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MOSHE HALLAMISH



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CONTENTS

Zvi Arad	Foreword	7*
Moshe Ḥallamish	Preface	9*
Eliane Amado Levy-Valensi	Idéologie et Judaïsme	11*
Jacob I. Dienstag	Christian Translators and Editors of Maimonides' Works — A Bio-Bibliographical Survey	21*
Paul B. Fenton	La Hierarchie des Saints dans la Mystique Juive et dans la Mystique Islamique	49*
Maurice-Ruben Ḥayoun	Ibn Bājja et Moïse de Narbonne — 'Iggeret ha-Petirah'	75*
Howard Kreisel	The Place of Man in the Hierarchy of Existence in the Philosophy of Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides	95*
Naftali Loewenthal	"Reason" and "Beyond Reason" in Ḥabad Ḥasidism	109*
André Neher	Cabale, Science et Philosophie dans le commentaire sur la Mishna de Tiféret Israël	127*
Bezalel Z. Safran	Maimonides and Aristotle on Ethical Theory	133*
Yochanan Silman	Revealed Religions in the Thought of Judah Halevi: A Systematic Presentation	163*
Elie Wiesel	Rabbi Yoḥanan and Resh-Lakish	175*
Elliot R. Wolfson	Letter Symbolism and Merkavah Imagery in the Zohar	195*
<i>Hebrew Section</i>		
Moshe Idel	The Meaning of "Ṭa'amei Ha-'Ofot Ha-Ṭeme'im of Rabbi David ben Yehuda He-Ḥasid	11
Rachel Elijor	Spiritual Renaissance and Social Change in the Beginnings of Ḥasidism	29

NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL

"REASON" AND "BEYOND REASON"
IN ḤABAD ḤASIDISM

In the historiography of the Hasidic movement, Habad is often portrayed as the "rational" branch of Hasidism. Dubnow describes the *Tanya* as a kind of 'Moreh Nevukhim' of Hasidism, a work tending towards philosophy in a milieu in which, in his view, the supra-rational held sway and the faintest tinge of philosophy was forbidden.¹

Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer² went further, depicting R. Shneur Zalman as an anti-spiritualist in the Hasidic fold. While the Hasidim in general sought to transcend the finite limitations of existence, in her view, R. Shneur Zalman focuses on normative halakhah and exudes an atmosphere of rationality and normalcy.

This perspective was modified by Dan and Tishby³ and, later, Moshe Hallamish,⁴ and Rachel Elior.⁵ The "anti-spiritualist" perspective was qualified or rejected. R. Shneur Zalman is seen as teaching a boldly spiritualist path, leading his disciples to an other-worldly mode of perception, tending even to acosmism. All existence is subsumed in the

109*

* A shorter form of this paper was delivered at the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1989.

1 *Toledot ha-Hasidut*, p. 232.

2 "Anti-Spiritualism ba-Ḥasidut", *Molad*, 171-172 (1962).

3 See Dan and Tishby, "Torat ha-Ḥasidut ve-Sifrutah", *Enziklopedia ha-Ivrit*, Vol. 17 (entry *Ḥasidut*), cols. 775, 790.

4 See Moshe Hallamish, "Mishnato ha-Iyunit shel R. Shneur Zalman mi-Liadi (ve-yahas le-torat ha-kabalah u-le-reshit ha-ḥasidut)", Doctoral Thesis at the Hebrew University (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 253ff.

5 See her *The Theory of Divinity of Hasidut Habad: Second Generation* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1982), *passim*, and "Iyunim be-Mahashevet Ḥabad", *Daat* 16 (1986).

infinite radiance of the *En Sof*: "there is Nought apart from Him," אין עוד מלבדו.

In fact, these contrary views of early Habad, both "rational" and "supra-rational", are due to a feature of this school which has not yet been fully clarified. Both rational and supra-rational elements are present, and there is a constant interaction between them. In this paper I attempt to examine certain aspects of this apparently self-contradictory feature of Habad thought, focusing on the first three generations of the movement.

Let us start with R. Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Amarim* or *Tanya*, first printed in 1796. The immediate impression is of a highly organised work, as Dubnow noted. However, organisation does not necessarily imply rationality in the simple sense. In fact, from the very beginning of R. Shneur Zalman's work we see that a spiritual dimension of existence is being described: a world of souls and of Divine radiance. If we characterise "rational" as relating to and integrating with *Olam ha-Zeh*, then a casual perusal of *Likkutei Amarim* might well suggest that this is a highly organised method for teaching an other-worldly quest, and that the direction of the text and the system it expounds is to lead the student out of this world into a para-normal realm, above the exigencies of materiality and human reason.

This impression is strengthened when we examine the discourses which R. Shneur Zalman was teaching in the early 1790's, the time when his *Likkutei Amarim* was first disseminated among his followers in manuscript form. In these brief discourses there is an emphatic demand to adopt an ascetic-kabbalistic world view. Worldliness, existence as such, the normative relationships of human life, are negated in the face of the radiance of a higher spiritual reality. The demand is unequivocally to accept the norms of the spiritual rather than the physical, of a supra-normal plane rather than that of rational, or shall we say "normal", human thought, feeling and behaviour. The disciple is expected to strip himself of all material desires; there is repeated reference to the ideal of "breaking" one's appetites for the physical world. A person should "plough" through his desires, doing the opposite of the will of his body. Through this, says R. Shneur Zalman, he will reach a state in which *ha-tov ha-ganuz*, beyond Reason, will be revealed:

הנה ענין החרישה היא מרפה ארעא,⁶ דהיינו להכניע הגוף, שבאמת כל א' מישראל יש לו רצון שהוא למעלה מן השכל אבל הגוף הגשמי מסתיר הדבר. וזהו ענין

6 See *Mo'ed Katan* 2b.

חרישה, להכניע בכל מה דאפשר איך שיהיה אפי' בנצחון, דהיינו שבכל דבר יעשה היפך רצון הגוף. וכשיעשה כן ממילא יתגלה אצלו הטוב הגנוז.⁷

The attempt to plough through the concealing veil of the desires of the body, in order to allow the spiritual *tov ha-ganuz* to be revealed, is one way of understanding the content of *Likkutei Amarim*. As is well known, the goal described there is the transformation of one's *Nefesh ha-Behamit* and *Nefesh ha-Sikhlit*, one's animal ("normal") and rational dimensions, into the supra-normal category of the Divine soul.

True, there is a conceptual and apparently reasoned aspect to this quest. *Likkutei Amarim* speaks of intellectual categories: *Hokhmah* and *Binah* of the Divine Soul. But, from this first level of interpretation of this tract, these intellectual categories are but a short ladder of Reason to be climbed in order to transcend Reason, with the intense flow of emotion described at length in the main body of the work and the acosmistic perspective taught in its second section, *Shaar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*.

At the same time, however, there is another way of looking at the same book. The direction is not from Reason to Beyond Reason, but in some way the reverse: aspects of the realm beyond Reason are brought into the plane of the rational and the everyday.

Translating the Beyond Rational into Rational Terms

This process has two very different modes. The first is that of "translation".⁸ The supra-rational is indeed an exalted goal, but since it cannot be reached by many of the intended readers of the book, a "translation" of it into accessible terms is provided by the author. An important feature of *Likkutei Amarim* is that room is given to the person who cannot

7 *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken ha-Kezarim* (Brooklyn, 1981), p. 161: "Ploughing" means breaking through the ground, that is, quelling the body. For in truth, every single Jew has a Will which is higher than Reason, but the physical body conceals it. This is what is meant by 'ploughing', to quell [the body] as much as possible, even aggressively. This means that in everything, one should do the opposite of the desire of the body. When one does this, automatically there will be revealed the 'hidden good'. Similar demands to transcend worldliness are found on pp. 191, 199 and 200-201, where R. Shneur Zalman demands total impartiality in providing food for one's own family and for other needy people.

8 This process, whereby esoteric teachings, originally the province of only a small elite, were made accessible to wider society is described at length in my *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago University Press, forthcoming).

achieve the step of enthusiasm which transcends the normative parameters of life. The spiritualist ideal is clearly depicted, and is defined as the true goal. But, the text continues, if you cannot achieve that, there is still a path which you can follow in order to draw some aspect of the other-worldly into your relationship with existence.

An example is *Likkutei Amarim*, ch. 16, which describes different kinds of response to contemplation. As a consequence of what starts as a cerebral, intellectual process, some people become mystically inspired. They have, so to speak, climbed the ladder of Reason and through it they achieve an intense level of ecstasy. Others, however, are not able to break through the bonds of normative existence and the basic rational structure of internal response. They contemplate the same mystical concepts, but achieve no emotional or spiritual breakthrough.⁹

We might think this puts them beyond the system expounded in *Likkutei Amarim*. However, the author provides a path for them too, a kind of rational substitute for ecstasy. If they cannot feel genuine heartfelt ecstasy, let them make the rational and cerebral effort to realise that they *should* feel it — *kakh ya'atah lahen*; and since they *should* experience inspiration, let them engender within themselves a rationally based enthusiasm to act accordingly, in thought, speech and action.¹⁰

We therefore see that *Likkutei Amarim* gives guidance on different levels. Unlike the harsh spiritual glare of the early discourses, suitable almost exclusively for the elite who could live up to the ascetic-kabbalistic ideal, beyond worldly desires, those for whom the *tov ha-ganuz* beyond Reason was accessible, in *Likkutei Amarim* the member of the early Habad fraternity is addressed in terms which take into account his limitations. Although reading a mystical tract, he may well have only a relatively ordinary, "uninspired" and coldly rational mind. As such, he is given guidance by the author to help him to manifest the Hasidic ideal of self-transcendence on his own worldly plane of being.

112*

9 *Likkutei Amarim*, ch. 16, fol. 21b. R. Shneur Zalman says this is due to a kind of immaturity, both of their minds and of their souls: מפני היות המוחין שלו ונר"ן שלו מבחי'. עיבור והעלם תוך התבונה ולא מבחי לידה והתגלות

10 *Ibid.*, 21b-22a. See M. Hallamish, *Nativ la-Tanya* (Tel Aviv, 1987), p. 103. The schema in this chapter of *Tanya* is an important source for R. Dov Ber's *Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, with its typology of different categories of enthusiasm. There is a parallel section in the writings of R. Aaron Halevi, *Sha'arei Avodah, Sha'ar Yihud ha-Neshamot*, fol. 50b-51a.

"Reason" as the Step After "Beyond Reason"

The *Tanya* also provides us with evidence of a further mode of emphasis on the Rational. This is quite a different kind of process, moving almost in an opposite direction to those which we have described. We find the suggestion that after the individual has reached a supra-rational plane of awareness, there should be a movement *into the rational*. This movement is neither a compromise for the one who cannot reach beyond it, nor is it simply a stepping stone to reach higher. Instead, it is additional to the supra-rational level and follows it. The supra-rational perspective *can* be achieved; yet nonetheless, the adept proceeds to a further stage, that of the rational. It seems that, in the eyes of the author, this mode of relationship with the rational is not a retreat, nor a form of "coming down", return to ordinary life after an ecstatic experience,¹¹ but another positive step in the contemplative process which he is describing.

We find a brief expression of this in the second section of *Tanya*, called *Sha'ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*. This tract is designed to provide a system of contemplation before, or during, prayer. The system of contemplation itself has a certain rational basis to it, and in some ways is reminiscent of the intellectualist approach of Maimonides. This is not only in style, but also in content. For example, there is a lengthy quotation from a philosophical passage in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, in order to explain the nature of the Divine.¹² Another passage seems to echo a discussion in *Moreh Nevukhim*.¹³ However, all this functions as the "ladder" described earlier, the path of Reason leading to that which is beyond Reason. Of greater interest is the movement from beyond Reason, onwards, as it were, to the realm of Reason. Evidence of this is found in Chapter Seven of the printed text.

Here we find two modes of contemplation described. The first, termed *Yihuda 'Ila'a*, the "Upper Unity", corresponds to our concept of the supra-rational aspect of Habad. Contemplation in this mode leads to the aware-

113*

11 I am grateful to Professor Moshe Idel for pointing out the significance of techniques for "coming down" in kabbalistic sources.

12 In ch. 7, fol. 82b, and ch. 8, fol. 85a, quoting *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* II: 10.

13 Chapter Two of *Shaar ha-Yihud* refutes the view of those who compare Creation to the work of a craftsman, who may abandon his handiwork yet it will continue to exist. On the contrary, claims R. Shneur Zalman, the universe is continually dependent on God. There is a similar discussion in the *Guide*, II, end ch. 69, refuting the view of the Mutakallimun.

ness that בחינת] המקום והזמן בטילים במציאות ממש לבגי מהותו ועצמותו ית.¹⁴ From this beyond-human point of view, in the face of the infinite oneness of the Divine, there is no world. The only reality is that of the radiance of the *En Sof*.

This perception of one-ness is presented as a climax of contemplative endeavour, and is described as the inner theme of the first line of the Shema prayer. However, this is not the final achievement of the system described here by R. Shneur Zalman. According to the printed tract, this stage is followed by a further contemplative mode called *Yihuda Tata'a*, "The Lower Unity". This is the awareness that despite the fact that the Divine is beyond space and time, nonetheless, גם למטה, אף על פי כן הוא נמצא במקום וזמן...דהיינו שמהותו ועצמותו יתברך הנקרא בשם אין סוף ברוך הוא מלא במקום וזמן. אח כל הארץ ממש בזמן ומקום.¹⁵ The emphasis here is that the world, "Space and Time, *makom u-zeman*", does actually *exist*. The contemplative sees the world and relates to it as world; at the same time he perceives that it is an expression of the Divine. The usual approach when exploring this aspect of Habad contemplation is to concentrate on the immanence of the Divine, perceived through and in the world. This has weakened our awareness of the extent to which the *Yihuda Tata'a* accords objective existence to the finite universe.¹⁶ In fact, integral to this concept is the idea that there is an objective reality which the individual has to face, and that the quest to discover the Divine is within terms of this objective domain. Consistent with this is the following comment on the passage

14 *Tanya*, II, ch. 7, fol. 82a: "Space and Time are really abnegated from existence in the face of His Being and Essence".

15 *Ibid.*, fol. 82a-b: "Nonetheless, He is also to be found below, within Space and Time.... That is, that His Being and Essence, called the blessed En Sof (Infinite) actually fills the entire universe, within Time and Space".

114* 16 Another aspect of this is that scholars have tended to adopt the primarily acosmist, or, as Rachel Elior puts it, "theocentric" perspective provided by R. Aaron Halevi, the great disciple of R. Shneur Zalman. Moshe Hallamish, in his doctoral thesis about R. Shneur Zalman, presents an alternative view, ultimately rejecting the acosmistic interpretation. Thus he quotes from a discourse:

גם עכשיו אחר שנבראו העולמות הרי קמי' כולא כלא, אלא שהוא כלא בכ"ף הדמיון ולא לא

ממש ואף גם זאת אינו אלא קמי' ולא לגבי הנבראים (Doctoral thesis, p. 129).

The passage quoted is from *Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze*, 38d; another transcript of the same discourse is in *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken* 5566 (1806), cf. p. 336. See also *Ethalekh Liozna*, p. 201. Yoram Jacobson, emphasising the significance of the '*Dirah ba-Tahtonim*' as the goal in the thought of R. Shneur Zalman, likewise seems to stress the reality of the 'tahtonim', the lower realms. See his "Torat ha-Beriah shel R. Shneur Zalman mi-Liadi", *Eshel B'er Sheva* (1976), pp. 350ff. He also discusses the concept of *Yihuda Tata'a*: see pp. 354, 358.

under discussion, from a modern commentary, the *Biur Tanya*, by R. Adin Steinzaltz:

המוקד של תפיסה זו הוא הכרה במציאותו של העולם. לא הכחשת קיומו של העולם מול האין סוף, אלא קיום אובייקטיבי של מציאות — שבתוכו יש אין סוף.¹⁷

In the passage we are discussing, from *Sha'ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, the *Yihuda Tata'a* is not presented as a compromise. It is a further stage of contemplation: first there is the contemplative mode of the first line of the Shema, *Yihuda 'Ila'a*; this is then followed by the contemplative mode of *Yihuda Tata'a*, associated with the *second* line of the Shema, *Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le-olam va-ed*, which is generally said in a whisper. The path is from the stage beyond Reason and reality, back into the realm of Reason, yet discovering there too the presence of the Divine.

This aspect of the contemplative tract which forms the second section of *Tanya* becomes yet more interesting when we compare the version printed under the aegis of the author, in 1796, with the manuscript texts which had been circulating among his followers for several years, from around 1792. In the printed version, the tract is introduced with the statement: להבין מעט מזער מ"ש בזהר¹⁸ דשמע ישראל כו' הוא יחודא עילאה ובשכמל"ז הוא יחודא תתאה.¹⁹ This suggests that the entire tract is intended to explain the nature of these two contemplative modes. Then in Chapter Seven there is the definition of these two modes, in conceptual terms, as we have quoted, and also in terms of the system of the Sefirot: the two modes are defined as different kinds of "unity" (*Yihud*) of the *En Sof* with the Sefirah *Malkhut* and also as different kinds of combination of the Divine Name.

When we look at the earlier manuscript versions of this tract, we are struck by the fact that all this is absent. The introductory passage, the terminology *Yihuda 'Ila'a* and *Yihuda Tata'a*, and the explanation of the difference between the two, are all missing. The manuscript versions

115* 17 R. Adin Steinzaltz, *Biur Tanya, Shaar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 96: "The crux of this approach is recognition of the existence of the world. Not denial of the reality of the world, in the face of the En Sof, but [recognition of] the objective reality of existence — within which is En Sof".

18 *Zohar*, I, 18b.

19 *Tanya*, II, ch. 1, fol. 66b: "To understand a little what is written in the Zohar, that 'Hear O Israel,' etc. is the Upper Unity and 'Blessed be the Name of the Glory of His Kingdom for Ever' is the Lower Unity".

omit the end of the Chapter Six and the beginning of Chapter Seven of the printed text.²⁰ What is absent is the definition of the second stage, the *Yihuda Tata'a*. If we study only the manuscript, we learn about the abnegation of all existence in the face of the Infinite, that is, the level beyond Reason, *Yihuda 'Ila'a*; but this technical term is not used, because in the manuscript there is no reference to the contrasting *Yihuda Tata'a*. Thus, there is no instruction about the second step, in which the contemplative rediscovers the world and returns to the finite domain of Reason and reality. The manuscript versions leave him in an upper realm of perception where there is no world, only the infinite Divine.

Two factors are relevant in considering why the manuscript and printed versions of this tract offer quite different approaches to contemplation in prayer. One is that the printed book would obviously reach a far wider audience than did the manuscript copies, and R. Shneur Zalman was concerned about the new class of reader who would not have the benefit of his close personal guidance. He did not want them to attempt a mode of contemplation which, in his view, was too elevated for them. The world-transcending path of the manuscript was, therefore, transformed into a road which, after providing a view of the dizzy heights, returns safely to daily life.

Complementary to this is the development that was taking place in Habad thought, not only as the result of a compromise, but as the gradual clarification of an ideal. From this perspective, attainment of the realm beyond Reason and abandoning finitude was not the highest step. More subtle and more demanding was the next stage: drawing that which is beyond Reason into the realm of logical, rational thought and life.

Thus, we find in a transcript, probably by R. Dov Ber, of one of his father's discourses (date unknown), a discussion of the difference between "radiance" (*orot*) and "vessels" (*kelim*). The root of the *kelim* is declared to be more exalted than that of the *orot*.²¹ The discourse relates the *orot* to *Yihuda 'Ila'a*, and to the transcendent "Source of Wisdom, *mekor ha-ḥokhmah*", which is above Reason. By contrast, the *kelim* are described as relating to *Yihuda Tata'a*, and to the revelation of Reason in tangible form. The discourse therefore concludes:

20 See *Likkutei Amarim, Mahadura Kama* (Brooklyn, 1982), pp. 432, 457.

21 The *kelim* derive from the "*ḥoshekh ha-rishon, he'elem be-'azmuto*" (12) while the *orot* derive from the "*he'arat ha-kav*", lower in the Lurianic cosmology. See *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken, 'Inyanim* (Brooklyn, 1983), p. 389.

לכן העיקר בזמן הזה להאריך ביחוד[דא] ת[תאה] בחי' כלים כי שרשם הוא גבוה
מאד.²²

Whether or not R. Shneur Zalman himself considered the *Yihuda Tata'a* the more exalted attainment, or whether this is an interpolation by his son R. Dov Ber, remains unclear. However, we believe that the reformulation of the path communicated by his tract on contemplation in the *Tanya* was not only with a mood of compromise, preventing the new readers from falling into error, but also as the result of the developmental process concerning the nature of his teaching.

Further evidence for this is provided by careful examination of the oral discourses of R. Shneur Zalman. Recent publishing of texts and colophons hitherto in manuscript provides useful information on the dating of these teachings. The harsh, other-worldly demand of the discourses of 1792-93 softens somewhat and, around 1795, is to a great extent replaced by an emphasis on contemplation.²³ After this date, too, the discourses continued to develop. Particularly striking is the contrast between those before 1800 and those after, in the final decade of the life of R. Shneur Zalman. The earlier discourses were brief and luminous, driving home hard one or two main points. After the turn of the century, and the arrest and liberation of R. Shneur Zalman, they became lengthy and subtle constructs, rather like complex philosophical Midrashim, in which intellectualist analysis was applied to a broad range of Talmudic and kabbalistic material.

This change of style was recognised by latter leaders of Lubavitch. According to R. Shalom Dovber (1860-1920), the difference is that the discourses before the arrest — which he calls simply "Peterburg" — tend to be spiritually radiant, above Reason; those after "Peterburg" are en clothed in the garment of Reason. In a talk given in 1907, R. Shalom Dovber compared two versions of a teaching, both by R. Shneur Zalman; one from before "Peterburg" and the other from 1805. The distinction between the texts, he claimed, was one of rational comprehension.

22 Ibid., p. 391: "Therefore the main thing in our epoch is to spend a long time [contemplating in the mode of] the Lower Unity, which has the nature of 'vessels', because their source is very exalted". Concerning the source of the *kelim*, see also *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken* 5563, p. 385. This is a teaching by R. Dov Ber given in the lifetime of his father.

23 Thus, in a discourse of that year, intellectualist thought of "Torah and Mitzvot" is described as providing "לבושין שמלבישין הנשמה ומקיפין אותה מראשה ועד רגלה והם נמשכין מבחי' אחר שעי"ז באחד יוכלו נשמות להכלל באחד (*Likkutei Torah, Shelah*, 51d. (Concerning the dating of this discourse, see *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken ha-Kezarim*, p. 614.) In other words, through the "garment" of intellectualist thought, the soul is unified with the Divine.

The one which is before "Peterburg" not everyone can understand. For that you need a more exalted person ... By contrast, the text which is from after "Peterburg" ones *does* understand. Having seen *that* text, one can then comprehend the teaching he said before "Peterburg". Why is this? Because it was from then on that [Habad] Hasidic teaching clothed itself in *Sekhel*.²⁴

According to R. Shalom Dovber, the *Tanya* was the beginning of the rational mode of expression of R. Shneur Zalman. While this had been achieved in the form of a written tract, the oral discourses remained on a supra-rational plan. Only after "Peterburg" was R. Shneur Zalman able to express these too in the garment of intellectualist, rational thought.²⁵

From the point of view of R. Shalom Dovber, this enclothing in intellect is a fundamental characteristic of the Habad school. As he puts it, "*der inyan fun Khasidus is dokh hislabshus besekhel*" (the goal of [Habad] Hasidism is to enclothe [esoteric concepts] in Reason).²⁶ Interesting enough as this viewpoint is in itself, at the turn of the twentieth century, we believe the groundwork for it was laid earlier, in the first two generations of the movement.

Drawing 'Emunah' into 'Da'at'

It is well known that R. Shneur Zalman's intellectualism was attacked by the contemporary Hasidic leader, R. Avraham of Kalisk. In a response by R. Shneur Zalman we find a further insight into the relation of Reason and Beyond Reason in his system. In a letter to R. Avraham, dated 1805, R. Shneur Zalman refers to a discourse he had recently delivered on the subject of "Faith", *Emunah* and *Da'at*, rational knowledge. This discourse can be identified.²⁷ Here, there is emphasis on the idea that after reaching the beyond rational one returns to the realm of Reason. Thus, R. Shneur Zalman states that the realm of "faith", of *Emunah* transcending Reason, should be "drawn down" into the realm of *Da'at*, rational knowledge.

R. Shneur Zalman starts by defining "Faith", by stating clearly what it is *not*. What the world calls faith, is actually *da'at*. Faith is higher

24 *Torah Shalom, Sefer ha-Siḥot* (Brooklyn, 1957), p. 114.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

27 *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken 5605*, Vol. 2, p. 728ff, a transcript by R. Dov Ber, and also *Likkutei Torah, Va-Ethanan*, 4a-d.

than *da'at*. What does the world call faith? To believe that God gives life to the world, and created the world. R. Shneur Zalman states that this is not a matter of faith, because, by simple consideration of the microcosm and the macrocosm, one perceives clearly the role of the Divine in the universe. Just as the human body, the microcosm, is kept alive by the *nefesh*, so the worlds, "which are like a vast body", the macrocosm, come into being and are maintained in existence by the Divine. According to R. Shneur Zalman, "this is not called *emunah* in the Holy Tongue, but *da'at*".²⁸ Another transcript of this discourse states: *על זה הענין לא יתכן לומר: כחי אמונה שהיא למעלה מן השכל מאחר שראייתן השכל תופס אותו החיות שכל העולמות מקבלים ממנו*.²⁹

This view of the power of reason is very interesting: theoretically at least, it leads towards the philosophic tradition, which at this period of Jewish history is generally seen to be at the opposite pole to the kabbalistic-Hasidic. A little later, we will return to this idea. For the moment, however, let us try to understand the point which R. Shneur Zalman is making.

If the idea that Divine life-force maintains the universe in existence is within the realm of *da'at* ("knowledge") and Reason, what is *emunah*, Faith? As explained here by R. Shneur Zalman, none other than the concept of the unchanging one-ness of the Divine, the perception of *Yihuda 'Ila'a* which we have already met, in relation to which there is no world.³⁰ This is the *emunah* which is beyond Reason, beyond *da'at*. However, the theme of this discourse of 1805 is that this dimension of awareness should somehow be brought into the realm of *da'at*: that which is beyond Reason should be drawn down so that it is *קבועה בלב האדם ג"כ בבחי' דעת והרגשה* וכאלו רואה. This unity of faith with rational perception is described in Messianic terms, or as the attainment of the *Zaddik* who has achieved total purity.

It is also, we suggest, one of the goals of the intellectualist dimension of R. Shneur Zalman's Hasidic teachings. The aim is that somehow, by study and contemplation of discourses in which the beyond rational is combined with the rational, the Hasid will himself come to that perception

28 *Likkutei Torah*, loc. cit., 4a.

29 *Maamrei Admur ha-Zaken 5565*, Vol. 2, p. 729: "One cannot call this Faith, which is higher than Reason, since Reason itself perceives the life-force which sustains all the worlds".

30 The phrase *Yihuda 'Ila'a* is used in *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid.*, 4c: on 4b, the terminology employed is the same as that used in *Tanya* in explanation of this level of perception, e.g., quoting Mal. 3: 6, cf. *Tanya*, II, ch. 7, fol. 82b.

31 *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid.*, 4b: "internalised by the person, with Knowledge and tangible awareness, as if he can see it".

which otherwise is reserved for the totally pure Zaddik or for the Messianic age. This facet of Habad was intensified in the second generation of the movement.

The Dispute on Ecstasy

Much has been written on the conflict between R. Aaron Halevi Horowitz, the foremost of the disciples of R. Shneur Zalman, and the son of the latter, R. Dov Ber.³² A central focus of their controversy concerns enthusiasm in prayer. R. Aaron's path embraced intense emotional enthusiasm and ecstatic states; the teachings of R. Dov Ber seem to lead in a somewhat different direction. Rachel Elior has typified the contrast between their paths as "theocentric" — R. Aaron — versus "anthropocentric" — R. Dov Ber.³³ In our view, the distinction can be defined in terms of *Yihuda 'Ila'a* versus *Yihuda Tata'a*. R. Aaron's teachings lead to the acosmistic transcendence of existence typical of the *Yihuda 'Ila'a* mode, leading to supra-rational ecstatic emotion. By contrast, R. Dov Ber's tracts on contemplation, *Shaar ha-Yihud*³⁴ and *Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut*,³⁵ teach the Hasid to remain in an essentially cerebral domain of intellectualist thought, in which the "integration" (*hitkalelut*) of the highest and the lowest is perceived. The thrust of R. Dov Ber's teachings is *not* to give way to ecstasy, in other words, not to let oneself be transported into a state of supra-rational emotion; the struggle implicit in his system is the attempt to integrate one's intimation of the "simple Unity", *ahdut peshutah* of the *En Sof*, the ultimate *Yihuda 'Ila'a*, with the domain of *sekhel* as characterised in his own lengthy, discursive and almost "philosophical" teachings.

120*

As is well known, in the writings of R. Dov Ber the intellectualist aspect of his father's thought was intensified. His teachings are subtle expositions in which exploring the theme of *sekhel* and the process of rational thought itself has a central place. The parallel between human cognitive processes and the Lurianic ladder of spiritual realms is made more explicit than in any previous Hasidic literature. While this, especially when combined

32 See Elior, *Theory of Divinity*, pp. 5ff., 290ff.

33 Ibid., p. 301.

34 *Shaar ha-Yihud*, also known as *Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut*, first published in *Ner Mizvah ve-Torah Or* (Kopyst, 1820).

35 *Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut* was first published in Koenigsberg (1831?). It has been translated by L. Jacobs with the title *Tract on Ecstasy* (London, 1963).

with R. Dov Ber's particular mode of intensive contemplation, could lead to completely supra-rational attainments, including trance-like states,³⁶ it also has another side to it: the ability of the contemplative to confront the finite, rational world. The *Yihuda 'Ila'a* dimension of perception of Oneness is somehow translated into a form which is compatible with finite, earthly existence.

This point is brought out in R. Dov Ber's treatment of the theme of *Nefilat Apayim*. While the Shema prayer represents *Yihuda 'Ila'a*, and the *Amidah* signifies an immobile state of selflessness, *bitul*, the following section of the prayers, said only on weekdays, represents the ability to combine *unio mystica* with rational activity in the daily world.³⁷ In R. Dov Ber's writings this is exemplified by the Biblical figure of Joseph: שְׁעֵשָׂה מְלֹאכְתּוֹ בְּכַתִּיבַת חוֹשְׁבֵנָא וְהִיא מְרַכְבָּה בְּבַחֲוֵי הָאֲצִינְלוֹתָּן מִמֶּשׁ וְלֹא הָיָה נִפְרָד כָּלֵל גַּם בְּעוֹסְקוֹ בְּתַכְלִית עוֹמֵק נִפְשׁוֹ בְּכַתִּיבָנָהּ.³⁸

One mode of expressing the exalted realm of *Azilot* is by being in a trance-like state beyond the world, or in a transport of ecstasy in which the ordinary exigencies of life have no meaning. Another mode is one in which the supra-rational combines with the rational, and hence Joseph, the ultimate mystic, is able to work out and write down the calculations involved with the administration of food supply during the famine, while unified utterly with the Divine.

Elsewhere the same writer expresses this concept with the image of an ecstatic dancer. He describes a chaotic dance of ecstasy, beyond Reason: "a dance which is higher than *da'at*".³⁹ However, through attaining a state of utter self-abnegation, the dancer is able to draw the beyond-Reason into the realm of Reason, namely, into the measured rhythm of the dance-steps, or the inspired juggling of the Talmudic sage R. Shmuel bar Yitzhak.⁴⁰ Thus Reason and beyond-Reason are joined, on the plane of this world, yet transformed into a Divine union of opposites.

121*

36 See Loewenthal, "Self-Sacrifice of the Zaddik in the Teachings of R. Dov Ber, the *Mitteler Rebbe*" in *Jewish History. Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky* (London, 1988), pp. 473-474.

37 See *ibid.*, pp. 466-468.

38 *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, I (Zhitomir, 1864), p. 90: "who did his work of writing accounts and [yet] was a 'chariot' with the very quality of *Azilot*; he was not separate at all, even when he was very intensely involved with writing". The concept "chariot" means being in a state of total self-abnegation. See *Tanya*, I, ch. 34, fol. 43a.

39 *Drushei Hatunah*, Vol. I (Brooklyn, 1989), p. 264.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 266. See T.B. Ketubot, 17a.

The World is a World

It is known that R. Dov Ber was criticised for his intellectualism by his rival, R. Aaron, and also by other figures in the Hasidic movement, such as R. Zvi Hirsch of Zydachev (d. 1830).⁴¹ A response to this kind of attack, by a major follower of R. Dov Ber, helps us see yet more clearly the significance of the Lower Unity and the dialectic of Faith and Reason.

R. Yitzhak Aizak Halevi Epstein of Homel (1780-1857) had been a disciple of R. Shneur Zalman in his youth and then became a close follower of R. Dov Ber. A letter from him to an unknown friend defends the teachings of the latter from the attack that they are atheism and philosophy; in Yiddish: ופלוסופיא אפייןרסות דאס איז אפיקורסות. ⁴² In other words, it is not rationalism, although it might look like it in some way; rather, says R. Yitzhak Aizak, it is *emunah*. Obviously this is not the conventional concept of *emunah*, otherwise there would be no need to defend it from the charge of rationalism; with the vocabulary we have learnt, we can describe it as *emunah* drawn into *da'at*. R. Yitzhak Aizak makes clear that it is, in fact, the ultimate expression of *Yihuda Tata'a*.

His letter continues with a description of the stages of contemplative prayer: first the contemplation before the Shema, then in the Shema itself, the double step of *Yihuda 'Ila'a* and *Yihuda Tata'a*. However, in the Shema, the intensity of the contemplation does not allow him to perceive the world: "he is not aware of the world"⁴³ because the basic theme of the contemplation is that all before God is as nought. It is after the Shema, during the *Amidah*, that the full force of the *Yihuda Tata'a* is felt. Kabbalistically, states R. Yitzhak Aizak, the *Amidah* is the Lower Unity, *Yihud Z'er ve-Nukva*; it is an "explanation" of the Shema, "to explain it also to us".

122*

According to R. Yitzhak Aizak, the effect of the *Amidah* is that one achieves the realisation that "All is God" (*altz iz Got*), but at the same time: דיא וועלט איז ארוועלט. און עס שאט גאר ניט. און איז גאר ניט מבלבל דיא אמונה.⁴⁴ In other words, the perception that all is God is not a denial of the world, as in the Upper Unity of the first line of the Shema. The

41 See L. Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity — the Life and Works of R. Aaron of Starosselje* (London, 1966), pp. 85-86, 89.

42 *Hanah Ariel* (Berdichev, 1912), pagination at end of volume, 4a: "Do not say, heaven forbid, that this is atheism and philosophy".

43 "אינו מרגיש העולם", *ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*: "The world is a world, but it does no harm; it does not at all confuse the *emunah*".

power of the perception of the Lower Unity is that one sees the world as having objective material reality, yet without this being in conflict with the spiritual truth that all is God.

In order to reach this kind of perception, continues R. Yitzhak Aizak, one needs the Habad Hasidic teachings. In particular, he cites R. Dov Ber's *Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut*, otherwise known as *Sha'ar ha-Yihud*. This work was explicitly attacked by R. Zvi Hirsh of Zydachev, who stated that it was influenced by philosophy.⁴⁵ However, R. Yitzhak Aizak describes the path of this book as quite different from secular, human intellect. Rather, its aim is to enable *emunah*, Faith, to grow from *katnut* to *gadlut*. The *gadlut* is: הגדלת כח הנפש האנושית שתרע אמנתה בטוב טעם ודעה.⁴⁶

This combination of Faith and Knowledge is, it seems, the drawing of *emunah* into *da'at* described by R. Shneur Zalman. In the second generation of Habad, the followers of R. Dov Ber believed that the path to achieve this was through his highly intellectualist teachings, which lead ultimately to the perception that "the world is a world, but it does no harm...".

Philosophy and Early Science

How far did Habad go in its movement towards Philosophy? To what extent did it carry through the logic implicit in the idea that "the world is a world"?

A partial answer is provided by examination of a work by R. Dov Ber's nephew, son-in-law and successor, R. Menahem Mendel, known as the *Zemah Zedek* (1789-1866). It was first printed in Poltava in 1912, with the title *Derekh Emunah*, and a supplement was printed in Berdichev the following year. Another title is *Sefer ha-Hakirah*, "Book of Philosophy". In its original manuscript form the book has as introduction a discussion, by the author, of a discourse by R. Shneur Zalman, in which the nature of the stars is adduced as evidence for the life force flowing from the *En Sof*. R. Menahem Mendel compares this with passages in *Moreh Nevukhim* (II, 19; and at greater length, with a long quotation, with II, 1, the third speculation).

123*

45 *Sur me-Ra va-Aseh Tov* (Jerusalem, n.d.), pp. 144-145.

46 *Hanah Ariel*, loc. cit.: "the maturing of the power of the Divine Soul so that it should 'know' its Faith with clear understanding". R. Yitzhak Aizak takes pains to explain that this is not ordinary understanding, but a transformation of spiritual *emunah* into a form which can relate directly to objective reality.