

Foreword

by the

Lubavitcher Rabbi שליט"א

The moral person must strive to bring his personal life and daily conduct in full harmony with his convictions; to live up to the standards of morality and ethics which he would like others also to adhere to. This is particularly true of the Jewish religious person, since the Jewish religion is a way of everyday life, and considers the *deed*—the actual conduct in the daily life—as the essential thing and the ultimate purpose of knowledge. The Chasidic philosophy goes a step further. While considering the deed essential, it demands that the deed be permeated with vitality and inwardness. Insisting that there can be no substitute for the actual fulfillment of duty, Chasidus insists at the same time that such action be animated; that the act have a “soul.” It is only on this level that a person can achieve true harmony in every aspect of his daily life, physical, emotional and intellectual; harmony of all his “components”—his Divine soul, animal soul and physical body, as well as harmony with the world in which he lives.

As one studies the biography of the Alter Rebbe, the exponent of the Chasidic teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the founder of the Chabad school of Chasidus, one cannot but marvel at the complete accord between his personal life and his philosophy and teachings. Indeed, he was the living embodiment of all that

he taught, and more. It is for this reason also that we find him to be a person of many accomplishments, down to small detail. He strove to develop himself in every way. From his very early youth he was known to recite his daily prayers with the *kavonoth* of the saintly SheLoH (Rabbi Isaiah Hurwitz), based on the Kabbala of the Ari haKodosh (Rabbi Yitzchok Luria), and all his daily activities were deeply probed and carefully measured. Making *Ahavas Yisroel*—in its *immediate application in actual practice*—a cornerstone of his ethical system, he misses no opportunity of applying it in his own life. Thus, no sooner does he come in possession of a sum of money (quite substantial in those days), than he dedicates *all* of it, in accordance with a prior stipulation, as a fund for constructive economic help to needy families. He was the *Baal Kore'*, reading the Torah in his congregation, with particular attention to pronuciation and grammatical rules; he was also the *Baal Toke'a*, sounding the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. In composing his *Shulchan Aruch*, he personally checked and counterchecked weights and measures defined by Jewish Law. He studied algebra, geometry and astronomy in order not to have to rely on others in making calculations essential to the study of the Talmud and the making of legal decisions. Knowing the value of *Neginah* in the attainment of *Devekuth*, he himself composed *Nigunim* and sang them with soulful ecstasy. Meticulous in all his ways, he sifted scores of prayer books (according to one tradition—no less than sixty different versions) to produce a prayer book punctilious in version and grammar.

The English reader is now fortunate in having been given access to both the philosophy and biography of the Alter Rebbe, in whom, as already mentioned, the former is fully reflected in the latter, for his life was a living example of what he taught; and

both complemented each other. In regard to the philosophy, the student of Chabad is no longer dependent upon secondary sources (which are in any case very scarce). He can study the basic work of Chabad, the *Likutei Amarim (Tanya)* in English translation. As for the life story of the author, the present volume fills a long-felt need, for it is the first comprehensive biography of the Alter Rebbe in the English language.

Dr. Nissan Mindel, who has the distinction and the *Zechus* of being the first to introduce the classic of Chabad philosophy, the *Likutei Amarim (Tanya)* of the Alter Rebbe, to the serious minded student who finds it easier to study it in English than in the Hebrew original, has now followed it up with another "first," the present biographical volume. For this noteworthy contribution the author and the Chabad Research Center are to be highly commended.

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