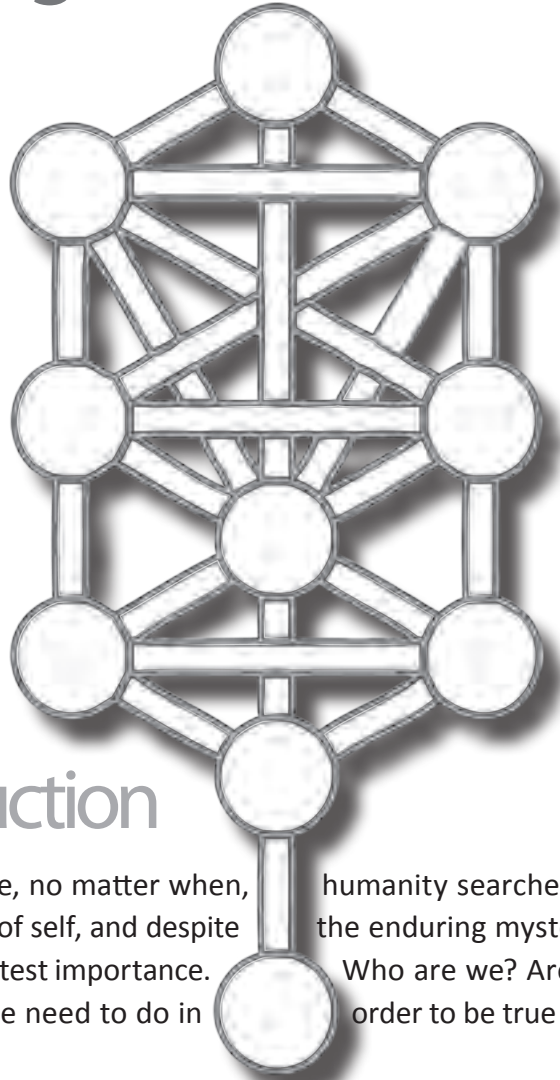


Lesson 1

Climbing the Soul Ladder

Uncovering the Human Potential



Introduction

No matter where, no matter when, fixed by a sense of self, and despite assign it the greatest importance. what is it that we need to do in

humanity searches for the ultimate. We are trans- the enduring mystery of what a self actually is, we Who are we? Are we really that important? And order to be true to ourselves?

Beneath the Floorboards

Treasure Hunt

Text 1

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. She recorded their dying epiphanies in a blog called *Inspiration and Chai*, which gathered so much attention that she put her observations into a book called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*.

Ware writes of the phenomenal clarity of vision that people gain at the end of their lives, and how we might learn from their wisdom. “When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently,” she says, “common themes surfaced again and again.”

Susie Steiner, “Top Five Regrets of the Dying,”
The Guardian, February 1, 2012

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,

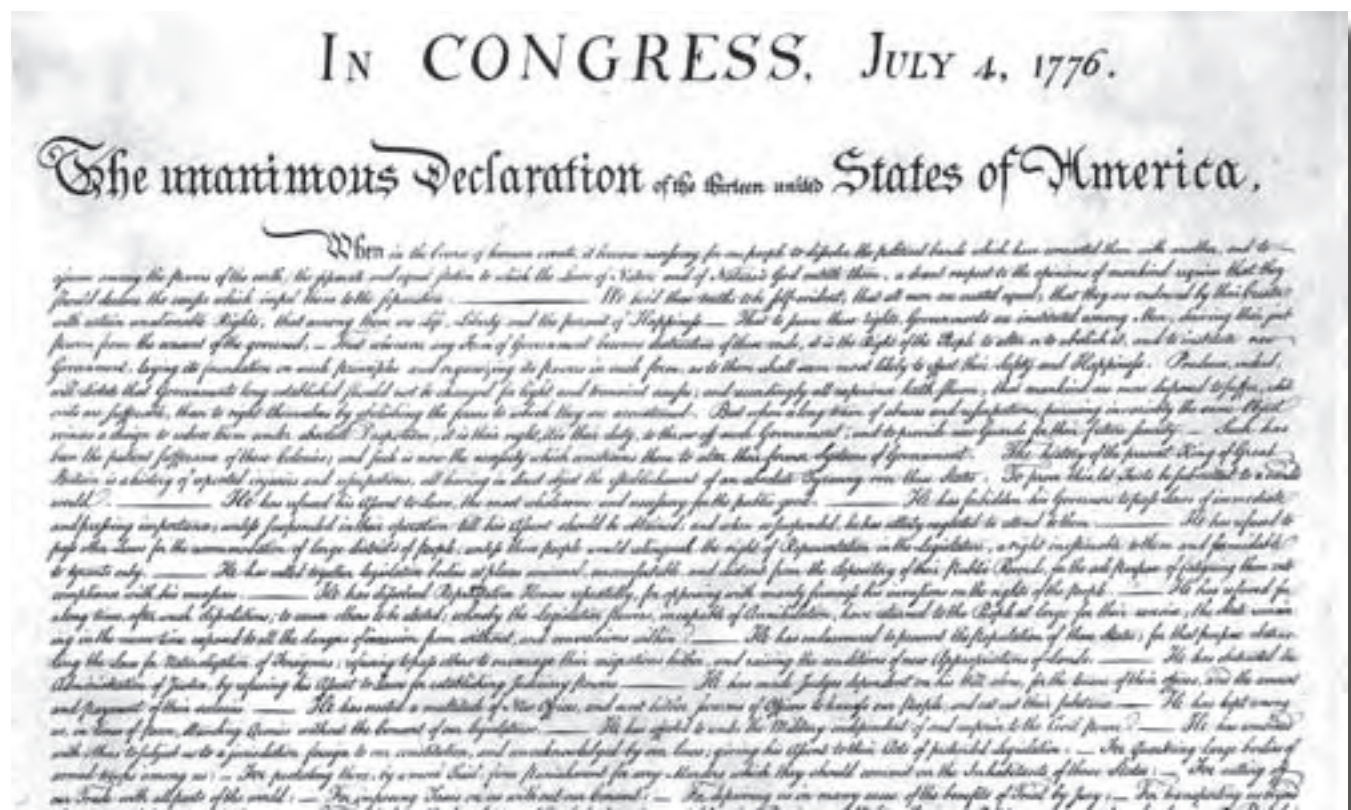
Text 2

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America

Question for Discussion

Do you agree that the statement “all men are created equal” is self-evident? If so, in which ways are all people self-evidently equal?



Reaching for the Heavens

Text 3

כְּמוֹת זֶה כֵּן מוֹת זֶה, וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לְכֹל, וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֵינוֹ, כִּי הַכֹּל הֶבֶל.
הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד. הַכֹּל הָיָה מִן הָעֶפֶר וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל הָעֶפֶר.
מִי יוֹדֵעַ, רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הָעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעְלָה, וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיֹּרֶדֶת הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶץ?
קִהַלֵּת ג, יט–כא

As is the death of man, so is the death of an animal; each has a vivifying spirit, and the superiority of man over beast is naught, for all is vanity.

All go to one place. All came from the dust, and all return to the dust.

How many understand, however, that the spirit of man ascends on high, while the spirit of the beast descends to the earth?

Ecclesiastes 3:19–21

Text 4

Dozens of U.S. billionaires pledged on Wednesday to give at least half their fortunes to charity as part of a philanthropic campaign by two of the world's richest men—Warren Buffett and Bill Gates. . . .

A total of 40 of the richest people in the United States, including Microsoft founder Gates and investor Buffett, now have taken the pledge. . . .

“I’ve long stated that I enjoy making money, and I enjoy giving it away,” energy tycoon [T. Boone] Pickens, who is worth about \$1 billion, said in his Giving Pledge letter. . . .

Buffett said none of the members of the Giving Pledge were driven by tax breaks. “Not one has talked to me about taxes,” he said. “Anybody who is entitled to take a tax deduction takes it, but I think the motivation goes far, far beyond taxes.”

Michelle Nichols, “U.S. Billionaires Pledge Fortunes to Charity,” Reuters, Aug 4, 2010

Text 5 ■

Do not the very existence of all these “isms” indicate that, by his very nature, man is forever seeking to transcend his material-bound self? If there is nothing more to man than the urge for animal gratification, why have billions of people accepted—to a greater or lesser degree—the moral

demands of these creeds? Does this itself not indicate that there is something more deeply ingrained in the human soul than the desire for life's temporal pleasures?

Obviously, in his heart of hearts, man longs for a freedom and transcendence that cannot be satisfied by mere “freedom” from restriction; he is convinced that there is a higher purpose to life, and is driven to learn it and to apply himself to its realization.

Rabbi Yanki Tauber, *The Skeptic and the Believer*, “Conversation IV: So Many Religions and Isms! Where's the Truth?”

Rabbi Yanki Tauber (1965–) Chasidic scholar and author. A native of Brooklyn, NY, Rabbi Tauber is an internationally renowned author and lecturer who specializes in adapting the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He is the executive editor of Chabad.org, the largest Jewish content website, and has written numerous articles and books, including *Once Upon a Hasid* and *Beyond the Letter of the Law*.

freedom

transcendence

purpose

The Soul of the Matter

Beyond the Skin, Flesh, and Bones

Text 6

Zohar. The most seminal work of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The Zohar is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to Arizal, the Zohar consists of the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yocha'i who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The Zohar has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.

כד אתברי אדם, מה כתיב ביה? "עור ובשר תלבישני וגו'" (איוב י,יא).
אי הכי, האדם מהו? אי תימא דאינו אלא עור ובשר ועצמות וגידים, לאו הכי, דהא
ודאי האדם לאו איהו אלא נשמתא. ואלין דקאמר, עור ובשר ועצמות וגידים, כלהו לא
הוו אלא מלבושא בלחודוי, מאנין אינון דבר נש ולא אינון אדם.
זוהר ב, עה,ב-עו,א

Concerning the creation of the human it is written, "You have clothed me with skin and flesh, [and covered me with bones and sinews]" (Job 10:11).

What, then, is the human? Merely skin, flesh, bones, and sinews? No, the essence of the human is the soul; the skin, flesh, bones and sinews are but an outward covering, mere garments, but they are not the human.

Zohar 2:75b-76a

Text 7

Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi was once holding his grandson in his lap. Young Menachem Mendel was sitting contentedly stroking his grandfather's beard, murmuring, "Zeide, Zeide (Grandfather, Grandfather)."

“That is not *Zeide*,” Rabbi Shne’ur Zalman teased, “that is *Zeide*’s beard. Where is *Zeide*?”

The child put his hands on Rabbi Shne’ur Zalman’s head. “This is *Zeide*!” he exclaimed.

“No, that is *Zeide*’s head. Where is *Zeide*?”

The same conversation repeated itself when the child touched Rabbi Shne’ur Zalman’s eyes, hands, and chest.

Menachem Mendel got up off his grandfather’s lap and hid behind a door. Suddenly he shrieked, “*Zeide! Zeide!*” Rabbi Shne’ur Zalman turned to him and with concern in his voice asked, “What happened, my dear?”

“Aha! There is *Zeide*,” Menachem Mendel triumphantly answered.

Rabbi Raphael Nachman Kahan, *Shemu’ot Vesipurim* (1990) 1:53

Rabbi Raphael Nachman Kahan (1897–1988) Chasidic mentor and author. Rabbi Kahan studied in the central Chabad yeshivah in the city of Lubavitch, Belarus. In 1930, he was sentenced by the Soviet regime to three years of forced labor in Siberia for his activism in the field of Jewish education. Kahan immigrated to Israel in 1935. He is the father of Rabbi Yoel Kahn, the chief transcriber of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s discourses and the preeminent authority on Chabad philosophy.

On Foreign Territory

Text 8

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon

(Maimonides/Rambam, 1135–1204). Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Cordoba, Spain. After the conquest of Cordoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law, and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are considered integral to the formation of halachic consensus.

אין צורת הנפש הזאת מחוברת מן היסודות כדי שתפרד להם . . . אלא מאת ה' מן השמים היא.

לפיכך כשיפרד הגולם שהוא מחובר מן היסודות . . . לא תכרת הצורה הזאת . . . ועומדת לעולם ולעולמי עולמים.

משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה ד, ט

The form of this soul is not a combination of the physical elements [fire, wind, water, and earth], into which it will ultimately decompose. . . .

Rather, it is from God, from heaven.

Therefore, when the matter of the body, which is a combination of the fundamental elements, decomposes . . . this soul does not cease to be. . . . Rather, it exists forever.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah 4:9

Text 9

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema, 1525–1572). Halachist. Rema served as rabbi in Krakow, Poland, and is considered the definitive authority on Jewish law among Ashkenazic Jewry. Rema authored glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (known as the *Mapah*) and *Darhei Moshe*, a commentary on the Halachic compendium *Arba'ah Turim*.

יש לפרש ש"מפליא לעשות" במה ששומר רוח האדם בקרבנו, וקושר דבר רוחני בדבר גשמי.

רמ"א, שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים ו, א

God performs wonders in that He sustains the human soul in a body and binds a spiritual entity with a physical one.

Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Shulchan Aruch, *Orach Chayim* 6:1

In the Image of God

Text 10

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ.
בראשית א, כז

God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him.

Genesis 1:27

Text 11

וכיון שנתברר שאינו גוף וגוייה, יתברר שלא יארע לו אחד ממאורעות הגופות: לא חיבור ולא פירוד, לא מקום ולא מדה, לא עליה ולא ירידה, ולא ימין ולא שמאל, ולא פנים ולא אחור, ולא ישיבה ולא עמידה; ואינו מצוי בזמן עד שיהיה לו ראשית ואחרית ומנין שנים; ואינו משתנה, שאין לו דבר שיגרום לו שינוי. ואין לו לא מות ולא חיים כחיי הגוף החי, ולא סכלות ולא חכמה כחכמת האיש החכם, לא שינה ולא הקיצה, ולא כעס ולא שחוק, ולא שמחה ולא עצבות, ולא שתיקה ולא דבור כדבור בני אדם. משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה א, יא

Because it has been established that He does not have a body or corporeal form, it is clear that He is not subject to any properties or incidences that characterize the physical: neither integration nor disintegration, space nor measure, ascent nor descent, right nor left, front nor back, standing nor sitting. He is not subject to time, so He does not have

a beginning, end, or an age. He does not change, for there is nothing that can cause Him to change.

Death, life (in the context of physical life), foolishness, wisdom (in terms of human wisdom), sleep, waking, anger, laughter, joy, sadness, silence, and speech (in the human understanding of speech) are not applicable to Him.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah 1:11

Text 12 ■

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1092–1167). Biblical commentator, linguist and poet. Ibn Ezra was born in Toledo, Spain and fled the Almohad regime to other parts of Europe. It is believed that he was living in London at the time of his death. Ibn Ezra is best known for his literalistic commentary on the Pentateuch. He also wrote works of poetry, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and other topics.

וחלילה חלילה להיות דמות לשם. וכן אמר, "אל מי תדמיוני" (ישעיהו מ,כה).
ובעבור שנשמת האדם העליונה שאיננה מתה נמשלת בחיותה לשם, ושאנינה גוף.
אבן עזרא, בראשית א,כו

Heaven forbid [to say] that God possesses any form, as the prophet says, "To whom will you compare Me?" (Isaiah 40:25)

The [likeness of man to the divine consists only in that the] human soul is spiritual, incorporeal, and immortal.

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, *Genesis* 1:26

The Call of the Soul

Text 13

אי אפשר למצא מעמד מבוסס לרוח כי אם באויר האלקי. הידיעה, ההרגשה, הדמיון והחפץ והתנועות הפנימיות והחיצוניות שלהם, כולם מזקיקים את בני האדם שיהיו אלקיים דוקא. אז ימצאו את מלואם, את יחושם השוה והמניח את הדעת. אם מעט פחות מגדולה זו יבקש לו האדם הרי הוא מיד טרוף כספינה המטורפת בים, גלים סוערים מתנגדים זה לזה ידריכוהו תמיד מנוחה, מגל אל גל יוטל ולא ידע שלו. אם יוכל לשקע באיזה רפש עבה של גסות הרוח ועביות ההרגשה, יצלח לו למעט את אור חייו לאיזה משך זמן, עד שבקרבו ידמה שכבר מצא מנוח. אבל לא יארכו הימים, הרוח יחלץ ממסגרותיו והטירוף הקלעי יחל את פעלו בכל תוקף. אורות, ע' קיט

The human spirit finds stability only within a Godly atmosphere. The [human spirit's] knowledge, feelings, vision, desires, and internal and external drives require humans to be divine beings. Only then will they achieve wholeness and find proper and fulfilling associations.

One who seeks anything less than this greatness is immediately confused and torn like a ship attempting to navigate a violent storm. The crashing breakers [of life] toss him from one wave to another, depriving him of serenity and tranquility. He may submerge in the sludge of ego and insensitivity, and thus temporarily dim the light of life and delude himself into believing that he has found inner peace. It won't be long, however, before emotional pandemonium will resume in all its intensity.

Rabbi Avraham Yitschak Hakohen Kook, *Orot*, p. 119

Rabbi Avraham Yitschak Hakohen Kook (1864–1935). Scholar and thinker. Rabbi Kook was born in Latvia and immigrated to Israel in 1904 where he became a leading figure in the religious Zionist movement. In 1917, he was appointed rabbi of Jerusalem, and in 1921, he became the first Ashkenazic chief rabbi of pre-state Israel. Kook wrote many books on Jewish thought and law, including *Orot Hakodesh*, most of which were published posthumously.

Beyond What Meets the Eye

The Kabbalah of the Soul

Text 14

הנשמה הוא מן העליונים, חלק אלוקה ממעל.
עץ הדעת טוב, פרשת ואתחנן

The soul is from the supernal realm; it is a part of God from above.

Rabbi Chaim Vital, *Ets Hada'at Tov, Parashat Va'etchanan*

Text 15

אלוקה זה אחד הוא, ואינו שנים ולא יתר על שנים, אלא אחד שאין כיחודו אחד מן האחדים הנמצאים בעולם. לא אחד כמין שהוא כולל אחדים הרבה, ולא אחד כגוף שהוא נחלק למחלקות ולקצוות, אלא יחוד שאין יחוד אחר כמותו בעולם.
משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה א, ז

God is One; not two or more. His Oneness surpasses any unity that is found in the world. His Oneness is not like the singularity of a species, which includes many individual entities, nor even like the oneness of a single body, which is divisible into parts and dimensions. Rather, He is utter Oneness, the like of which does not exist in the world.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah* 1:7

God with a Last Name

Text 16

דהנה ענין אור הוא שזהו רק הארה לבד לא מהות הדבר כלל. על דרך משל אור וזיו השמש שהוא הארה לבד, שהרי מהות השמש עצמה אינה מתפשטת בעולם להאיר כי אם מה שמאיר הוא רק הארה לבד שאין בה מן העצם כלל, עם היות שההארה היא מעין העצם דעצם השמש בהירה ממילא האור הוא מאיר כו' ומכל מקום אין בו מהעצם כלל כו'. . . והדוגמא מכל זה יובן למעלה. מה שנקרא אור שזהו בחינת הארה לבד, שאין בו מן העצם כלל . . . אמנם, הוא גילוי העצם, שלפי אופן העצם ממש. יום טוב של ראש השנה תרס"ו, ע' קעו-קעח

The most basic feature of light is that it is only an emanation [from the light-source], not the source itself.

For example, the sunlight that reaches our planet is only an emission from the sun; the sun itself is not to be found in this planet's atmosphere. Though the sun's rays are a perfect reflection of the sun—the sun itself is a luminous entity, and its rays simply project its luminosity—the rays are not the sun itself.

God's Infinite Light is called so because it, too, is only an emanation, containing nothing of G-d's essence. . . . Nevertheless, it serves to reveal G-d's essence, for it is a perfect expression thereof.

Rabbi Shalom Dovber of Lubavitch, *Yom Tov shel Rosh Hashanah* 5666, pp. 176–178

Rabbi Shalom Dovber of Lubavitch (Rashab, 1860–1920). Chasidic rebbe. Rabbi Shalom Dovber became the 5th leader of the Chabad movement at the age of 21, upon the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch. He established the Lubavitch network of *yeshivot* called *Tomchei Temimim*. During World War I, he fled to Rostov on the Don, Russia, where he passed away and is buried. He authored many volumes of Chasidic discourses and is renowned for his encyclopedic method of expounding upon Kabbalistic concepts.

Figure 1.1

Philosophical Jewish Understanding of the Human Soul	Kabbalistic Understanding of the Human Soul
Immortal	Immortal
Non-physical	Non-physical
The essence of the human	The essence of the human
A fountain of goodness	A fountain of goodness
Seeks transcendence	Seeks transcendence
A God-like creation	Part of God; Godliness
Has a self-identity	Has no self-identity
Finite	Infinite

Human Soul

The Chameleon

Text 17

אלוקי! נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא. אתה בראתה, אתה יצרתה, אתה נפחתה בי. סידור תהילת ה', ברכות השחר

My God! The soul that You instilled within me is pure. You created it, You formed it, and You have breathed it into me.

Siddur Tehilat Hashem, Morning Blessings

Text 18

גם הנשמה כמו שנעשית בחינת יש נברא היא בעצם מהותה אלקות. שזהו ההפרש בין הנשמות לשאר הנבראים, דכל הנבראים התהוותם אינה באופן שהבורא נעשה נברא, כי אם שהוא מהוה את הנברא, היינו שמציאות הנברא אינו מציאות הבורא... מה שאין כן מציאות הנשמות, הרי זה מה שהאלקות עצמו נעשה בבחינת מציאות דנשמה. תורת מנחם, ספר המאמרים תשי"ז, ע' יג

Even as the soul becomes a created being with a self-identity, its core is Godliness. This is the difference between the soul and all other creations. With regards to other creations, the Godly energy that creates them remains distinct from them. . . . With regard to the soul, however, Godliness itself becomes the entity of the soul.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, *Torat Menachem, Sefer Hama'amarim 5717*, p. 13

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994). The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century; known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

The Upshot

Text 19

Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi (Alter Rebbe/the Rav, 1745–1812). Chasidic rebbe, halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus. He was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chasidism; *Torah Or*; *Likutei Torah*; and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded code of Jewish law.

ומי . . . [ש]נפשו שוקקה וצמאה לה' וכלתה אליו כל היום ואינו מרוה צמאוננו במי התורה שלפניו, הרי זה כמי שעומד בנהר וצועק, "מים! מים לשתות!" כמו שקובל עליו הנביא, "הוי כל צמא לכו למים" (ישעיהו נה,א).
תניא, פרק מ



ne . . . whose soul yearns and thirsts for God and pines for Him all day, but does not quench the thirst with the “waters of the Torah” that are readily available, is like a person who stands in a river and shouts: “[I need] water! Water to drink!” As the prophet laments: “Ho! All who are thirsty go to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1).

Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, ch. 40

Key Points

- 1.** The human being's innate goodness flows from his essence, his soul.
- 2.** The human soul is a spiritual entity. When the body dies, the soul remains intact. The soul always was and always remains transcendent, an entirely spiritual entity.
- 3.** The more materialism-oriented a person's life, the more he represses his true self. The more he engages in spiritual activities, the more he expresses his true self.
- 4.** In the world of Jewish philosophy, all of existence is divided into two categories: Creator and creations. The greatest innovation of mysticism is the concept of "Godliness" (*Or Ein Sof*). *Or Ein Sof* is an emanation from God. It is not the essence of God, but is not anything other than God either; it is a perfect expression of Him.
- 5.** According to the mystics, the human soul is "a part of God from above," i.e., Godliness..
- 6.** The Godly human core takes on containment, limitation, and ego. But even as it assumes a personality, at its core it remains Godly. It is Godliness in disguise.
- 7.** The knowledge of what lies at our core ought to lead to an increased sense of self-respect and self-worth and affect our estimation of our fellow human beings.
- 8.** Our souls are lonely in this material world; the salve for this loneliness is Torah study.