



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Chai Elul

Breathing Life Twice

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## 1.

### CHAI ELUL GIVES LIFE

In the sichah delivered on Chai Elul 5705 {1945}, the previous Rebbe said:<sup>1</sup> Chassidim have an old Chassidic adage with two versions: a) Chai Elul, ח"י אלול, is the day that has brought and brings life, חיות, into Elul; and, b) Chai Elul, injects vitality to the *avodah*<sup>2</sup> {alluded to} in the verse,<sup>3</sup> “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me, אָנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי.”

Since the previous Rebbe related **both** versions, clearly, both are valid, and each version has a unique significance compared with the other. We need to clarify:

After the Rebbe said (according to the first version) that “Chai Elul... brings life into **Elul** (unqualified),” this means **every** aspect of Elul, including (the inspiration for) every category of divine service included in the month.

As mentioned many times,<sup>4</sup> Elul is an acronym of the words in the following verses:<sup>5</sup> “...brought about to his hand, I shall provide for you, אָנֶה לְיָדוֹ, וְיִשְׁמְתִי לָךְ” (which speaks about the city of refuge),<sup>6</sup> and alludes to Torah (as our Sages say,<sup>7</sup> the words of Torah provide refuge); “אָנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי,” which refers to the *avodah* of prayer (“I am to my beloved...,” which connects Jews with Hashem); “...to one another, and gifts to the poor, אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְנוּת לְאֲבִיוֹנִים”<sup>8</sup> refers to acts of kindness; and “(Hashem your L-rd will circumcise) your heart and the heart (of your offspring), (ומל ה' אלוקיד) אֶת לִבְכֶּךָ וְאֶת לִבְבִּי וְאֶת לִבְבִּי וְאֶת לִבְבִּי”<sup>9</sup> which alludes to repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 3, p. 946; *Sefer HaSichos 5705*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>3</sup> *Shir HaShirim* 6:3 — this verse contains an acronym of the word “Elul” (*Abudraham*, *Seder Tefillas Rosh Hashanah*; *Pri Eitz Chaim*, “*Shaar Rosh Hashanah*,” ch. 1; *Shaar HaPesukim on Shir HaShirim* 6:3; et al).

<sup>4</sup> The forward to *Kuntres 94* (*Sefer HaMaamorim* 5711, p. 318ff), et al.

<sup>5</sup> *Shemos* 21:13.

<sup>6</sup> {The Torah teaches that someone who kills unintentionally should flee to a “city of refuge.” The first letters of four words in this verse, spell the word *Elul*.}

<sup>7</sup> *Makos* 10a.

<sup>8</sup> *Esther* 9:22; *Sefer Arugas HaBosem*, quoting *Sefer Amarkal*.

<sup>9</sup> *Devarim* 30:6.

The second version — “Chai Elul injects vitality to the *avodah* of ‘I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me’” — only mentions **one** type of the *avodos* (which are hinted to in the word acronym) of *Elul*, so what does it add?

## 2.

### TWO BIRTHDAYS

We could say that the two versions {of the above-mentioned adage} regarding the contribution of Chai Elul correlate to two elevated qualities of this day: It is the birthday of “two great luminaries”<sup>10</sup> — the Baal Shem Tov, who founded the general teachings of Chassidus; and the Alter Rebbe, who founded the teachings of Chabad Chassidus.

Although Chabad Chassidus, חסידות חב"ד, is an extension of general Chassidus, as it transitions Chassidus into חכמה (wisdom), בינה (understanding), and דעת (knowledge) — human **intellect** — it has a **unique novelty** over general Chassidus.<sup>11</sup>

[Chabad Chassidus is so novel that it needed to be pioneered and revealed by the Alter Rebbe who had a **new** soul, as known.<sup>12</sup> He was even given the title (as was the Baal Shem Tov), “**the Great Luminary**” (as mentioned above).]

The same applies to {the *avodah* based on the verse} “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me”: Although this is just a particular detail of the general character of “Elul,” it adds a new and fundamental quality to the general character. And all the *avodos* of Elul are performed in a loftier manner. This is similar to the novelty of Chabad Chassidus relative to, and introduced into, general Chassidus.

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<sup>10</sup> The previous Rebbe quoting the Rebbe Rashab, *Sefer HaSichos* 5703, p. 142, 146, 188, et al.

<sup>11</sup> See *Maamar Padah BeShalom* 5685 (quoting the Rebbe Rashab in the *Maamar* of Yud Tes Kislev, 5679 (p. 673 in the 5748 [1988] ed.).

<sup>12</sup> *Sichah of Chai Elul*, 5705 (*Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 3, p. 788a ff.; *Sefer HaSichos* 5705, p. 127 ff.); see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shir HaShirim*,” p. 50a for an explanation of the concept of “new souls.”

Now we can understand the two above-mentioned versions about the significance of Chai Elul.

Since Chai Elul is the birthday of the Baal Shem Tov, this day introduced a vitality into **Elul**, because general Chassidus infuses a **general** vitality into *avodas* Hashem. It is an energy that encompasses and permeates all methods of *avodah*.

Since Chai Elul is also the birthday of the Alter Rebbe — the founder of the teachings of **Chabad** Chassidus — it introduced a vitality into the *avodah* of “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me” (and through this, into all methods of *avodah*). This is because (the novelty of) Chabad Chassidus is connected specifically with this mode of *avodah*, as will be discussed.

### 3.

NEED VS. CAN

The core difference between general Chassidus (from the Baal Shem Tov) and Chabad Chassidus (from the Alter Rebbe) is captured by the Previous Rebbe in a pithy adage: “The Baal Shem Tov showed us how we **need** to serve Hashem, and the Alter Rebbe showed us how we **can** serve Hashem.”

From a simple reading of this adage, the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov appear to give us an understanding of how serving Hashem **needs** to be, but do not offer instruction on how we **can execute** this service of Hashem **practically**.

This is puzzling: How is it possible to say that the Baal Shem Tov did not explain how to actually serve Hashem? On the contrary, the Baal Shem Tov groomed so many great disciples, and those disciples had disciples who served Hashem in the ways of Chassidus even before the revelation of Chabad Chassidus. Similarly, those disciples molded their own disciples in the later

generations {who served Hashem in the ways of Chassidus}, although Chabad Chassidus was not learned (for whatever reason). They certainly (didn't just know how they **must** serve Hashem, but they) also knew how to **actually engage in avodah** according to the ways of Chassidus.

So what does it mean that it was (specifically) the Alter Rebbe who showed a person how he can serve Hashem?

#### 4.

##### EVOLUTION OF TORAH

We will understand this by prefacing with the following. Just as the teachings of Chassidus were first revealed in a seminal state (general chassidus) and only later was it brought into the framework of intellect (Chabad) with all its details, we find the same process applying to the Torah as a whole:

When Hashem gave the Torah, He gave the Written and the Oral Torah, “the laws that were revealed to us and to our children,”<sup>13</sup> together with the **rules** of Torah, which are the principles of interpreting the (Written) Torah. Similarly, the Oral Torah was given in a comparable fashion (outlining how to interpret and deduce teachings from Scripture and how to dive into the “deep reasons for the laws and in-depth study of their rationale...”). From that time and on, when Jews learn Torah (according to the rules of Torah that were given to Moshe on Sinai), with **their** effort and **their** intellect, they can innovate many new concepts in Torah, “endless new laws.”<sup>14</sup>

This is one way of understanding the adage of our Sages:<sup>15</sup> “Everything that a seasoned student innovates in the future was all given to Moshe at Sinai.” This statement is paradoxical. If it was “all was given to Moshe at Sinai,” then it can't be considered an **innovation**; so why do we say “innovates in the future?”

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<sup>13</sup>The words of the Alter Rebbe in “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 1, par. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See *Megillah* 19b; *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Peah* 2:4; *Shemos Rabbah*, beginning of sec. 47, et al.

Another question: How is it possible to say that in such a short period of time, Moshe learned the entire Torah, including every innovation to be made by every seasoned student who will ever live? (This question is especially cogent since this will include the “new Torah that will emerge from Me,”<sup>16</sup> the {dimension of} Torah taught by Moshiach,<sup>17</sup> which will be exceptionally vast.)<sup>18</sup>

One explanation, as mentioned previously: Moshe received the Written and Oral Torah with all the rules of how to derive many details from them, according to *pshat*,<sup>19</sup> *remez*,<sup>20</sup> *drush*,<sup>21</sup> and *sod*.<sup>22</sup> A seasoned student learns and derives, **in actuality**, the details of the dialectic, the pilpul, etc., until he extracts a specific law from a general rule. Therefore, novel insights of a seasoned student are considered an innovation (since Moshe did **not actually** learn {or teach} the specifics. As our Sages say,<sup>23</sup> Moshe was unfamiliar with the “mounds and mounds of laws” that Rabbi Akiva would later expound).

However, since every innovation in Torah must be built on the foundation of the general rules that Moshe received at Sinai, it turns out that it was “all given to Moshe at Sinai.” Everything was already included (at least in a concealed manner) in the Torah that Moshe possessed.

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<sup>16</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:3.

<sup>17</sup> In consonance with the known dictum (*Hemshech* 5666, p. 23, 546; et al) that *Matan Torah* will not occur again.

<sup>18</sup> It is germane to note what is known (*Maamarim* 5699, s.v., “*Va’yedbar*” [the second], at the beg. and at the end; et al) that Moshiach will be able to teach the entire nation, notwithstanding the huge population, because he will teach from the level of “**visualization**.” This idea is analogous to what it says regarding the Arizal: What he learnt {while sleeping} for two or three hour, he wouldn’t have been able to to explain over the course eighty consecutive years, day and night (*Pri Etz Chaim*, Gate of “*Krias Shema She’Al HaMita*,” ch. 1), because his comprehension was on the level of “visualization.” (*Likkutei Torah*, “*Tzav*,” 17b; et al.)

On this basis, it is also understood that the question in the text cannot be answered by saying that it was because Moshe received and learnt the Torah through the medium of “visualization.” After all, since at Mt Sinai the dimension of Torah that Moshiach was destined to reveal was also given, which Moshiach himself would learn through the medium of “visualization” over **many years**, it would have been an impossibility that Moshe actually learnt all this (even if through “visualization”) over the course of forty days, etc.

<sup>19</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture.}

<sup>20</sup> {A method of commentary based on hints and allusions in the text, sometimes based on the numerical value of letters.}

<sup>21</sup> {An exegetical method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express an ostensibly extrinsic idea.}

<sup>22</sup> {A method of commentary focusing on the secrets and esoteric teachings of Torah, based on *Kabbalah*.}

<sup>23</sup> *Menachos* 29b

Now, when a seasoned student toils intellectually to uncover a specific element in the Oral Torah (according to the rules of Torah), he thereby produces an **innovation** in Torah; innovating in Torah becomes a fundamental component of Torah study. Moreover, it is an **obligation** for “every Jew”<sup>24</sup> not only to learn what is already written in books, etc., but also “**to innovate... in halachos and aggados**, in both the revealed parts and esoteric parts {of Torah}.”<sup>25</sup> [Moreover, every Jew has a portion of Torah which he needs to innovate, upon which the perfection of his soul depends.]<sup>26</sup>

A similar process applies to Chabad Chassidus (which brings Chassidus into the realm of intellect). Although Chabad Chassidus appears to be a specific genre within general Chassidus, it introduced a fundamental **innovation** into Chassidus.

## 5.

DID MOSHE TEACH EVERYTHING?

Why, in fact, is the new insight of a seasoned student called “an innovation”? It’s true that Moshe didn’t **actually** teach every specific idea and law, but a true innovation doesn’t just mean that the idea wasn’t previously revealed, but that it didn’t even exist in “potential.” Since the specific law was included (covertly) in the Torah, which Moshe taught — which is why we say, as mentioned above, “**Everything was given** to Moshe at Sinai” — how can we call this an innovation?

The answer is as follows:<sup>27</sup> When we describe something as an innovation, it is not referring so much to the subject — the concept being learned (that the concept is new and never existed) — but refers (primarily) to the **person learning**.

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<sup>24</sup> *Iggeres HaKodesh*, end of epistle 26 (p. 145a); see Alter Rebbe’s “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 2, par. 2: “**and to innovate...**”; *Zohar*, vol. 1 (12b) “to expand it {Torah} every day.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Iggeres HaKodesh*, end of epistle 26 (145a); (note Alter Rebbe’s “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 1, end of par. 4).

<sup>27</sup> See “*Hemshech 5666*,” pp. 383, 393, 404 (regarding the Written Torah and the Oral Torah).

A concept taught in Oral Torah, as it exists in the Torah given at Sinai, is in such a concealed state, that even Moshe who knew every rule and the method of deriving a detail from a generality “did not know what they were saying.”

The uncovering of a detail is something that is wholly the accomplishment of “a seasoned student.” Therefore, the innovation is attributed to the seasoned student, since **he** was the one who revealed the matter by toiling with his **own abilities**, through intellectual exertion. For him, what he discovers is totally new.

This is also one reason that the perfection of the soul is contingent on “innovating a new idea” in the Torah:

The true meaning of an idea is that an idea should be **comprehended and grasped**<sup>28</sup> by a person. It’s not good enough that another person (whom he trusts) assures him that the idea is valid. Rather, **he**, with his own intellect and understanding, comprehends it himself. Therefore, consummate intellectual ability is shown by the process of “innovation.” This shows that the person has attained an intellectual objective entirely on his own (as discussed above).

Since the purpose of studying Torah is for the human mind to become one with the wisdom of Hashem in a “wonderful union,” perfection of the soul (which must be reached through Torah study) is accomplished by the person discovering novel insights in his Torah study.

## 6.

### ONE TEACHES IN GENERALITIES

This is also the difference between the way the Torah was given from Above and the way it is later learned by Jews:

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<sup>28</sup> Tanya, “*Likkutei Maamarim*,” ch. 5.  
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“I gave you good teaching”<sup>29</sup> refers to the Giving of the Torah {with a focus on the} the Giver of the Torah, and emphasizes mainly **giving from Above**.

In fact, what is transmitted {from Above} may be analogous to the case of a teacher who gives to his student. As an idea is understood by the teacher, the idea illuminates the teacher with all its length, width and depth. And the teacher teaches it to the student, as our Sages say,<sup>30</sup> “succinctly.”<sup>31</sup> He conveys to the student the synopsis — the core idea without its particulars. True, the point conveyed includes all its details, but the details are not discernable as discrete entities.

However, after the Torah was given (this applies also in the case of a teacher and student), of greatest significance is that **the recipient, the one learning**, understands, grasps and absorbs the Torah subject. In order for a subject to be **absorbed**, a person must understand every detail of the idea, and specifically this way, when he understands each detail individually, he will **absorb** (by understanding each detail) the synopsis, and seminal idea, correctly and **completely**. For example, one can only understand a mishnah (*mishnayos* are written “concisely”)<sup>32</sup> in depth **and thoroughly** after learning, understanding, and absorbing (in depth, which allows it to be considered **his Torah**)<sup>33</sup> the Beraisa,<sup>34</sup> Talmud passages, etc., that elucidate the mishnah.

## 7.

### CHABAD TAKES EFFORT

We can posit that the difference between general Chassidus and Chabad Chassidus is **similar**. The (primary emphasis) on how general Chassidus was revealed by the Baal Shem Tov is how it came from **Above**, from Hashem and

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<sup>29</sup> *Mishlei* 4:2

<sup>30</sup> *Pesachim* 3b.

<sup>31</sup> {In the original, “*b'derech ketzarah*.”}

<sup>32</sup> As Rambam says, Mishnah consists of “concise teachings that include many details” (Rambam’s “Introduction” to his *Commentary on Mishnah*, s.v. “*acharei kein*.”)

<sup>33</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 19a.

<sup>34</sup> See *Taanis* 21a: “If there is anyone who can ask {me a question concerning a beraisa}....”

from *tzaddikim*,<sup>35</sup> who are compared to their Creator.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, one of the main ideas emphasized by general Chassidus is faith — “A *tzaddik* shall live by his faith.”<sup>37</sup> Faith is not something achieved by a **person**; rather, it is conferred from Above,<sup>38</sup> including from father (teacher) to son (student) — we are believers, the children of believers<sup>39</sup> — and a person is {only} a “recipient” {of faith}.

When the Alter Rebbe instilled Chassidus into Chabad (mortal intellect), he enabled (and thus required) the ideas of Chassidus to be understood (to the extent that they would be) absorbed by a person through **his own power**.<sup>40</sup> When a Jew works to **understand** the inner dimension of Torah — the teachings of Chassidus — until he really understands it (aside from believing it, also) can grasp it with **his** own mind, he then has the advantage that through the increased vitality in serving Hashem, **he** created something anew as a product of his own hard work.

[This explains why this matter — empowerment to innovate, and make strides, through our own efforts, in our divine service, according to Chassidus — had to be revealed specifically by a **new** soul.]

## 8.

### FAITH VS UNDERSTANDING

This is what the Previous Rebbe meant when he said that the Baal Shem Tov showed us how we **must** serve Hashem, while the Alter Rebbe showed us how we **can** serve Hashem:

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<sup>35</sup> Lit., “a righteous person,” the term *tzaddik* in *Chassidic* literature refers to an individual who is completely righteous, will never sin, and has no evil inclination at all.

<sup>36</sup> *Rus Rabbah* ch. 4, sec. 3; et al.

<sup>37</sup> *Chavakuk* 2:4; see *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 1, pp. 141-142; et al.

<sup>38</sup> See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Shabbos* 97a.

<sup>40</sup> See *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 1, pp. 141-142; et al.

The difference between “we must” and “we can” is: “We must,” emphasizes the idea that (we **need** to act because) it is demanded from Above and comes from **Above**. “We can” emphasizes a person’s ability, and how he is able to achieve this **through his own efforts**.

Certainly and obviously, general Chassidus blazed a path in **avodas Hashem** that was **actualized** according to the ways of the Chassidus.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the vitality of general Chassidus infuses every part of a person’s *avodah* — his prayer, learning, performance of mitzvos, and even “all of your {mundane} acts.”<sup>42</sup> They are all done sublimely, with a new vitality.

However, since this is an energy which comes from Above, from faith, it is an **overarching** vitality, which encompasses and permeates every aspect of a person uniformly. The **unique** purpose of **each** detail in serving Hashem is not perceived; rather, they are all part and parcel of a single generality.

This idea is recognizable in the matter of faith. The vitality that faith infuses into the details of divine service is not due to the particular make-up of each mode of *avodah*. Instead, because a person, **overall, is enlivened** by his faith, he lives by his faith. Consequently, **all** his affairs are done (automatically) with vitality and enjoyment.

The Alter Rebbe showed us how we **can** serve Hashem — how a person is able to generate vitality in serving Hashem **by his own power**, by working arduously also with his mind to understand the inner dimension of Torah. Consequently, this brings about a new vitality in every detail of his *avodah*, a novelty, on account of the new depth the person has uncovered in the substance of each detail of **that avodah**.

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<sup>41</sup> {In the original Hebrew, “ע"פ דרכי החסידות.”}

<sup>42</sup> {See *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 231, par. 1: “All of your acts should be for the sake of Heaven.”}

## 9.

WE CAN ALL SERVE *HASHEM* PROPERLY

Now we can understand the two above versions regarding the vitality that Chai Elul infuses into the *avodah* of Elul:

General Chassidus brings an all-encompassing vitality and into all the categories of *avodah* of Elul (as discussed above in Section 1 and 2), in a manner that a person does not perceive each aspect of his *avodah* as a separate entity.

In simple words, when a Jew undertakes a soul-reckoning in the month of Elul using the above approach, he mainly thinks about how well he is serving Hashem overall. Indeed, he needs to think about the details — how well he is doing in each category of *avodah* — because otherwise he won't make an accurate reckoning. What is (most) important to him, however, is the **bottom line** of his situation — is he as connected to Hashem as he ought to be?

The Alter Rebbe succeeded to establish the idea of *avodah* (in Chassidus) through a person's own abilities, infusing vitality into the *avodah* of “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” The order of **this** *avodah* (first comes, “I am to my beloved”; and then comes, “and my beloved is to me”) — it starts with **an initiative from below**, by a person working on himself (using his own inner resources), alluded to by the phrase, “I am to my beloved.” Then, the closeness of Hashem to him (“and my beloved is to me”) will be much more profound, since it is a product of **his** work, his “effort.”<sup>43</sup>

This channels a new vitality into **all** categories of *avodah* associated with the month of Elul, because they all will be carried out in a manner of “I am to my beloved” — *avodah* through a person's own abilities.

— Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos, *parshas Ki Savo*, Chai Elul 5730 (1970)

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<sup>43</sup> {*Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaKodesh*,” epistle 27; based on *Megillah* 6b.}  
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