding the remainder of his study, the following distinction applies. If a person is primarily a businessman, **most of his study should be in the holy Zohar....** A person who is not primarily a businessman, should study Gemara with major commentaries (poskim).”<sup>4</sup>*

In the same compendium was also find the following directive:

*“You should commit yourself to study books of Musar (ethics) **every day... especially Sefer Ha-Zohar.** Try to study this when you are at least a little bit inspired with reverence and faith.”<sup>5</sup>*

3. Rabbi Mordechai Twersky of Chernobyl, *Likutei Torah* (Piotrków, 1889) p. 6a. For the *Ba’al Shem Tov’s* interest in the Zohar see: Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome Mintz (trans.), *In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov* (Schoken, 1970), pp. 42, 49, 165, 244.

The Zohar was particularly appreciated by early Chasidic master Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, who commented: “The Zohar sustained my soul.” “The Zohar helped me to be a Jew.” “In matters of both the spirit and the flesh the Zohar is a guide.” “The bitter taste of exile is with me.... Only when I immerse myself in the study of Zohar do I find peace.” “I achieve inner tranquility only in prayer or in the study of Zohar.” “Study the Zohar... then study it even more” (cited in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *In the Circle of the Ba’al Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism* (Chicago University Press, 1985), p. 5.

4. Chaim Bichovsky and Chaim Heilman (eds.) *Meah Shearim* (Berdichev 1912; reprint Kehos 2005), p. 50. The passage also appears in *Ma’amarei Admor Ha-Zaken, Ha-Ketzarim*, (Kehos 1981), p. 571. (Emphasis is added here, and in all further citations, unless noted).
5. *Meah Shearim* p. 40. The authorship of this text is unclear. Multiple sources attribute it to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, though it has also been attributed to

In a few sources, Zohar is emphasized by Rabbi Shneur Zalman as a focus for Shabbos study. In one discourse he writes:

***“You should study a little Zohar every day, and on Shabbos, Zohar the entire day.”***<sup>6</sup>

The importance of Zohar study on Shabbos is echoed by Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s son and successor, Rabbi Dov Ber, in his introduction to *Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav*.

*“Shabbos is a time for the study of Sefer Ha-Zohar, delving a little into its Kabbalistic commentaries, such as those of Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, Sefer Mikdash Melech, Sefer Likutei Torah, etc.”*<sup>7</sup>

Indeed we find that this was the practice of Rabbi Shneur Zalman himself from whom:

*“We heard commentaries and insights on sections of the Zohar every Shabbos night... And as I heard from his holy mouth, not once or twice, that throughout his entire life, he dedicated Shabbos in particular to Zohar study in great depth (namely, on the night of Shabbos, as we witnessed).”*<sup>8</sup>

While initially delivered to a small group,<sup>9</sup> these commentaries were subsequently edited and published by Rabbi Dov Ber as

Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk and Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch. See note of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, to *Meah Shearim*, Kehos edition, p. 55a; Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine, *Migdal Oz* (Kfar Chabad, 1980), p. 421, note 4\*.

6. Mondshine, *Migdal Oz* p. 414; *Ma’amarei Admor Ha-Zaken, Al-Parshios ha-Torah*, vol. 2 (Kehos 1982), p. 831.
7. *Shulchan Aruch Admor Ha-Zaken* (new edition, Kehos 2001), p. 16. Zohar study is suited for Shabbos since it is not typified by disputes, like the Talmud, and is therefore conducive to the restful spirit of Shabbos (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Sichos Kodesh* 5740, vol. 3, p. 494).
8. Letter to the Chabad community by Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s son, in his *Biuray Ha-Zohar* (Kapust, 1816 new edition, Kehos 2015), p. 1.
9. See *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5750, vol. 1, p. 103, note 31.

*Biurey Ha-Zohar (Commentaries on the Zohar)*, a genre which continued to be prominent during the first three generations of Chabad leadership.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these texts recommending Zohar study, we also find that Rabbi Shneur Zalman demanded mastery of the Zohar as an admission requirement for his advanced Torah academy (*ched-er*). The criteria for admission were:

*“Fluency in the Talmud, Midrash, Ikrim, Kuzari and to be knowledgeable in Zohar.”*<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most far-reaching encouragement of Zohar study appears in Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s *Laws of Torah Study*, where he recommends that every person:

*“Set aside a small amount of time every day to learn through once the entire texts of: the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, Mechilta, Sifra, Sifrei, Tosefta; as well all the Midrashim of Tanaim and Amoraim all of whose words constitute the Oral Torah which was ‘given to Moses at Sinai,’<sup>12</sup> such as: most Midrash Rabah, Tanchuma, the Pesiktos etc., and most importantly the Midrash of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. This is in order that a person will complete the entire Oral Law at least once in his lifetime, so as to fulfill the command, ‘You shall carefully guard all the commandments etc.,’ (Deuteronomy 1:22).”*<sup>13</sup>

10. In 1818, Rabbi Dov Ber authored *Kuntres Ma'amarei Zohar* (printed in *Ma'amarei Admor Ha-Emtzoie, Kuntreism* (Kehos, 1991), pp. 199-220). Zohar commentaries of the Third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, “*Tzemach Tzedek*,” (1789-1866), are published in *Biurey Ha-Zohar Le-Admor Tzemach Tzedek* (Kehos 1968-1978), 2 volumes.
11. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, *Sefer Ha-Sichos* 5700, (Kehos 1986), p. 22, note 14\*.
12. See *Babylonian Talmud, Berachos* 5a; *Jerusalem Talmud, Peah* 2:4.
13. *Laws of Torah Study* 2:10 in Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Shulchan Aruch*, volume 5 (new edition, Kehos 2004), p. 471. See also *ibid.* 2:1, *idem. Likutei Torah, Leviticus* 5d; *Song* 3c and the discussion in *Likutei Sichos* vol. 30, p. 173-4.

Here Rabbi Shneur Zalman instructs us to study the entire Zohar at least once in our lives. As a ruling which appears in a text of Jewish law, it is clearly directed at the general public, and not an elite group, or to Chasidim in particular.<sup>14</sup>

The suitability of the *entire* Zohar for study, is stressed elsewhere by Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

*“In the case of Zohar, study it in order.”*<sup>15</sup>

A few anecdotes from the second and third generation of Chabad have reached us which also paint Zohar study in a positive light.

*“The assistant of the Mitteler Rebbe (Rabbi Dov Ber, Second Chabad Rebbe) would study both Mishnah and Zohar on a daily basis. The Mitteler Rebbe once asked him, ‘Which gives you more pleasure: Mishnah study or Zohar study?’ “*

*“He answered, ‘Rebbe, the truth is that with Mishnah study, I have some understanding, but with the Zohar I don’t understand anything. But I still enjoy Zohar study more.’”*

*“The Rebbe said to him, “The truth is that **your soul has more pleasure from Zohar study and your soul does understand it.**”*<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known Chabad teaching encouraging Zohar study is a remark of the Third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (*Tzemach Tzedek*), which was included in the popular inspirational anthology *Hayom Yom*.

*“The Tzemach Tzedek once told Reb Hendel (Kugel) in a private audience: ‘**Zohar study elevates the soul; Midrash***

14. The author does preface the passage by stating, “It is desirable *according to Kabbalah*,” but this is a reference merely to the *source* of this practice, namely, that it is not rooted in the Talmudic literature.
15. Mondshine, *Migdal Oz*, p. 424.
16. Avraham Chanoch Glitzenstein (ed.) *Otzar Sipurei Chabad* vol. 16 (Kehos 1997), p. 82, citing Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dworkin.

*study awakens the heart; (recital of ) Psalms with tears, 'cleans the vessel.'*"<sup>17</sup>

Based on all of the above, it seems that Zohar study was vigorously encouraged in early Chabad, without any notable restriction or reservation.

## ZOHAR STUDY IN LATER CHABAD

The stress on Zohar study that we find in these early writings is, by and large, not echoed in later Chabad. As generations have passed, the emphasis has shifted almost exclusively to the study of Chabad Chasidus, with little mention of Zohar study.

In fact, even Rabbi Shneur Zalman's instruction to study Zohar before prayer, (which was well known, having been published in *Likutei Torah*), was subsequently recast, as the following anecdote illustrates.

*"Reb Pesach (Malastovker) told my grandfather (Mordechai Yoel Duchman) that when he was in a private audience with Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe asked him, 'Pesach! What is your practice before prayer?'"*

*"He answered, 'That which is stated' (i.e., what is written in Likutei Torah: mikveh, charity and Zohar study)."*

*"Tzemach Tzedek replied, 'Charity is a mitzvah all day. As for mikvah, don't overly extend yourself. Regarding Zohar study, my grandfather (Rabbi Shneur Zalman) really meant: study Chasidus.'"*<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, we do find that Rabbi Shneur Zalman's recommendation was cited *unmodified*, three generations after *Tzemach*

17. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (ed.), *Hayom Yom* (Kehos, 1942), entry for 16th Teves.

18. Shneur Zalman Duchman, *Le-Shaima Ozen* (Brooklyn, 1963), p. 202.

Tzedek, by the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn:

*“Regarding the study of Zohar and Midrash before prayer, etc., this opens up the heart and the mind to be greatly awakened during prayer.”<sup>19</sup>*

Still, we do not find Zohar study encouraged with the same frequency and emphasis as in the early generations of Chabad. Apparently, when the movement was first founded there was a paucity of Chasidic texts available, and as this situation began to change, the community’s natural preference was for Chasidus over Zohar—a chasid will naturally be attracted to the teachings of his master, the Rebbe. Also, the Zohar lacks a commentary that renders the text accessible for the non-specialist and for many it is barely comprehensible. (It is also written in a difficult Aramaic, and a full translation into Hebrew was not available until relatively recently.) This in contrast to Chabad Chasidic texts which go to great lengths to make mystical concepts relatable through parables and psychological insights.

It appears, then, that Zohar study became less prominent in Chabad largely because its role as an inspirational text was gradually replaced by Chabad Chasidus. As the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe stressed in a sermon in 1960.

*“Before Chasidus came to light, the inner teachings of Torah were elusive. There was the practice of studying, or merely reciting the Zohar, and various works encourage this practice, even when ‘a person doesn’t understand what he is saying.’”*

*“Even when Kabbalah was understood, its real meaning remained elusive, except to a few elevated souls, since there was a lack of illustrative parables and examples from the human experience; the commentaries chose to focus on debating technical terms. Afterwards Chasidus demonstrat-*

19. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, *Sefer Ha-Ma’amarim* 5682-3, (Kehos 1987), p. 236 .

*ed the meaning of the inner teachings of Torah... it explained them in a way that everyone can find relatable.”<sup>20</sup>*

It is not surprising, then, that while the Seventh Rebbe promoted Chabad Chasidus vigorously, he rarely encouraged Zohar study. Chasidus, he felt, had adapted Zohar (and other teachings of Kabbalah) to a format which was more accessible, relevant and inspirational.

The point was made emphatically in a talk from 1953, referring specifically to Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s recommendation to study Zohar before prayer.

*“Before prayer there is the requirement to study Zohar and Reishis Chochmah; but the Rebbes and senior Chasidim have taught that (for this goal) the necessary parts of Zohar and Reishis Chochmah have been included in Chassidus.”<sup>21</sup>*

However, that is not to say that the Rebbe was *opposed* to Zohar study, which he would sometimes encourage in public sermons. For example, on *Rosh Chodesh Av* 1980, the first of nine days of intense mourning for the Temple, the Rebbe proposed:

*“Each day of the ‘nine days’ everyone ought to add in the three areas of Torah, worship and acts of kindness. In Torah: Additional study, more than the regular study carried out each day, primarily in the study of halachah, **and also in the study of Zohar.**”<sup>22</sup>*

20. *Toras Menachem* vol. 27, p. 152.

21. *Sichos Kodesh* 5713, p. 316 (Yiddish). In a Hebrew rendition of this sermon, “necessary” is rendered “necessary for a person’s worship” (*Toras Menachem* vol. 9, p. 17).

22. *Sichos Kodesh* 5740, volume 3, p. 690. In this, as in most other instances below, the Rebbe suggested to supplement the Zohar study with commentaries from Chabad Chasidus. He likewise encouraged (non-Chabad) students of the Zohar to avail themselves of Chabad Chasidus to enhance their understanding of the material (see, for example, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 4, p. 331).

Similarly, on *Lag B'Omer*, the anniversary of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's passing, in 1988 he suggested:

*"It would be a good idea for there to be more study of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's Torah, particularly the Book of Zohar."*<sup>23</sup>

In 1991 when the Rebbe introduced a campaign to study Torah passages relating to redemption, he suggested looking for sources in:

*"Scriptures and the Oral Law: Talmud, Midrashim, and especially the inner parts of Torah, beginning with the Book of Zohar."*<sup>24</sup>

The Rebbe also demonstrated a generally positive attitude to the publishing and dissemination of the Zohar. To one author, who had compiled teachings of the Zohar on the weekly Torah portion, the Rebbe wrote:

*"Regarding your comment that I am not happy with your book 'Leket Shmuel,' anthologized from the Zohar according to the order of scripture—naturally, this has no basis. On the contrary, every effort to publicize the inner part of Torah is extremely desirable."*<sup>25</sup>

To another author who wished to produce a compendium of easier Zohar passages, the Rebbe initially expressed concern that a superficial rendition of the text is, perhaps, not a publishing priority, as it is not especially nourishing for the reader. But then he concluded:

23. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos*, 5748, volume 3, p. 314.

24. *Sefer Ha-Sichos* 5751, volume 2, p. 501.

25. Letter to Rabbi Shmuel Kinpes (1883-1979), dated 3rd *Shevat* 5718. The Rebbe had previously declined to offer his approbation to the book (letter dated 9th *Shevat* 5717), which had led Rabbi Kinpes to believe that the Rebbe was "not happy" with the book. In reality, the Rebbe had declined as it was not his custom to endorse published works. See also *Igros Kodesh* vol. 17, p. 165.

*“However, since every effort at disseminating Torah is so important, I do not, G-d forbid wish to express an opinion to the contrary.”<sup>26</sup>*

On another occasion, the Rebbe assisted Rabbi Simcha Ashlag in securing a substantial donation (from Rabbi Joseph Gutnick) for the printing of his grandfather’s multi-volume *Zohar im Perush ha-Sulam*.<sup>27</sup>

We also know of an instance where the Rebbe offered his blessing to a Zohar study group, and responded to their questions.<sup>28</sup>

While he generally did not favor the “magical” use of Zohar, we do find two letters where the Rebbe recommends reading the Zohar as a supernatural remedy for vision problems.<sup>29</sup>

As for the restrictions on Zohar study which, due to its esoteric nature, have been aired in Rabbinic literature over the centuries, the Rebbe was quite explicit.

*“While the Zohar is categorized as ‘secret (sod),’ i.e., from among the esoteric sections of the Torah, nevertheless, subsequent to the printing of the Zohar anybody can learn from it, so it is now considered exoteric.”<sup>30</sup>*

In summary: While Zohar study was encouraged in early Chabad, in more recent generations the emphasis has shifted toward the study of Chasidus. We do not, however, find any restrictions attached to Zohar study emanating from Chabad, and there were occasions when the Rebbe encouraged it.

26. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 17, p. 165. The Rebbe therefore recommended the author to seek the advice of senior Rabbis in Jerusalem.

27. The story is recounted by Rabbi Ashlag at [https://youtu.be/-Q8\\_jyqpVGg](https://youtu.be/-Q8_jyqpVGg).

28. Unpublished letter in my archive (from 1951).

29. Together with reading *Tanya*. See *Igros Kodesh* volume 5, letter 1360; vol. 7, letter 2137.

30. *Toras Menachem*, volume 50 (1967), p. 23.

## LURIANIC KABBALAH IN EARLY CHASIDISM

While the attitude to Zohar study in Chabad is, overall, a positive one, the same level of openness cannot be said with regard to the study of Lurianic Kabbalah. This is not a uniquely Chabad phenomenon, and is based on a concern voiced by the founder of Chasidism, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* himself.

The following citation, found in *Tzemach Tzedek's* popular compendium of discourses *Derech Mitzvosecha*, is well known in Chabad circles.

*“And it was for this reason that the Ba'al Shem Tov instructed not to learn works of Kabbalah. For if a person does not know how to strip away the concepts (in Kabbalah) from their physical context, the study will make his (conception of G-d) far too physical.... This is notwithstanding the fact that the words of Arizal are reliable and true.”<sup>31</sup>*

The *Ba'al Shem Tov* certainly did not question the authenticity of Lurianic Kabbalah, which he deemed “reliable and true.” There is also no doubt that the *Ba'al Shem Tov* himself studied Lurianic Kabbalah and that his teachings were consistent with it.<sup>32</sup> He was however concerned that Lurianic Kabbalah might be misinterpreted by the general public, and therefore instructed not to study it.<sup>33</sup>

31. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (*Tzemach Tzedek*), *Derech Mitzvosecha*, (Poltava 1911; new edition, Kehos 1991), p. 115b.

32. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Igros Kodesh* p. 86.

33. *Tzemach Tzedek* initially writes that “the *Ba'al Shem Tov* instructed not to learn *works of Kabbalah*” which, at first glance, might be understood as applying to *all* works of Kabbalah, even the Zohar. However, from all the citations below it will become clear that his objection was aimed specifically at Lurianic Kabbalah. In fact, this very passage, makes the point clear, “This is notwithstanding the fact that **the words of Arizal** are reliable and true.” (We have also seen above that the *Ba'al Shem Tov* had a positive attitude to Zohar study).

This is an important distinction which is sometimes lost in Chasidic circles, where the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* “instruction” is mistakenly interpreted as applying to *all* texts of Kabbalah.

*Tzemach Tzedek* identifies one such concern: a confusion about the identity of the ten *sefiros* (Divine energies/attributes). Kabbalah associates each of the *sefiros* with different Divine names (*E-I, Elokim* etc.). The *Ba'al Shem Tov's* concern was that, in associating a Divine attribute with the name of G-d, a practitioner may fail to realize that the particular *sefirah* itself is not G-d, but a tool/energy through which the infinite G-d acts. He may fail to “strip away the concepts from their physical context.”<sup>34</sup>

In one of his discourses, Rabbi Shneur Zalman indicates that the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* concern is particularly relevant to the Lurianic doctrine of *tzimzum*, the withdrawal of Divine light that preceded creation.<sup>35</sup>

*“The concept of tzimzum of the Infinite Light mentioned in Etz Chaim...<sup>36</sup> needs to be understood well and thoroughly stripped from any physical connotation, for the Ba'al Shem Tov protested against those who studied Kabbalah and did not know to interpret (its symbols) non-physically.”<sup>37</sup>*

A comparable distinction is also made in Rabbi Meshulam Feivish Heller of Zabrizza (1742-1794), *Yosher Divrei Emes* (Munkatch 1905), p. 25b: “Concerning study of the writings of Arizal: I know that you will not study it without someone greater than you are, and you are unable to find someone. But you can study *Sharei Orah, Ginas Egoz* and, primarily, the *Zohar* and *Tikunei Zohar*.”

The more “dangerous” nature of Lurianic teachings was also recognized in the ban against Kabbalah study by the sages of Brody in 1757 (as part of their struggle against Frankism), which forbade *Zohar* (and Kabbalah of Rabbi Moses Cordovero) to those under the age of thirty, and Lurianic Kabbalah to those under forty.

34. The same concern is mentioned, in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Likutei Torah* (*Leviticus*, 51c). See also *Tzemach Tzemach's* remarks in his *Ohr Ha-Torah, Exodus* pp. 106 and 849.
35. See discussion in Rabbi Chaim Miller, *The Practical Tanya*, volume 2 (Kol Menachem, 2017), pp. 99ff.
36. A primary source text of Lurianic Kabbalah, authored by *Arizal's* foremost student Rabbi Chaim Vital.
37. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Ma'amarei Admor Ha-Zaken, Inyanim*, vol. 2, (*Kehos*, 2015), p. 484.

Who were the students of Kabbalah to whom the *Ba'al Shem Tov* “protested” and “instructed not to learn works of Kabbalah,” who “did not know how to divorce the concepts from their physical context”?

If we bear in mind that the *Ba'al Shem Tov* lived at a time when Sabbateanism and Frankism continued to pose a major threat to the traditional community, and that these movements were propelled by Kabbalistic teachings, it is not hard to imagine why conservatism with the public teaching of Kabbalah was recommended. This concern was in fact articulated explicitly by the *Ba'al Shem Tov* in a citation that has reached us from Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz “the Seer” of Lublin, through his student Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein.

*“I heard my master, of blessed memory (the Seer of Lublin), say of those followers of the sect which made a desecration of G-d’s name in an event that occurred in the days of the Taz<sup>38</sup>— it was because they desired to have revelations of Elijah, Divine inspiration and prophecy through yichudim (mystical practices) using (Divine) names. But they did not refine their character or humble their material selves, so they were unworthy... they performed yichudim without refining their material natures. They pictured heavenly forms under the ‘chariot’ (in a physical way) with the result that thoughts of adultery got the better of them—Heaven forbid—and what happened happened—Heaven spare us. This is what my master said.*

*“And he said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, that these fools studied this wisdom without the capacity of reverence and fear of Heaven. That is why they took it all in a physical sense and, as a result, they went astray.”<sup>39</sup>*

38. Rabbi David *ha-Levi* Segal (1586–1667), author of *Turei Zahav*, an important commentary on the Code of Jewish Law. The “sect” refers to the followers of Shabbatai Tzevi (1626-76).
39. Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein of Zidichov (Ziditshoyv), *Depart from Evil and Do Good* (Lublin 1912, new edition Jerusalem 1997), p. 93. See also Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Epstein, *Ma’or Va-Shemesh* (Warsaw, 1877), p. 34.

The explicit symbolism of Lurianic Kabbalah, which is filled with references to the “intimate union” of gendered energies, was inappropriate for individuals who had not tamed their passions and “*humbled their material selves.*” As a result, when they “*pictured heavenly forms*” it ignited their passions and led to the lewd behavior which characterized the Sabbatean and Frankist movements.

The point is made more clearly by a passage from Chasidic master Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin, who writes that Sabbateanism was caused by:

*“Their immersion in the wisdom of Kabbalah while the heart was filled with earthly passions, strengthening their material side. When they read descriptions of cohabitation, embracing, and kissing (of the Divine attributes, in Lurianic Kabbalah) etc., it gave them adulterous thoughts, may G-d spare us, to the point that they sinned greatly.”*<sup>40</sup>

In such a climate, the *Ba’al Shem Tov* was strongly opposed to any public teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah. This is corroborated from the following anecdote which has reached us from the notes of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740–1809), an important disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and colleague of Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

*“Once the Ba’al Shem Tov spoke with him (the Maggid) and rebuked him for expounding on the Kabbalah in public.”*

*“(The Maggid) responded, ‘Why then, master, do you expound Kabbalah in public?’”*

*“The Ba’al Shem Tov replied, ‘My style, in public sermons, is to convey the esoteric world of Etz Chaim, as understood through parallels to human experience in this world. So I render the physical, spiritual.’”*

40. Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin, *Divrei Sofrim* (Lublin 1939), p. 64. Curiously, Shabbatai Zvi himself was critical of Lurianic writings for focussing too much on symbolism while not making its meaning clear. He is quoted as saying, “*Arizal made a wonderfully beautiful chariot, but did not say who was riding in it*” (Avraham Cardozo, *Raza de-Razin* cited in Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1973), p. 904).

*“But you, sir, cite the esoteric symbolism verbatim, so you render the spiritual, physical.”<sup>41</sup>*

Lurianic Kabbalah (*Etz Chaim*) is dominated by very physical and anthropomorphic symbolism. We learn of the Divine “mother” and “father,” limbs of the Divine “body,” and spiritual phenomena are depicted by spatial analogies such as “lines” and “circles.” The *Ba'al Shem Tov* was concerned that if this material was cited verbatim in public to lay audiences, the physical connotation of these metaphors might be taken too literally. This would “render the spiritual (concepts in *Etz Chaim* overly) physical.”

The danger is therefore two-fold: 1. The *theological* error of understanding the symbolism too physically. 2. The *behavioral* deviance that may result, when individuals who are not sufficiently refined, are immersed in the explicit imagery of Lurianic Kabbalah.

The *Ba'al Shem Tov*'s “style”—which we would now call “Chasidus”—was to emphasize the *inner meaning* of Lurianic teachings with illustrations from the human experience, minimizing (or perhaps excluding completely) the physical symbols of *Etz Chaim*, which could easily be misinterpreted.<sup>42</sup> Using examples from human psychology to illustrate spiritual phenomena, the *Ba'al Shem*

41. *Dibros ha-Maggid Mi-Mezritch Mi-Ksav Yad (Machon Genuzim 2018)*, p. 397. The same anecdote is found in *Ohr Ha-Emes: Imrei Tzadikim* (Zhitomir 1900), p. 72, but with the Maggid rebuking an unnamed preacher.

42. Since Lurianic Kabbalah rarely reveals the inner meaning (*nimshal*) of any one of its symbols (*mashalim*), it is a matter of controversy whether it is possible for anyone to discern it. The prevailing view among Sefardic Kabbalists (in Teiman, Iraq and North Africa) is that the *nimshal* is not available to us; we must simply learn Kabbalah as it has been revealed, as a sacred wisdom. As contemporary author, Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Hillel writes, summarizing the position of the leading Sefardic Kabbalist, Rabbi Shalom Sharabi (1720-1777):

*“There is no possibility whatsoever to grasp the inner ‘nimshal’ hidden in the text and its symbols. Ask yourself: Is it possible to interpret a riddle without first knowing the whole of the riddle itself, in all its detail? That is why our master Rabbi Shalom Sharabi—and following him, the works of most early and later Kabbalists—set their primary goal to study the teachings of Arizal, to know with as much clarity as possible, the stated symbolism (mashal ha-chitzon)... This is our primary task”* (Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel, *Ahavas Shalom* (Jerusalem, 2002), p. 124).

Тов “rendered the physical, spiritual” taking a familiar aspect of physical life and disclosing the spiritual energy which it embodies.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman once expressed the same idea to one of his followers more succinctly:

The first to propose a framework for understanding the underlying *nimshal* of the Lurianic system was Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Ramchal* (1707-46), see idem. *Choker u'Mekubal* 3a; *Adir Ba-Marom* 2a-b. Later on, attention to the *nimshal* became a hallmark of the commentaries on Lurianic Kabbalah authored by Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag (1885–1954). Rabbi Ashlag, whose upbringing was Chasidic, was dismayed when he encountered the Sefardic Kabbalists in Jerusalem, who were opposed to elucidating the *nimshal* of the Lurianic system, as the following incident (which he shared) illustrates.

*“I asked them, ‘Do you have a teacher who knows the inner meaning of this material?’*

*“They replied to me, ‘Heaven forbid! There is no inner meaning beyond what is stated in the text that has been transmitted to us! Nothing more, G-d forbid!’”*

*“I asked them, ‘Do you think Rabbi Chaim Vital knew the inner meaning?’”*

*“They replied, ‘He certainly didn’t know any more than we know.’”*

*“I asked what they thought of Arizal himself. They replied, ‘He certainly did not know of any inner meaning. Everything he knew, he told his student Rabbi Chaim Vital, and it has reached us.’”*

*“I laughed at them very much. ‘If so how could have Arizal composed the text if he didn’t understand it?’*

*“They replied, ‘He received the composition from Elijah, who knew the inner meaning, because he was an angel.’”*

*“At this point I became furious with them. I lacked the ability to tolerate them.”* (Letter of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag reproduced in Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Gottleib, *Ha-Sulam* (Jerusalem, 1997), p. 61).

It is important to note, however, that *Ramchal*, Beshtian *Chasidus* and Ashlagian Kabbalah all offer different interpretations of the Lurianic *nimshal*, each following their own path. They do, however, all share a conviction in the value of the *nimshal* and an optimistic viewpoint concerning our ability to discern it.

The Vilna Gaon was of the view that the *nimshal* can be discerned, and cited *Ramchal* as a precedent (see letter printed in Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, (Chaim Friedlander (ed.)), *Da’as Tevunos (Bnei Brak 1975)* vol.1, p. 236). This theme is developed in the works of his disciples, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Shklov and Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, (and later on, Rav Kook). Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, however, emphasized the elusiveness of the *mashal*, like the Sefardic Kabbalists.

*“The Alter Rebbe said to Zalman of Koritz, ‘Etz Chaim is a book of mussar (ethics).’”*<sup>43</sup>

We find an identical observation from Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, who said that:

*“Recently he had completed the Etz Chaim and saw that it was all mussar.”*<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, *Etz Chaim*, which deals exclusively with Kabbalistic theosophy, is very far from being a *mussar text*. With these remarks, Rabbi Shneur Zalman and Rabbi Nachman apparently meant to say that the onus is on the student of *Etz Chaim* to *render it into* a practical text, to find parallels and lessons in human experience.

If these lessons are of such importance why did *Arizal* himself neglect them?

The following visionary exchange has reached us from Chasidic Master Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Yehudah Yechiel Eichenstein of Safrin, in his mystical diary, *Megilas Setarim*.

*“Our master Rabbi Yisrael Ba’al Shem Tov, once asked our master, the Arizal: ‘Why did you speak of the secrets so openly and not in the path of worship?’*

*(Arizal) answered him that if he had lived two more years, everything would have been fixed.”*<sup>45</sup>

In this view, *Arizal’s* lack of attention to “the path of worship” (*i.e.*, to *mussar*), which *Ba’al Shem Tov* deemed so problematic for the unlettered public, is to be seen as a tragic consequence of *Arizal’s* short life. (*Arizal* died from a plague at the age of 38, a few years after he began teaching Kabbalah in Tzefat).

43. Rabbi Shmuel Grunem Esterman, *Ramach Osios* in *Kisvei Ha-Rashag Esterman* (Israel 2015), sec. 69, (p. 294).

44. *Chayei Maharan 2*, (*Shivchei Maharan*), *Ma’alos Toraso u-Sefarav*, sec. 22, p. 14a.

45. Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Yehudah Yechiel Eichenstein of Safrin, *Megilas Setarim* (Jerusalem, 1944), 17a.

Another attempt to explain why *Arizal* was not concerned about using very physical symbolism in reference to the Divine, is found in Rabbi Shlomo Lutzker's introduction to *Maggid Devarav Le-Ya'akov*, an early compendium of the Magid's teachings.

*"Arizal... was not able to expand more upon the non-corporeality and abstraction of G-d, and furthermore he didn't need to, because he only revealed this (material) to his holy students who were already full of wisdom and profound understanding and had learned from the holy books of Rabbi Moshe Cordevero."*<sup>46</sup>

The Kabbalistic system of Rabbi Moshe Cordevero (*Ramak*) is more simple than that of *Arizal*, and devotes significant attention to the theological implications of Kabbalah, helping the reader not to err in any issues relating to Divine unity and corporeality.<sup>47</sup> *Arizal's* students were well grounded in the Kabbalah of *Ramak*, which is why *Arizal* was comfortable using very corporeal symbolism, without much clarification. This, however, could not be said of the gen-

46. Rabbi Shlomo Lutzker (ed.), *Maggid Devarav Le-Ya'akov* (Koretz 1781; new edition, Kehos 2004) p. 3-4. He continues: *"But some of them thirstily drank the words of the Arizal only in the sense of their plain meaning.... Until, thanks to G-d's pity on us, the light of Israel gleamed, that is the divine holy Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. His holy disciples reveled in the dust of his feet, thirstily drinking in his words, the words of the living G-d. With every gesture, movement, word and action, he revealed the precious source of the glory of this wisdom"* (translation by Moshe Rosman).

47. For an anthology of teachings of *Ramak* on these topics see: Shmuel Yudaikin (ed.), *Ha-Melech Hakadosh* (Bnei Brak: 2001).

This was, of course, a controversial position since Rabbi Chaim Vital delegitimized all Kabbalistic authors from the time of Nachmanides until *Arizal* (see introduction to *Etz Chaim*), including Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. However, here we see that Magid's school took a more inclusive approach to Cordoverian Kabbalah, which was still viewed as less authoritative than that of the *Arizal*, but not disqualified completely. As a result, *Ramak* is cited extensively in Chabad Chasidus. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Ma'amarei Admor Ha-Zaken al Ma'amarei Razal* (Kehos, 1984), p. 456; Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 11, p. 157; idem., *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, vol. 3, p. 22. For a contemporary example of an inclusive approach to Cordoverian Kabbalah see Rabbi Daniel Frisch, *Sha'arei Zohar* (Jerusalem 2005), pp. 195-205.

eral public, from whom *Arizal's* Kabbalah must be withheld, unless accompanied by Chasidic teaching.

In another exchange that has reached us through *Tzemach Tzedek*, the *Baal Shem Tov* is depicted as finally coming to terms with the corporeal nature of *Arizal's* teachings and even justifying them.

*“The Ba’al Shem Tov used to say that Rabbi Chaim Vital made Kabbalah too physical.”*

*“Once when (Ba’al Shem Tov) practiced soul ascent, (he saw) Rabbi Chaim Vital, who gave him a pen and said, ‘Why don’t you write something better?’”*

*“The Ba’al Shem Tov (later) explained that a symbol must be from something physical and there simply is no other physical example<sup>48</sup> than the cohabitation of man and woman.”<sup>49</sup>*

After a heavenly encounter with Rabbi Chaim Vital, who had passed away over a century earlier, the *Ba’al Shem Tov* accepts the necessity of Lurianic imagery, which provides the most accurate symbolism possible for Kabbalistic truths. However, this does not mean to say that the *Ba’al Shem Tov* changed his mind about the *public* teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah, from which he did not retreat.<sup>50</sup>

(It is no surprise, then, that the use of Lurianic *kavanos* during prayer—mediations based on a complex array of Kabbalistic sym-

48. For the Kabbalistic principle of *yichudim*, the merging of polar opposite energies.

49. Notes of Chaim Meir Hilman (1855-1927) author of *Beis Rebbe* (Berditchov, 1902), in Mondshine, *Migdal Oz*, p. 372.

50. In more private settings the *Ba’al Shem Tov* would certainly have studied Lurianic Kabbalah with his disciples. See letter of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook in *Igros Ha-Rayah*, volume 2 (Jerusalem 1946), p. 69. The *Ba’al Shem Tov's* personal *siddur* (prayer book) also indicates that he prayed with Lurianic *kavanos*. (For a description of the *siddur* see Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine's essay in *Kovetz Sifsei Tzadikim*, issue 7 (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 72ff.).

bols and Divine names—was also discouraged by the early leaders of Chasidism.<sup>51</sup>)

The *Ba'al Shem Tov's* approach, to “convey the esoteric world of *Etz Chaim* as understood through parallels to human experience in this world” was perceived as successfully “correcting” the dangers implicit in public Lurianic discourse. As Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira (1783-1841), author of *Bnei Yisasschar*, writes:

*“People did not know how to approach the study of (Kabbalistic) wisdom, to learn a path in Divine worship from it, and they became corrupted by it... until G-d sent us the Ba'al Shem Tov, who enlightened the world how to study this material and to learn from (Kabbalistic) wisdom a worship that is whole and sincere.”*<sup>52</sup>

A similar picture is drawn by Chasidic Master Rabbi Aharon Horowitz of Starosselje (1766-1828), an important disciple of Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

*“In the writings of Arizal, profundities of (Kabbalistic) wisdom are disclosed... in a wondrous way; he revealed this (Kabbalistic) wisdom more than all those who preceded him. Nevertheless, he veiled it thickly, with cryptic analogies which cannot be understood. That is why many later Kabbalists took his words almost literally, in a very physical sense, may G-d forgive them....”*

*“Until G-d sent us the light of Israel... the Ba'al Shem Tov who, utilizing the prophetic spirit given to him from heaven, began to explain (Arizal's) holy words. He explained the deeper meaning of this wisdom... introducing many anal-*

51. See *Tzava'as Ha-Ribash* sec. 117; Rabbi Zev Wolf of Zhitomir, *Ohr ha-Meir* (Koretz 1798), p. 12a, 34a, 109b; Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, *Sichos Ha-Ran*, sec. 75; Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch, *Imrei Binah*, (Kapust 1821) introduction; Rabbi Benjamin of Salositz, *Turei Zahav* (Mohilev, 1816), p. 57c. See also *Hayom Yom*, 11 Adar 1.

52. Notes of Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech to Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein, *Depart from Evil* p. 7.

*ogies from the soul-body relationship, in the spirit of the verse, 'From my flesh I perceive G-d' (Job 19:26). He began to save Israel... enabling a person to carry out wholesome worship through these holy insights.*"<sup>53</sup>

In the eyes of early Chasidic masters, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* had provided a necessary "correction" to *Arizal's* teachings which were too obscure, too open to misinterpretation and too removed from practical application. Lurianic Kabbalah lacked necessary parallels to human psychology that render familiar experiences as a guide to understanding spiritual truths, "*From my flesh I perceive G-d.*"

From the above citations one might get the impression that the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and his disciples are filled with commentaries on the Lurianic Kabbalah. In reality, however, Lurianic citations in Chasidic works are relatively sparse. Beshtian Chasidism devotes itself vigorously to clarifying modes of worship, and it is certainly *based* on Lurianic teaching, but the connection is not always made. The vast majority of Chasidic literature is composed as commentary on the weekly Torah reading, and Kabbalistic citations are more of an occasional "spice" rather than the actual "meat" of the discourse.

Chasidic literature did do a very good job of making some Lurianic ideas known to a very wide audience; but it did this while discouraging the actual study of Lurianic Kabbalah. Chasidic disciples were exposed to Lurianism, and its core concepts formed a central feature of their world view, but many of them had probably never learned a page of *Etz Chaim*.

Summary: From its outset, Beshtian Chasidism was strongly opposed to the public teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah. The *Ba'al Shem Tov* felt that due to *Arizal's* extensive use of physical symbolism to describe Divine processes, without significant attention to the non-physical meaning of these symbols, Lurianic Kabbalah could

53. Rabbi Aharon Horowitz of Starosselje, *Sha'arei Ha-Yichud Ve-ha-Emunah* (Shklov 1820; new edition, Jerusalem, 2016), p. 4b-5a. He continues to describe how this process then unfolded through the Magid and then through his master, Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

easily be misconstrued by the unlettered public. Instead, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and early Chasidic masters emphasized what they felt was the inner message and practical relevance of Lurianic teachings, while employing Lurianic symbolism only sparingly. Early Chasidism could be typified as a *non-Lurianic Lurianism*.

## LURIANIC KABBALAH IN EARLY CHABAD

The conservatism regarding Lurianic teaching in early Chasidism becomes all the more apparent from the exceptional case of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. For reasons which are not fully clear, Rabbi Shneur Zalman gradually developed a style of Chasidic teaching that incorporated Lurianic Kabbalah to a far greater degree than his colleagues.

*"I have set out only to explain the words of the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, and of his disciples, according to Lurianic Kabbalah."*<sup>54</sup>

The approach was a departure from the norm in Chasidic circles, and eventually erupted in a public controversy surrounding the publication of his *magnum opus*, the *Tanya*.<sup>55</sup> Rabbi Shneur Zalman's principle critic, Chasidic Master Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk, wrote:

*"I do not approve... that you have taken the words of our holy Rabbi of Mezritch, which are the words of our holy Rabbi, the Ba'al Shem Tov, and mixed them together with the holy words of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria."*<sup>56</sup>

54. *Tanya, Igeres Ha-Kodesh* chapter. 25.

55. See my comments in Rabbi Chaim Miller, *The Practical Tanya, Volume 1: The Book For Inbetweeners* (Brooklyn: Kol Menachem, 2016), p. xviii-xxi. For a discussion of attitudes to Kabbalah in early Chabad see Rabbi Nochum Greenwald, *Ha-Chasidus ve-Toras ha-Kabbalah in Mayanosecha*, issue 24 (Nisan 2010), pp. 20-27. For the overall development of Chabad ideology see Naftali Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School*, (Chicago University Press, 1990).

56. Ya'akov Barnai (ed.), *Igros Chasidim Me-Eretz Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzchak Ben Zvi, 1980), p. 239. The dispute was not purely ideological, and

From another of Rabbi Avraham's criticisms we are given a clear indication why most Chasidic masters avoided more than a minimal reference to Lurianic ideas.

*"Too much oil may, G-d forbid, cause the light to be extinguished.... With almost all their Chasidim, our teachers took great care with their words, speaking only ethical teachings (musar), striving to bring them faith in the Sages."<sup>57</sup>*

Even in his new system, Rabbi Shneur Zalman certainly did not present Lurianic teachings in their full complexity, as they are found in the writings of Rabbi Chaim Vital.<sup>58</sup> If overt citations to Lurianic material represented, to give a crude illustrative estimate, two percent of general Chasidic teaching, Rabbi Shneur Zalman raised that number to perhaps twenty percent. While that represents a sharp increase, the flavor of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's writings is still distinctly Chasidic, filled with parables, metaphors and illustrations from the human psyche. His works do not read like a commentary on Lurianic Kabbalah; in fact, when he was once asked to compose a commentary on *Etz Chaim* his response was:

*"You want from me Chasidus on Etz Chaim! What does Etz Chaim speak of? The chain of spiritual worlds (hishtalshelus). But I, thank G-d, am speaking higher than that, much higher."<sup>59</sup>*

also centered around the fund-raising efforts of Rabbi Shneur Zalman on behalf of Rabbi Avraham.

The Lurianic content of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's public discourses was also considerably expanded after his release from imprisonment by the Russian authorities in 1798. According to tradition, Rabbi Shneur Zalman saw his release as a sign that his approach to teaching Chasidus had been ratified in heaven, and he subsequently pursued the path more vigorously. See *Likutei Sichos*, volume 30, pp. 170-5; Rabbi Nachum Greenwald (ed.) *Harav* (2015), pp. 387-431.

57. Ibid., p. 240.

58. Rabbi Shneur Zalman did permit some study of *Etz Chaim* directly from the text. *"One may study Etz Chaim, Gate 7, provided one is careful to take from there some lesson in worship"* (cited in Mondshine, *Migdal Oz*, p. 424. See note 11 *ibid.*).

59. Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn, *Toras Shalom* (Kehos 1957), p. 256.

In one of his letters, Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains more precisely the relationship between his approach to Chasidic teaching and Kabbalah.

*“And let nobody suspect that I myself have stripped away the physical symbolism of Arizal’s teachings, fathoming their meaning. My intent is only to clarify the teachings of the Ba’al Shem Tov, of blessed memory, and his disciples, according to Arizal’s Kabbalah... as I have heard from my masters.”<sup>60</sup>*

As we have seen, *Arizal* did not explain the inner meaning (*nimshal*) of each physical metaphor (*mashal*) that he employs. In his discourses, Rabbi Shneur Zalman often presents a Lurianic idea along with its *nimshal* and practical application. He makes clear to us here that it is not he who fathomed the *nimshal*, but the *Ba’al Shem Tov*. However, since the *Ba’al Shem Tov* often cited the lesson (*nimshal*) without reference to its Lurianic symbol/source (*mashal*), Rabbi Shneur Zalman took upon himself the task of bringing the two together.

To put it succinctly: *Arizal* taught the *mashal* without the *nimshal*. The *Ba’al Shem Tov* stated the *nimshal* without its (Lurianic) *mashal*. In what became known as the *Chabad* school, Rabbi Shneur Zalman realigned the *nimshal* and *mashal* together, taking the *Ba’al Shem Tov*’s words and demonstrating their Lurianic underpinnings.

This is perhaps why Rabbi Shneur Zalman felt he was doing something “higher” than merely commenting on *Etz Chaim*. Such a commentary would only give clarity to the *mashal*; Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s focus was on “marrying” the *nimshal*, which had already been identified by the *Ba’al Shem Tov*, with its Lurianic *mashal*.

The relationship was summed up by the Fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber (Rashab) in these words:

60. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Tanya, Igeres Ha-Kodesh*, section 25.

*“People think that Chasidus is a commentary on Kabbalah, which is a mistake... Actually, Kabbalah is a commentary on Chasidus.”*<sup>61</sup>

The relationship between *mashal* (signifier) and *nishmal* (signified), is that the former explains the latter. If Chasidus, the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* represent the *nimshal* of the Lurianic *mashal*, then “Kabbalah (*mashal*) is a commentary on Chasidus (*nimshal*).” This is despite the fact that Chasidus was a body of teaching developed after Lurianic Kabbalah, and appears, superficially, to be a layer of commentary imposed upon it.<sup>62</sup>

In summary: Rabbi Shneur Zalman developed a more overtly Lurianic approach to Chasidism, including far more references to Kabbalah than his contemporaries.<sup>63</sup> This came to be known as

61. *Toras Shalom* p. 172. See at length the discussion in Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *On the Essence of Chasidus*, (Kehos 2003) p. 49; *Likutei Sichos* vol. 26, p. 388; *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5744, volume 4, p. 2417.
62. Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber explains the idea in more depth in a 1908 talk:

*“In the writings of Arizal, the Divine realm is described using symbols from the human body. So the foundation of Kabbalah is the verse, ‘Above on the (Divine) throne was a figure like that of a man’ (Ezekiel 1:26; depicting how Divine energy appears in human garb).*

*“But the foundation of Kabbalah is the verse, ‘Let us make man in our image’ (Genesis 1:26; depicting how Divine energies are mirrored in the human)....*

*The approach of Chasidus is ‘undressing’ the human faculties, understanding Divine energy from your own psyche... that from your powers of ‘keser,’ ‘chochmah’ and ‘binah,’ you understand ‘chochmah’ as it is above (as a Divine energy), through ‘undressing’ the powers (as they are within you, since they are created in the Divine image)....*

*“Kabbalah represents a containment (hagbalah) of Divine energy (in a limited symbol), whereas Chasidus is its unveiling (hafshatah)... Because when you learn about Divine energy from your own faculties, then those faculties become (unveiled as) Divine” (Toras Shalom, pp. 255-6).*
63. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav’s teachings are also typified by an increased emphasis on Lurianic Kabbalah, as merged with Beshtian teachings. See the survey of Rabbi Nachman’s views in Rabbi David Shapiro, *Ish Tevunah Yidlenah* (Jerusalem, 2014) pp. 20-32.

Chasidic Master Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Eichenstein, and the Rebbes of the

*Chabad Chasidus*. Rabbi Shneur Zalman did not feel he had violated *Ba'al Shem Tov's* prohibition against the public teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah, because he had fused Chasidus and Lurianic Kabbalah in such a way that the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* concern (of presenting physical symbols for the Divine without proper clarification) was averted. Chabad therefore represents a more openly Lurianic strand of Beshtian Chasidus.

## LURIANIC KABBALAH IN CONTEMPORARY CHABAD

The above sources which reflect a conservative approach to Lurianic teaching, are echoed frequently in the teachings of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). A few examples should suffice.

As cited at the beginning of this essay, the Rebbe observed that Kabbalah study has not been a focus in Chabad.

*“Generally speaking, Kabbalah study was not common, even among Chabad Chasidim, whose knowledge of Kabbalah was from material cited and explained in Chasidic discourses, not because they studied Kabbalah.”*<sup>64</sup>

In numerous letters and *sichos* (sermons), this conservative attitude toward Kabbalah study is attributed to the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (as transmitted through *Tzemach Tzedek*). Chasidus is recommended as the “safer” alternative. The following is typical:

*“There is a view cited in Rishonim (Medieval authorities) that one should not study Kabbalah before the age of forty.”*<sup>65</sup>

Komarna school who followed after him, taught Lurianic Kabbalah without any filter or insistence on synthesizing it with the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*. For Rabbi Eichenstein's attitudes to Kabbalah study see his *Sur Mera*. He was also critical of Chabad for being too “philosophical.”

64. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5745, volume 2, p. 1147. Again the Rebbe stresses here *Tzemach Tzedek's* remarks in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*.
65. See *Shach to Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah*, 246, par. 6. For an extensive discussion on the sources in Jewish Law regarding the permissibility of

*We also have the conservative position of the Ba'al Shem Tov about Kabbalah study, cited by Tzemach Tzedek....”*

*“However, these limitations applied only to Kabbalah study, but since Chasidus is now available... any Jewish person below the age of forty can and must study Chasidus.”<sup>66</sup>*

On one occasion, when asked about the study of Arizal's *Etz Chaim*, the Rebbe replied:

*“You write that someone has suggested you ought to study Etz Chaim. Obviously this would be considered the study of Jewish mysticism, however when you study such ideas in Chasidus Chabad, things are more clearly understood, and you are spared from inappropriate interpretations. This is not the case when you study without the above (Chabad) commentaries, where caution is advised.”<sup>67</sup>*

Similarly in 1990 when the Rebbe was asked by a grandson of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag to make a “public call” for people to study Kabbalah, the Rebbe declined, explaining:

*“Chabad Chasidus incorporates concepts of Kabbalah... so when one studies Chabad Chasidus, one also studies the Kabbalistic concepts which it cites. This being the case, such a ‘public call’ would imply that one cannot fulfill this study through Chabad Chasidus....”<sup>68</sup>*

From all of the above, one might easily get the impression that the Rebbe's position on this issue was strongly exclusivist. Chabad Chasidus, he seemed to argue, is the most accessible and “safe” approach to study Lurianic Kabbalah. On the other hand, direct

Kabbalah study see Rabbi Moshe David Chaimovitch, *Emes Ve-Emunah* (Bet E-I, 2015), pp. 149-245.

66. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5744, volume 4, p. 2416.

67. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 11, p. 276. See also *ibid.* vol. 8, p. 222.

68. *Siach Sarfei Kodesh*, p. 491. A video of the exchange can be seen at <https://youtu.be/S6otDPrAt4>. See discussion below.

study from Lurianic writings lacks the necessary elaboration. There is also a concern that the Lurianic anthropomorphic imagery could be misinterpreted. Everyone is advised, therefore, to study Chasidus without reservation, and be wary of Lurianic study.

However, the matter is not so simple. As is the case in so many instances, the Rebbe's approach to this issue is nuanced and multifaceted. As we shall see from the following, many sources indicate that a more inclusivist approach was adopted by the Rebbe, which neutralized some of the Chasidic aversion to Lurianic study.

First of all, this was the tradition in which the Rebbe himself was raised. His father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak ("Levik") Schneerson, was a Chabad *chasid*, but also a Lurianic Kabbalist. All the writings that we have from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak demonstrate a deep engagement with Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>69</sup>

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's public teaching of Lurianic material, attracted criticism from his peers, as his wife, Rebbetzin Chana, noted in her memoir:

*"My husband had sometimes encountered opposition to his style of Chasidic discourses. Some complained that there was too much Kabbalah."<sup>70</sup>*

Another incident which has reached us is the account of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's Kabbalistic discourse in 1928 to the Chasidic community of Leningrad. The strong emphasis on Kabbalah prompted some listeners to,

*"Begin questioning Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's knowledge of such Kabbalistic works as Etz Chaim and other Lurianic texts, prompting him to cite entire pages verbatim."*

*"Rabbi Michoel Dworkin, a respected Chasid, was unable to contain himself and challenged Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's nov-*

69. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, *Likutei Levi Yitzchak* (Kehos 1971-3), four volumes.

70. *Memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana*, (Kehos 2012), installment 20.

*el approach. 'On what do you base your method of teaching?' he asked the Rav.*

*"I received fundamental guidance and basic principles from Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber,"<sup>71</sup> replied Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. 'Drawing on his instructions I later formulated a methodology.'<sup>72</sup>*

Contrary to the norm in Chasidic circles where Lurianic Kabbalah was not emphasized (beyond its inclusion in Chasidic discourses), Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was well versed in these texts and they featured prominently in his public discourse.

He also encouraged his son, the future Rebbe, to follow in this path. In a substantive correspondence which has been preserved, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's letters to his son are saturated with Lurianic teaching.<sup>73</sup> In one letter, penned in 1934, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak actively encourages the future Rebbe to incorporate more Lurianic Kabbalah into his Torah thoughts.

*"Your essay was, generally speaking, very good. It demonstrated critical insight and mastery of legal and mystical sources.... But, my beloved son, my suggestion to you is... to add more 'pepper and spice,' meaning to connect the ideas more and more with their foundation in the 'true wisdom' of Kabbalah... for then each idea will be recognizable as true.... For, as you can see, the majority of Chasidic texts are based on Kabbalah... and even those which do not have (Lurianic) interpretation printed alongside them, the truth is that they are all based on Kabbalah."<sup>74</sup>*

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak saw importance in connecting all parts of Torah with Lurianic Kabbalah, in order to bring to light their "truth" in

71. The Fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, in whose *Yeshivah* Rabbi Levi Yitzchak had studied.
72. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Gottlieb (Rabbi Elchonon Lesches, trans.), *Rabbi, Mystic, Leader* (Kehos 2008), pp. 74-5.
73. *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, volume 3, pp. 197-423.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

a more overt way. He also observed that Chasidic wisdom is founded on Kabbalah, though the connection is not always obvious. He encouraged his son, the future Rebbe, to include more Lurianic content in his Torah thoughts, beyond that which is already cited in Chasidic discourses.

We find that this was indeed the style of the Future Rebbe's first public discourse, delivered at the court of the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, in 1929, when the latter was away traveling. One observer later reported:

*"He spoke for several hours without interruption, words of Chasidus mixed and spiced with Midrash, Kabbalah and gematria (numerology), the approach he has received from his father... If only we would hear from his mouth the Rebbe's Chasidus! I hope this will happen soon."*<sup>75</sup>

In summary: Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson encouraged his son, the future Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, to have a strong interest in Kabbalah, beyond the material which had already been incorporated in Chabad Chasidus. While we do not find any clear indication that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak taught Lurianic Kabbalah in public without an accompanying Chasidic commentary, he certainly did so in private, and his writings that have survived are predominantly Lurianic. For a Chabad Chasid, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's approach was considered unusual by his peers.

The extent to which the Rebbe was molded by his father's influence is complex. The Rebbe certainly did not emphasize Lurianic study to the same extent as his father; but the Rebbe's public sermons (*sichos*) for over forty years are strikingly original, expanding on themes well beyond those discussed by the previous leaders of Chabad, including significant attention to Kabbalah. The Rebbe also devoted much time to teaching his father's Kabbalistic writings in public,<sup>76</sup> though these sermons are never *purely* Lurianic

75. Report of the events written to the Sixth Rebbe by Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Althaus, reproduced in Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 16 (Kehos 2001), pp. 387-8.

76. Many of these sermons are collected in *Toras Menachem, Tiferes Levi Yitzchak* (Lahak 1990-1993), three volumes. For the Rebbe's sermons on his

and always contain some practical lessons and/or ties to Chasidic ideas. In private, the Rebbe showed interest in a broad spectrum of Lurianic literature, including its Sefardic, Lithuanian (non-Chasidic) and Chasidic schools of interpretation.<sup>77</sup>

Coming from an inclusivist background, how did the Rebbe view the generally exclusivist approach which dominated Chabad circles? The following passage from a 1976 sermon is telling.

*“There were Chasidim, even great Chasidim, who did not study Etz Chaim etc., saying that whatever they needed to know from Etz Chaim had been cited by the Alter Rebbe in Tanya or in Chasidic discourses. As a student of the Alter Rebbe, he did not want to receive from any other source. Everything that he needed to know, he would know from the Alter Rebbe.”<sup>78</sup>*

Here the exclusivist approach, of studying only Chasidus, is not presented as the normative position of Chabad; it is portrayed as an extraordinary, although admirable, approach of some special individuals. “*There were Chasidim*” who acted in this exceptional

father’s Kabbalistic notes on *Tanya*, see *Likutei Sichos*, vol. 39. pp. 51-160.

77. For example, in a 1952 letter to Shlomo Chaskind, the Rebbe includes the following very broad “list of books that interest me”: 1. *Beis Lechem Yehduah* on *Etz Chaim* (2. vols.); 2. *Leshem Shevo ve-Achlimah* (4-5 vols.), full set; 3. *Shalom Yerushalayim*, Responsa in Kabbalah; 4. *Me’il Kodesh* and *Bigdei Yesha*, three volumes on *Etz Chaim* and *Sha’ar Ha-Kavanos*; 5. *Siddur* Rabbi A. Sharabi, nine volumes; 6. *Damesek Eliezer*, commentary on the Zohar; 7. *Bnei Aharon*, commentary to *Shaar Ha-Gilgulim*; 8. *Choshev Machashavos, Magen David*; 9. *Kisei Melech* on *Tikunei Zohar*; 10. *Sefer Ha-Mekaneh al ha-Mitzvos* and *Ohev Yisrael*; 11. *Chemdas Tzvi* on *Tikunei Zohar*; 12. *Pesach Einayim* by Rabbi Shalom Sharabi; 13. *Sha’ar Gan Eden*. (the letter is printed as an addendum to the weekly *Sicha* prepared by *Lahak*, published for *Shabbos Parshas Ki Seitzei 5771*, p. 11). The Rebbe also showed interest in acquiring the *Sulam* commentary on the Zohar by Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag (see Uriel Zimmer, *Igros Chasid (Kfar Chabad, 2010)*, p. 18); works of Kabbalah by Rabbi Asher-Zelig Margolios (*Igros Kodesh #1053*); and those of Rabbi Moshe Yair Weinstock, with whom he corresponded and met in person in 1959, discussing Lurianic Kabbalah (see account of Rabbi Shalom Wolpo in *Shemen Sason Me-Chaverecha*).

78. *Sichos Kodesh 5736*, vol. 1. p. 197.

fashion, but, there were, of course, Chasidim who did not share these exclusivist sentiments.

If I am reading this correctly, the Rebbe is speaking as one who has an admiration and respect for the exclusivist position, which stems out of devotion and attachment to one's Rebbe, but it was not a position with which he himself was fully aligned.

The following section from a 1978 sermon appears to be more reflective of the Rebbe's own position, (and consequently, the position of Chabad in its Seventh Generation).

*“When speaking of Seder Histalshelus (detailed study of the spiritual realms), Kabbalah has more commentary than Chasidus. As we see in practice: first we study Chasidus, and then we study Kabbalah.”*

*“But after studying Kabbalah, we still need to study Chasidus, to ensure that the Kabbalah study is in order.”<sup>79</sup>*

Here Kabbalah study, beyond the material incorporated in Chabad Chasidus, is painted in a positive light. Lurianic Kabbalah simply has more information about *Seder Hishtalshelus* than Chasidus,<sup>80</sup> and therefore “we study Kabbalah.” However due to the concerns which have been aired by the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, “first we study Chasidus” and “after studying Kabbalah, we still need to study Chasidus, to ensure that the Kabbalah study is in order.”

If these recommendations are followed, Lurianic Kabbalah study is considered acceptable, it would seem, even for loyal Chabad adherents.<sup>81</sup>

79. *Sichos Kodesh* 5738, volume 2, p. 413. This view is also echoed by Chabad adherent and Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh in: Ephraim Kurer, *Sefer Ha-Zohar: Its Author and Status* (Heb.) (Yeshivas Mevor Chaim, 2011), p. 61

80. And “factual knowledge of *Seder Hishtalshelus* is also a lofty and exalted mitzvah, Indeed, it outweighs everything” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Tanya, Kuntres Acharon* p. 156b). See discussion of Rabbi Nochum Greenwald on this text in *Ha'aros Oholei Torah, Parshas Noach* 2002 (pp. 38-9), and *ibid.*, *Parshas Toldos* (pp. 87-90).

81. If I am indeed correct that the Seventh Rebbe favored a more inclusivist

There is another approach of the Rebbe which I would classify as inclusivist: he encouraged the publication and dissemination of Lurianic works by non-Chabad authors, even if such works did not contain any Chabad material. To be sure, the Rebbe would always encourage the inclusion of references to Chabad discourses in these works, but he had a positive attitude to disseminating all (Orthodox)<sup>82</sup> treatments of Lurianic Kabbalah, even when Chabad references were lacking.<sup>83</sup> In fact, even when he declined to participate in Rabbi Ashlag's public call for Kabbalah study (mentioned above), the Rebbe was quick to emphasize, "*I don't reject other approaches,*" and he blessed the project with success. Such a statement, I would argue, is the hallmark of an inclusivist approach. Exclusivism, by definition, rejects other approaches, and considers its own the uniquely correct path. Only an inclusivist would say, "*I don't reject other approaches.*"<sup>84</sup>

approach then a special connection with *our* Rebbe would be best maintained through inclusivism!

82. The Rebbe expressed dissatisfaction with teachers of Kabbalah who were not Torah observant Jews. In a 1985 letter, he explained: "*When a person desires to do research in any scientific field, the only qualification required would be sufficient knowledge and ability to carry out the research. However, if one wishes to do research in any area of Judaism, in order to present an accurate assessment, it can be done only by a Jew, and not just a Jew, but one who has been living Jewishly for many years. Lacking this qualification, the conclusions will necessarily be superficial at best.... The same is true in the matter of the Kabbalah. A true and scientifically valid study of it cannot be made just on the basis of books, but one has to be personally involved in the Kabbalah in his everyday life over a period of many years.*"

Similarly in a 1976 letter the Rebbe argues that Kabbalah, "*is a subject that cannot really be studied without a G-d-fearing, Torah-true teacher, much less by one who has no solid Torah-background*" (both letters can be found at [https://www.collive.com/show\\_news.rtx?id=50902](https://www.collive.com/show_news.rtx?id=50902)).

83. See letters to: Rabbi Yehudah Tzvi Brandwein (*Igros Kodesh*, letter 8310); Rabbi Reuven Margolios (24th Elul 5714, 8th Elul 5717); Rabbi Asher Zelig Margolios (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 4, p. 331); Rabbi Moshe Yair Weinstock (*Shemen Sasson* *ibid.*). The Rebbe was also encouraging of Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri's efforts to build a Yeshivah devoted to Lurianic study and practice in the Sefardic tradition (see video of their meeting at <https://youtu.be/Muz2huD-5tk>).
84. The fact that the Rebbe declined to participate in Rabbi Ashlag's "public call" to Kabbalah should therefore be perceived in light of the following

So far we have seen that the Rebbe's inclusivism incorporated:

- a.) Personal interest in all strands of Lurianic Kabbalah;
- b.) Citation of Lurianic material in his public sermons (alongside Chabad Chasidus);
- c.) Encouragement of the publication and dissemination of a vast range of Lurianic texts and commentaries;
- d.) Sanction for Lurianic study among Chabad adherents, when accompanied by a firm grounding and ongoing interest in Chasidus.

The Rebbe's position might therefore be considered a *conservative inclusivism*, seeing value in broader Kabbalah study, but in limited contexts.

There is, however, a further important source on this issue which we have not yet addressed. I refer, of course, to the Rebbe's very frequent citation of a line in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya (Igeres Ha-Kodesh)*.

*“Arizal wrote that specifically in these latter generations it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so).”<sup>85</sup>*

factors. 1. A “public announcement” needs to be kept relatively simple, and given the choice between emphasizing Chasidus or Kabbalah, the Rebbe felt the former to be more beneficial. 2. The Rebbe was respectful of the exclusivist tradition in Chabad, and did not want to make a public declaration to the contrary. 3. The Rebbe possibly harbored concerns about Ashlagian Kabbalah which he preferred not to air in this meeting, since it was unnecessary to do so and would have been insulting to Rav Ashlag (see his comments in *Igros Kodesh* vol. 11, p. 276). For these reasons, the meeting between Rav Ashlag and the Rebbe is not, in my opinion, proof that the Rebbe's position was exclusivist, as is often (understandably) inferred. A nuanced understanding of the Rebbe's position needs to be perceived in the context of all the sources cited in this essay.

85. *Tanya, Igeres Ha-Kodesh* sec. 25. The source for this statement in *Arizal's* writings is often cited as Rabbi Chaim Vital's introduction to *Sha'ar Ha-Hakdamos*, printed at the beginning of our editions of *Etz Chaim*. However the assertion that “it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah to do so” is never stated there explicitly, only by implication.

*Arizal's* reference to “this wisdom” is clearly not to Chasidus—which he predated by two centuries—but to his own Kabbalistic teachings.<sup>86</sup> This statement itself is not alarming in a *Lurianic text*, but it is anomalous in an early Chasidic text, such as the *Tanya*. As we have seen, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* certainly did *not* deem it a “*mitzvah*” to reveal Lurianic wisdom to the public; on the contrary, he rebuked those that did so. How, then, could Rabbi Shneur Zalman promote a teaching to the contrary?

In a 1987 sermon, the Rebbe highlighted this contradiction:

*“There is something to which, remarkably, people do not pay attention. (Tzemach Tzedek) cites... the Ba'al Shem Tov's directive not to study works of (Lurianic) Kabbalah. But note the contrast: The Alter Rebbe writes in Igeres Ha-Kodesh that, 'In these latter generations it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so).' This is at the same time Tzemach Tzedek stresses conservatism and caution in Kabbalah study!”*

*“Whatever the reason may be, a conservative approach to Kabbalah study has become the norm.”<sup>87</sup>*

Already in his ninth decade, after a lifetime of reflecting on these texts, the Rebbe shared his impression that there is an unresolved tension here. The *Ba'al Shem Tov's* directive not to spread Lurianic Kabbalah is in direct opposition to the *Tanya's* statement that it is a *mitzvah* to do so. While the contradiction is blatant, “*people do not pay attention*” to it. Practically speaking “*a conservative approach*”

However, a more accurate source for the *Tanya's* statement is found in earlier printings of *Etz Chaim* which were available to Rabbi Shneur Zalman. There, a different introductory letter from Rabbi Chaim Vital is printed, stating: “*But in these generations it is a mitzvah and great joy before G-d that this wisdom be revealed*” (*Etz Chaim*, Koritz Edition (1782), p. 2a; Shklov edition (1800), p. 3a).

86. Rabbi Aharon Horowitz of Starosselje did try to argue that *Arizal's* statement refers, in fact, to Chasidus, and not Kabbalah (see *Sha'arei Ha-Yichud Ve-ha-Emunah* p. 4b-5a). However, his argument, which is clearly anachronistic, seems to have been rejected by the Rebbe, as will become apparent below.

87. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos 5747*, volume 3, p. 61.

to *Kabbalah* study has become the norm,” following the view of *Ba'al Shem Tov*—but that does not mean to say that the matter has been clarified; it is just a reflection of the “facts on the ground’ in Chasidic circles.

In his *Likutei Sichos*, the Rebbe devotes an entire essay to the *Tanya*’s statement (from *Arizal*), in which he concludes:

*“We see that, despite the warnings and limitations imposed by Rabbi Chaim Vital, we do indeed learn concepts in Kabbalah. Not only do we study them, but based on Arizal’s statement that now ‘It is a mitzvah to reveal this wisdom,’ we disclose and publicize them....*

*“The study of any part of Torah **after it has been revealed,**<sup>88</sup> including (Lurianic) Kabbalah, strengthens the connection between a Jew and the Creator... no person should wait to study this wisdom until he has satisfied all the criteria and restrictions (stated by Rabbi Chaim Vital).<sup>89</sup>*

Likewise we find in a 1987 sermon that the Rebbe actively encouraged the dissemination of *Arizal*’s writings, explaining:

*“This will also achieve, ‘the outward dissemination of the wellsprings,’ upon which the coming of Mashiach depends. As in his response to the *Ba'al Shem Tov*’s question, ‘When, sir, are you coming?’ to which Mashiach said, ‘when your wellsprings (i.e., of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*), will be disseminated outwards.’”<sup>90</sup>*

*“Now the ‘wellsprings’ of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* are based on the teachings of Arizal.<sup>91</sup> **So it follows that by publicizing***

88. Emphasis in the original.

89. *Likutei Sichos*, volume 26, pp. 35-6.

90. Letter of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* describing his soul’s ascent to the heavenly chamber of *Mashiach*, printed in *Keser Shem Tov* (new edition, Kehos 2004), pp. 4-5.

91. The Rebbe’s words here echo his father’s letter from fifty years earlier, (cited above), “the majority of Chasidic texts are based on Kabbalah... and even those which do not have (Lurianic) interpretation printed alongside them, the

*and spreading the teachings of Arizal, (we achieve) 'the outward dissemination of the wellsprings,' speeding even more the coming of our righteous Mashiach.*"<sup>92</sup>

Another instance where the Rebbe was encouraging of public Lurianic study was in the summer of 1976, on the Sabbath afternoon preceding *Arizal's yahrtzeit*, the following day:

*"At this time, we ought to study some teachings of Arizal, also after the departure of the Sabbath this evening, and especially on Sunday, which is the anniversary of his passing."*

*"And wherever Jews are to be found studying Torah, they should also study something from the teachings of Arizal... and especially by his graveside.... And this study should continue in the following days...."*

*"Also during upcoming gatherings for young children, an idea from Arizal's teachings should be taught, since in Lurianic writings there are many ideas which one could explain even to children."*<sup>93</sup>

Here the Rebbe instructed that *Arizal's* writings should be studied publicly, without restriction, "*wherever Jews are to be found studying Torah.*" Unusually, this campaign was also directed to children, who were encouraged to study Lurianic teachings (on their

*truth is that they are all based on Kabbalah."*

92. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5747, volume 3, p. 369. Rabbi Simchah Ashlag claims that the Rebbe was responding to an earlier complaint which he had made, that the Rebbe's constant stress on the dissemination of *pnimiyus ha-Torah* (the mystical parts of Torah), was perceived as referring only to Chasidus and not Kabbalah. According to Rabbi Ashlag's recollection, the Rebbe replied, "G-d forbid, I will clarify this matter" (see [https://youtu.be/-Q8\\_jyqpVgG](https://youtu.be/-Q8_jyqpVgG)).

The notion that spreading Lurianic Kabbalah accelerates the coming of Mashiach is also mentioned by Rabbi Chaim Vital himself (in the above-cited introduction to *Etz Chaim*, Koretz edition), which stresses, "*But in these generations it is a mitzvah and great joy before G-d that this wisdom be revealed, and in this merit Mashiach will come*" (emphasis added).

93. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, vol. 2, p. 572.

# שעות ספורות אחרי שהגיעה לכפר חב"ד, "פקודת" הרבי מלובאביץ': אלפי חסידים נהרו בשיירת מכוניות לקבר האר"י בצפת



הרבי מלובאביץ'  
קריאה לעלות לישראל

מאת מנחם רהט

במחנה של "מקודת", שהשמייע ה"רבי מלובאביץ' אתמול בשעה 7 ב"ב, בוקר, בשעה טלפונית מניו יורק — בהתכנסו תוך שעות ספורות כ-5 אלף פנים מחסידיו מכל רחבי הארץ על קברו של האר"י בצפת, לציון מלאת 404 שנה למסירתו.

"פקודת" הרבי נתקבלה בכפר חב"ד בשבת בבליה, ומיד הוחל בארגון השעה מיוחדת — מריכוזי חב"ד בכל רחבי ת"א — לקבר האר"י בצפת. באלפי שעות שלפני חגיגתה, "מקודת" לבני החסידים ולישיבות; ומקץ שעה קלה יצאה לעצם שיירה של 20 אוטובוסים וכלי רכב פרטיים רבים. במקודתו ציווה הרבי על חסידיו לעלות לרגל, ברוב עם הדת מלך" לקבר האר"י — ולעסוק שם בהגותו.

בהתכנסות על קבר האר"י נאמרו המילות ונלמדו פרקים בתורת הקבלה. אחד מחסידי חב"ד, הרב יוסף ילי מובסקי, השמיע בהתכנסות קריאה לרבי מלובאביץ' — בשם כל חסידו חב"ד בישראל — לעלות ארצה ולקבוע משכנו בארץ הקודש.

הרב ולימובסקי, מוסר לפרי חב"ד, נ"י

מק את קריאתו הנדירה לרבי בכך, ש"בכתבי האר"י ציוין, כי שנת תשל"ו היא שנת "קץ המשיח" מקובלים סבורים, כי הכוונה לגאולת ישראל השלמה. לפי כך, קרא הרב ולימובסקי לרבי מלובאביץ' כל יציאה עוד בשנה זו ארצה, ויבא עמו לישראל את כל בני הגולה.

Newspaper reports of the Rebbe's 1976 directive for public study of Lurian teachings, including children (courtesy Shturem.net).

## האדמו"ר מלובוביץ' קורא ללימוד כתיבי האר"י ז"ל

בהתיחס ליום מסירתו של הרב יצחק לוריא ז"ל, ראש חכמי הק"בלה בצפת (האר"י ז"ל) שנפטר לפני 404 שנה ביום ה' מנחם אב — הורה הרבי מלובוביץ' לחסר דיו ולשומעי דברו ברחבי תבל לק"בוע ביום זה ובמים שלאחריו עד יום ט' באב, שיעורים וחוגי לימוד בכתיבי של האר"י ז"ל, נוסף לשיר עזרים התורגמים שיש להוסיף בהם בכלל ביומים אלה.

החידוש שבחזרה זו שהוא מוסר בת גם על ילדים קטנים וילדות, אלא שעבורם — אמר הרבי — יש להתאים את התורות העיוניות הקב"ליות לרמתם, וכן למצוא סיפורים מחיי האר"י ז"ל שיש בהם לקח חינוכי עבורם.

כן ביקש הרבי מחסידיו בישראל להתאסף ל"קבוע עם הוריהם" על קבר האר"י ז"ל בצפת וללמוד כל צוותא מדברי תורתו הוראה זו התקבלה כאן בישראל ביום ראשון בבוקר, ובתמסורת בוק של שרשרת שיתוף טלפונית נמסרה תוך שעה תיים שלוש לחלק גדול של חסידו חב"ד בארץ במקומות העבודה ובמוסדות החינוך.

ואכן חיש להתארגנו והספיקו ל"האספה כמה אלפי חסידו חב"ד ש"נודעה להם הוראה זו על קבר האר"י ז"ל ללמוד תורתו בין הבאים היו מאות ילדים שהגיעו לשמע הוראת הרבי.

אוטובוסים של חב"דניקים הגיעו ממכפר חב"ד, מירושלים, מנהלת הרב חב"ד שבקרית מלאכי, מבני ברק, מלוד ועוד ריבוננו חב"ד וכמונן מ"רחבי הגולה.

level). The campaign also proposed a gathering at Arizal's grave where his teachings were to be publicly studied, an event which was subsequently reported in press reports, which marveled at the fact that children were studying Lurian teachings!<sup>94</sup>

There was no insistence in the Rebbe's directive that Arizal's teachings must be taught with Chasidic commentary, and if Luri-

94. The newspaper articles and related documents are reproduced at <http://www.shturem.net/index.php?section=artdays&id=3174>.

anic writings were to be learned “*wherever Jews are to be found*” this could certainly not be guaranteed.<sup>95</sup>

Let me cite one more similar case from 1984. In a public meeting with Rabbi Avraham Shapira (1914-2007), Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Israel, and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (1929-2010), Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, the Rebbe encouraged his colleagues to make a “public call” for the study of Kabbalah.

After citing *Arizal’s* statement (from *Tanya*) that “*in these latter generations it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so),*” the Rebbe suggested:

*“The two Chief Rabbis should issue a joint ‘public call,’ to awaken and inspire the hearts of our Jewish brethren in all locations, concerning the need and urgency of studying the mystical parts of Torah. This ought to be publicized very widely.”*<sup>96</sup>

The Rebbe’s request was unfortunately not heeded, and in a subsequent meeting in 1989 with the two Chief Rabbis, he lamented:

*“In our last meeting we spoke about the need to make a public call for the study of mystical parts of Torah, the teachings of Kabbalah, since, regrettably, some people have never learned Kabbalah in their life.”*<sup>97</sup>

If the Chief Rabbis’ public call would have taken place, it would have obviously led to the study of a vast range of mystical texts, including Lurianic Kabbalah. This represents another instance in which the Rebbe encouraged the public Lurianic study, without restriction or direct stipulation that it must be interpreted through a Chasidic lens. In this particular case the Rebbe explicitly quoted

95. Although the directive was directly addressed to an audience of largely Chabad Chasidim, who were presumably well grounded themselves in Chasidus.

96. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos* 5745, p. 3090-1.

97. *Siach Sarfei Kodesh (Machon Oholei Tzadikim)*, p. 469,

the *Tanya's* statement as one of his sources, that “*in these latter generations it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so).*”

In fact, in 1983 the Rebbe even went so far as to “co-opt” the *Arizal* into the dynastic chain of Chabad Chasidic Rebbes that he would list during his *Rosh Hashanah* sermon, a practice which he continued in all subsequent years.

*“My father-in-law the (Sixth) Rebbe spoke about mentioning the name of all our Rebbes on Rosh Hashanah, beginning with the Ba’al Shem Tov, then the Magid, the Alter Rebbe, Mitteler Rebbe, Tzemach Tzedek, Maharash, the Rebbe Rashab and, in our times the Rebbe, my father-in-law... I would like to now add mention of the Arizal’s name... based on the statement in Tanya, in the name of Arizal, that ‘specifically in these latter generations it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so).’”<sup>98</sup>*

In summary: In most contexts the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe upheld the Beshtian tradition which opposed public teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah (when devoid of Chasidic commentary). However, there were several instances where the Rebbe did encourage public Lurianic study. This seems to have been based on the authority of the *Tanya's* teaching (in the name of *Arizal*) that “*it is permitted to reveal this wisdom, and a mitzvah (to do so).*”

## CONCLUSIONS

- » Chabad differs in its attitudes towards the study of Zohar *vis-a-vis* the study of Lurianic Kabbalah (teachings of *Arizal*).
- » Early Chabad vigorously encouraged Zohar study.
- » In later generations of Chabad, Zohar was less emphasized, but there was never any objection or restriction aired against study of the Zohar, which is considered a form of *Midrash*.

98. *Toras Menachem, Hisvaduyos 5744, vol. 1, p. 25.*

- » This was not the case with Lurianic Kabbalah, which the *Ba'al Shem Tov* strongly discouraged from the general public, arguing that it could confuse the average person.
- » Rabbi Shneur Zalman introduced more Lurianic Kabbalah into his Chasidic discourses than his contemporaries, and this became a hallmark of what came to be known as the Chabad school of Chasidism.
- » Reflecting the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* concerns, an *exclusivist* position became dominant in Chabad, where pure Lurianic study was discouraged and accessed only through the material cited in Chabad discourses.
- » The Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was respectful of this position, and generally emphasized it.
- » However, the Rebbe also demonstrated inclusivist tendencies and was not discouraging of Lurianic study for individuals well grounded in Chabad Chasidus.
- » Toward the latter part of his leadership, there were several occasions when the Rebbe did promote Lurianic study more vigorously, in a way that had not been precedented before. While it is hard to say so conclusively, this appears to reflect a shift in emphasis, toward an even more inclusive approach.
- » As a whole, the Rebbe was consistent in his stress that Chabad Chasidus represents a peak in the development of the wisdom of Kabbalah/Chasidus, and it should be our utmost priority to encourage its dissemination and study.