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TAKING OWNERSHIP OF CHASSIDUS

From the Talks of
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
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1.

The Living Writings*

There is a well-known expression that the Rebbe Rashab said just a few hours before his passing: "I am going to heaven; my writings I leave for you."[1]

As discussed on several occasions,[2] the profound meaning embedded within this statement is that through these writings, we effectively "have" the Rebbe **himself** — and even more so, we have him {in his most sublime state} as he exists in heaven.

{The Midrash teaches that} "*Tzaddikim* are likened to their Creator."[3] Therefore, {we can explain the unique quality of writing, by analyzing how G-d relates to His writing — Torah.} Just as G-d invested His very essence into the Torah — as explained in the well-known interpretation[4] of the statement of *Chazal*, {explaining the acronym for the word Anochi},[5] "I wrote and gave My very self," that G-d literally wrote and invested Himself into the Torah[6] — {which leads to the remarkable consequence that} through studying Torah, G-d says, "You are taking Me."[7]

Similarly, *Tzaddikim* invest their very selves into the Torah concepts they studied, and specifically, into the original Torah insights they innovated. Therefore, by studying their Torah teachings, one bonds with the *Tzaddikim* themselves.

2.

Giving vs. Leaving

When comparing the Rebbe Rashab's wording to the aforementioned statement of *Chazal* (regarding the giving of the Torah), a distinct shift in terminology emerges. *Chazal* employ the term "*yehavis*" — "I gave" (an expression of **active giving**). In contrast, the Rebbe Rashab stated, "the writings I **leave** for you."

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* This *Sichah* was published in honor of the 2nd of Nissan, the *Histalkus* of the Rebbe Rashab in the year 5680 (1920). For his detailed biography, see *Chanoch L'Naar, Sefer Toldos Admur Moharashab* (Kehos 1976). And elsewhere.

1) Copied in a letter by the elder Chassidim — printed in the Frierdiker Rebbe's *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 1, p. 113.

2) See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 17, p. 423; Vol. 22, p. 185; and elsewhere.

3) *Bereishis Rabbah*, 67:8; Rus 4:3; and elsewhere.

4) See *Likkutei Torah*, *Shlach* 48d; *Or HaTorah*, Yisro, p. 901 ff.

5) *Shabbos* 105a (according to the version of the *Ein Yaakov*).

6) See *Tanya*, ch. 47.

7) *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Emor* 17. See *Shmos Rabbah*, 33:1, 33:6; *Tanchuma*, *Terumah* 3.

At first glance, one might assume the reason for this {discrepancy is simply situational}. Because this was said just a few hours before his passing, the term "leave" is circumstantially appropriate — much like we find in *Halachah*[8] regarding the gift of a deathly ill person (*shechiv mera*), where the formalized wording is "I leave."[9]

However, based on the oft-discussed principle regarding the profound precision in the teachings of our *Rebbeim* — that this exactitude applies not merely to their general themes, but to every single word and expression — we are forced to conclude otherwise, i.e., the specific choice of the phrase "I leave for you" is not merely circumstantial. Rather, this precise wording lies at the very **core** of the message[10] the Rebbe Rashab wished to convey: {namely, the unique mechanism through which} studying his writings allows one to "take" the Rebbe himself.

3.

Two Modes of Transmission

The difference between these two aforementioned terms — "*yehavis*" (giving) and "leave" — {is as follows}:

"Giving" emphasizes that the object reaches the recipient through the **power of the giver**.[11] It does not necessitate any active effort on the part of the recipient to acquire the gift. In contrast, "leave" means that the giver merely provides the opportunity for the other person to take it; however, for it to actually enter the recipient's possession, they must **take** it themselves (through their own active effort).

We find parallels to these two modes — "giving" and "leaving" — in the study of Torah.[12] As *Chazal*[13] state: "Initially, the Torah is called by the name of G-d ('his delight is in the Torah of **G-d'**[14]), but ultimately it is called by his [the student's] name ('and in *his*

8) *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 253:2.

9) Or "I abandon," which is also halachically effective (see *Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger* on *Shulchan Aruch*, loc. cit., and references there). See the following footnote.

10) Especially since an expression of "giving" would undoubtedly be legally effective. {In fact, using the word "leave" is halachically precarious,} as there are opinions that question its efficacy entirely. (See *Pischei Teshuvah* ibid., and references there. Note also that some say "abandon" is worse than "leave" and is completely ineffective, as cited in *Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger* there.) We must also analyze the precise translation of the Yiddish word "*loz*" {leave}.

11) This is also the case in the aforementioned statement of *Chazal*, "I wrote and *gave* My very self" — that G-d "gave us Himself, as it were" (*Tanya*, loc. cit.). This is a dynamic that comes from Above, with no human involvement {i.e., we passively receive it}.

12) This is in contrast to the {initial} **Giving** of the Torah {at Mount Sinai}, as mentioned in the previous footnote.

13) *Avodah Zarah* 19a.

14) *Tehillim* 1:2.

Torah he meditates'[14])." When one's Torah study consists of a cursory reading (*lemigras*),[15] the Torah remains "called by the name of G-d" — it relates primarily to the **Giver** of the Torah. However, when there is {in-depth} "meditation"[15] (**analytical** study of Torah),[16] it is "called by his name"; the words of Torah become **his own** since he "**took**" them through his own toil — {as the *Gemara* states,} "it is his Torah."[17]

Based on this, we can explain the Rebbe Rashab's precise wording, "the writings I **leave** for you." This mirrors his innovation in the manner that the teachings of *Chassidus* were revealed. {Unlike in previous generations where the study of *Chassidus* was largely dependent on the manner it was "given" by each respective Rebbe,} the Rebbe Rashab established that the comprehension of *Pnimiyus HaTorah* should be {achieved} entirely through the intellectual power of the **recipient** and **student**, such that he actively "**takes**" the concepts being studied, as will be explained.

4.

The Yeshivah Framework

One of the primary innovations of the Rebbe Rashab was the founding of the Tomchei Temimim *yeshivah*.[18] The central accomplishment of **this** *yeshivah* was[19] that a formalized schedule for the study of *Chassidus* was instituted into the *yeshivah's* curriculum.

What is the {specific} innovation of studying *Chassidus* within the framework of a *yeshivah*? It is that the very essence of a *yeshivah* is studying Torah through a fellowship of peers (*dibbuk chaverim*), the back-and-forth debate among students (*pilpul talmidim*), and the like. Through this dynamic give-and-take, the subject matter being studied is clarified and refined until it emerges crystal clear in all its details.

Similarly, the Rebbe Rashab instituted that the study of the teachings of *Chassidus* should be conducted in this "yeshivah-style" manner. As he stated,[20] he wanted the method of studying *Chassidus* to be "like the study of subjects in the **revealed dimension** of Torah [*Nigleh*]," until "they will understand *Chassidus* just as they understand a concept in

15) See *Gemara Avodah Zarah* there, later in the passage. See also *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Maharsha*) there.

16) See Rashi there.

17) *Kiddushin* 32b.

18) 15th of Elul, 5657 (1897).

19) {This was an innovation} even relative to the *yeshivah* in Lubavitch during the days of the Tzemach Tzedek.

20) Copied in a letter by the Rebbe Rayatz (*HaTamim*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-24 [13a-b]; *Igros Kodesh* of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. 10, p. 365 ff., and elsewhere).

Nigleh." Therefore, he established the system of studying *Chassidus* in the *yeshivah*[21] {in such a way} that the students should learn in distinct groups. Each group would study the exact same concept (or subject) in *Chassidus* so that they could discuss and debate it among themselves, until the concept became totally clear to the students in all its minutiae — exactly akin to the method of study in the revealed dimension of Torah.

Such a method of studying *Pnimiyus HaTorah* represents a **fundamental** innovation compared to all the eras that preceded it.

5.

The Historic Divide Between Revealed and Hidden

In previous eras, there was a fundamental difference between the study of the revealed dimension of Torah (*Nigleh*) and the study of the inner dimension of Torah (*Pnimiyus HaTorah*).

The revealed dimension of Torah was given in such a manner that the **human** intellect of a created being could grasp its logic and intellectual structure. Even though[22] Torah is the profound wisdom of **G-d**, about which it is said "no thought can grasp Him," the Almighty {deliberately} lowered His wisdom so that the human intellect could comprehend it (to the point that it {can be} "called by his name," becoming his [the man's] Torah).

In contrast, *Pnimiyus HaTorah* remains openly {and conspicuously} the Torah of **G-d**. In the very early generations, the majority of the Jewish people received these concepts purely through **faith**. It was simply beyond the capacity of human intellect to **grasp** them. (This, in fact, is one of the meanings of the name *Kabbalah*: it comes through an accepted tradition (*kabbalah*) from one person to another.[23])

Even in later generations (after the *Arizal*), when the concepts of *Pnimiyus HaTorah* were **explicated** in a manner that they could be "**spread out**,"[24] and be **understood**[25] (— not merely recited on a surface level[26]), they were still not **brought down** to the level of

21) His *Kuntres Eitz HaChaim*, chapter 25.

22) See *Tanya*, ch. 4.

23) See at length the introduction of Rabbi Chaim Vital to *Shaar HaHakdamos* (printed in *Kuntres Eitz HaChaim* — of the *Baal HaHillula* [the Rebbe Rashab] — Kehot publication, Addendum 1, p. 74 ff.).

24) The wording of *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 6, at the end. See *Kissei Melech* there. The introduction of *Mikdash Melech* to the *Zohar*, and elsewhere. See the introduction of Rabbi Chaim Vital to *Shaar HaHakdamos* there.

25) See *Sefer HaSichos Toras Shalom*, p. 185. The *Sichah* of Yud-Tes Kislev 5669 (printed at the end of *Toras Shalom*, 5743 edition).

26) The wording of the *Kissei Melech* there.

human intellect where he could truly grasp them.[27] It remained **Divine** intellect, which could only be apprehended by the intellect of the **G-dly** soul (which is a Divine intellect belonging to a Divine soul, capable of grasping the deeply spiritual concepts explained in *Pnimiyus HaTorah*).

[We can suggest that this is the reason[28] why not everyone was capable of comprehending these concepts. Only those who possessed a particularly lofty soul, and furthermore, had refined themselves properly to become a vessel for the soul's revelation {could understand them}. However, those who were not "refined" and did not possess a lofty soul were unable to attain an understanding of *Pnimiyus HaTorah*.]

This provides one explanation for the statement of the *Zohar*[29] that in *Pnimiyus HaTorah* "there are no questions…" (unlike in the revealed dimension of Torah):

A question represents a state of **concealment and hiddenness**; it obscures the truth of Torah. Therefore, regarding the revealed dimension of Torah — which descended into a state where **human** intellect can grasp it — questions do exist. In fact, the questions are an integral part of the **Torah itself**. [A proof for this, as discussed on several occasions, is that even if one wishes to study only a question in the Torah, he is obligated to recite the blessings over the Torah beforehand.] {The reason for this is} because the intellect of the Torah (**G-d's wisdom**) cannot immediately settle within the human intellect. First, questions arise within the human mind until the student refines his understanding and arrives at the absolute truth of the Torah.

In contrast, *Pnimiyus HaTorah* was never brought down into the confines of human intellect. It was given exclusively for the intellect of the G-dly soul. Since the Torah shines openly for the G-dly soul {without any concealment}, "there are no questions."

6.

The Ultimate Intellectual Independence

Furthermore: It is well known[30] that the innovation of the Alter Rebbe in the teachings of Chabad *Chassidus* (and particularly after his liberation on *Yud-Tes Kislev*) consisted of clothing the concepts of *Pnimiyus HaTorah* within intellect (*CHaBaD*), in such

27) See the introduction of Rabbi Chaim Vital there (in the aforementioned *Kuntres*, p. 76): "There is no doubt that these matters will not be understood through material, human intellectual inquiry…"

28) See *Toras Shalom*, p. 113.

29) *Raaya Mehemna*, *Naso* (124b), cited and explained in *Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 26. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 25, pp. 161-162, 164.

30) See at length *Toras Shalom* referenced in footnote 28. And in numerous other places.

a manner "that everyone — even those who are unrefined" {i.e., those referred to as} "outside" — could understand it with their human intellect.

Nevertheless, this was still not {grasped} in the identical manner as the comprehension of the **revealed dimension** of Torah. The human intellect **on its own** could not achieve a complete comprehension of *Pnimiyus HaTorah*; rather, only when a concept in *Pnimiyus HaTorah* was explicitly explained to a person, could it **settle** in his mind.

[This is analogous to a teacher who teaches his student a profound intellectual concept that is beyond the student's **independent** capacity to comprehend. Even after the teacher explains it to him and it settles in his mind, the student cannot find his **own** words to explain the concept {to others or elaborate upon it independently}.]

{Thus, we can appreciate} the innovation of the Rebbe Rashab: he brought down the concepts of *Pnimiyus HaTorah* in such a way that the comprehension of them could be achieved in the exact same manner as the comprehension of the **revealed dimension** of Torah. Just as the revealed dimension of Torah is "exposed" to the human intellect in a way that one toils in it just as one would in a mundane intellectual pursuit — in that very same manner, the human intellect should toil in *Pnimiyus HaTorah*.

[This is analogous to a teacher who brings down the profound intellectual concept to the student in such a way that the student can subsequently toil in it with his own intellect, and find his own words and explanations to express the concept.]

This innovation can be seen in his *maamarim* (Chassidic discourses)[31] — the very same concepts that are explained in the *maamarim* of the Chabad *Rebbeim* who preceded him, appear in his *maamarim* with lengthy explanations. Furthermore, the presentation and explanation of the concepts is in a style that the human intellect can explain (using its own "words") and grasp, entirely akin to how one grasps an intellectual concept in the revealed dimension of Torah.[32]

Therefore, the Rebbe Rashab was extremely precise in his wording, "the writings I **leave** for you." Because this is the central accomplishment of **his** writings: that the human intellect of a person can actively "**take**" them {on its own}, until it becomes "his Torah — called by his name."

31) Regarding the *maamarim* of the Rebbe Rashab, see *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. 2, 295b ff. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 7, p. 209.

32) And there is the well-known saying of the early Chassidim that the Rebbe Rashab is the "*Rambam* of the teachings of *Chassidus*" (*Likkutei Dibburim* there, 296a. See *Sefer HaSichos 5701*, p. 160).

7.

The Obligation to Understand

From all the above, we derive a practical directive: There are those who indeed study *Pnimiyus HaTorah*, yet they are afraid to ask a question when they do not understand the subject matter. {They think to themselves:} How can one ask a question about a concept in *Pnimiyus HaTorah*? After all, {the *Zohar* states that} "there are no questions there"! And if one does not understand, {they figure that} it is sufficient to believe with perfect faith that everything written in *Pnimiyus HaTorah* is true.

To this, the answer is: The Rebbe Rashab paved the way for the teachings of *Chassidus* to be grasped by the human intellect in the exact same manner as the revealed dimension of Torah. Meaning, it must be studied with in-depth analysis (*iyun*) and through back-and-forth debate. And if one does not understand a concept — {the rule applies that} "the bashful person cannot learn,"[33] and one must ask and clarify the matter.

To be sure, even when one does **not** understand a concept in Torah (even in the revealed dimension of Torah), there perforce must be an attitude of "we will do" prior to "we will hear" (*naaseh* before *nishma*). It is unthinkable to harbor any doubt, Heaven forbid, regarding the absolute truth of the matter.[34] However, on the other hand, one cannot fulfill {the specific obligation of} **understanding** the Torah merely through the acceptance of the Heavenly **yoke** (*kabbalas ol*). To **understand** a concept properly means that the person comprehends with his **own** intellect how the question is resolved (even in *Pnimiyus HaTorah*).

Through the study of *Pnimiyus HaTorah* — which has been revealed in these generations within the teachings of Chabad *Chassidus* in a manner of **complete** comprehension and understanding (akin to the comprehension of the revealed dimension of Torah) — this serves as an imminent preparation for "that era,"[35] {of *Moshiach*} when "the Jewish people will be great sages, knowing the hidden matters, and grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full capacity of mankind, as it is stated:[36] 'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.'"

(From a Sichah delivered on 20 Cheshvan, 5746)

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33) *Pirkei Avos* 2:5.

34) This is also evident in the manner and style of his questioning, that there is absolutely no trace of audacity, Heaven forbid. For he recognizes that the deficiency is entirely on his part {and not in the Torah text itself}: "If it is empty — it is from you" (*Yerushalmi*, *Pe'ah* 1:1; *Sheviis* 1:5).

35) *Rambam* at the conclusion of his work {*Mishneh Torah*}.

36) *Yeshayahu* 11:9.