



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Iggeres HaTeshuvah | Sichah 5

## Cavities and Light

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

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## 1.

HIGH, HIGH ABOVE

In the fourth chapter of *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,<sup>1</sup> where the Alter Rebbe explains how all ten *sefiros*<sup>2</sup> are “contained and alluded to in the name ‘*Havayah*,’”<sup>3</sup> beginning with the letter *yud*, “which is a simple point {that} alludes to His *chochmah*,”<sup>4</sup> he adds in parentheses: “And the thorn<sup>5</sup> atop the *yud* alludes to supreme *ratzon*,<sup>6</sup> which is *הַמְּעַלְהַּ מְּעַלְהַּ*, high, high above *chochmah ilaah*.”<sup>7</sup>

In my father’s<sup>8</sup> notes on *Tanya*,<sup>9</sup> he focuses on the double wording, “*הַמְּעַלְהַּ מְּעַלְהַּ* — high, high above,” and explains:

For *chochmah stimaah*<sup>10</sup> of *arich anpin*<sup>11</sup> transcends *chochmah ilaah* of *Atzilus*;<sup>12</sup> and the supreme *ratzon*, which is *galgalta*,<sup>13</sup> transcends *chochmah stimaah*.

Consequently:

Supreme *ratzon* is *הַמְּעַלְהַּ מְּעַלְהַּ* — high, high above *chochmah ilaah* of *Atzilus*.

It would seem that the thorn atop the *yud* alludes to (only) a level higher than *chochmah* of *Atzilus* (alluded to by the letter *yud*). So why is it relevant for the Alter Rebbe to emphasize here that “supreme *ratzon*” (alluded to by the “thorn atop the *yud*”) transcends (not only *chochmah* of *Atzilus* but) also *chochmah stimaah*?

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<sup>1</sup> *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” 94b.

<sup>2</sup> {*Sefiros* are Divine emanations. There are ten *sefiros*, which are various attributes of the manifestation of Divinity, generally categorized by intellectual and emotional faculties.}

<sup>3</sup> {*Havayah*, also known as the Tetragrammaton, is the four-letter name of Hashem, spelled *yud-hei-vav-hei*.}

<sup>4</sup> {*Chochmah*, lit., “wisdom,” is the first of the ten *sefiros*.}

<sup>5</sup> {The letter *yud*, when written in Torah script, has a serif above the letter.}

<sup>6</sup> {*Ratzon*, lit., “will,” transcends the ten *sefiros*, and has the ability to motivate and control the other *sefiros*.}

<sup>7</sup> {Supernal wisdom.}

<sup>8</sup> {The Rebbe’s father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn.}

<sup>9</sup> *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak*, “*He’aros LeSefer HaTanya*,” end of p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> {Lit., “the concealed *chochmah*.”}

<sup>11</sup> {Lit., “the long face,” this term refers to *ratzon*, the lower level of *kesser*.}

<sup>12</sup> {Lit., “emanation,” the first and highest of the four spiritual worlds.}

<sup>13</sup> {Lit., “the skull,” denotes the supreme *ratzon* transcending *chochmah*, analogous to a skull surrounding the brain.}

In light of this, it is clear that by use of the double wording, “לְמַעַלְמַעַל — high, high above,” the Alter Rebbe intends (not only to say that supreme *ratzon* transcends *chochmah stimaah* but also) to emphasize how lofty supreme *ratzon* is relative to *chochmah ilaah* (of *Atzilus*). Namely, supreme *ratzon* is “high, high above” *chochmah ilaah* (two levels higher).

We need to clarify: Why is it important to emphasize here, in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, that supreme *ratzon* is “high, high above” *chochmah ilaah* — two levels higher?

## 2.

### RECTIFYING BLEMISHES

We can posit the following explanation:

The Alter Rebbe’s explanation that “the thorn atop the *yud* alludes to supreme *ratzon*,<sup>14</sup> which is high, high above *chochmah ilaah*” was brought as an introduction (as discussed previously)<sup>15</sup> to his explanation later in Chapter 8<sup>16</sup> that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy<sup>17</sup> “remove all blemishes” because they derive from “the supreme *ratzon*, which is alluded to by the thorn of the *yud*, which is high, high above the flow issuing from the letters of the name *Havayah*.”

For this reason, both in our chapter and in Chapter 8, the Alter Rebbe uses the phrase, “high, high above.” Removing the blemishes in the four-letter name of *Havayah*<sup>18</sup> requires a level that is **altogether** beyond the name *Havayah* — “high, high above.”

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<sup>14</sup> {*Ratzon*, lit., “will,” transcends the ten *sefiros*, and has the ability to motivate and control the other *sefiros*.}

<sup>15</sup> *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, p. 417.

<sup>16</sup> *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 8, 98a.

<sup>17</sup> {The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy were conveyed by Hashem to Moshe, to be said in prayer as a way of invoking Hashem’s mercy; see *Shemos* 34:7.}

<sup>18</sup> {Sins blemish the letters of the name *Havayah*, as discussed in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*.}

In other words, although *chochmah stimaah* is also higher than *chochmah ilaah* — the *yud* of the name *Havayah* — nonetheless, *chochmah stimaah* is only one level “above.” (Meaning, *chochmah stimaah* has a connection to *chochmah* of *Atzilus* — as known,<sup>19</sup> *chochmah* begins on the level of *kesser*,<sup>20</sup> albeit there, it is *chochmah* “**stimaah**” — **concealed chochmah**.) As such, *chochmah stimaah* doesn’t have the power to rectify blemishes. The remediation of blemishes is possible only from the level of the supreme *ratzon* that is “high, high above” the name *Havayah*.

### 3.

#### LIKKUTEI TORAH

However, we need to clarify: In *Likkutei Torah*,<sup>21</sup> it is explained that “the remediation of all blemishes” is brought about by the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy because they derive from “*mocha stimaah*,”<sup>22</sup> which has an advantage over the level of *galgalta*.

As such, how does this teaching in *Likkutei Torah* correlate with the idea emphasized in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah* that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy “remove all blemishes” because they derive from the supreme *ratzon* (the level of *galgalta*), which transcends *chochmah stimaah*?

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<sup>19</sup> *Ramaz*, beg. of “*Emor*,” end of 88b; cited in *Likkutei Torah*, “*Acharei*,” end of 27d; et al.

<sup>20</sup> {*Kesser*, lit., “crown,” is the sublime, encompassing level of Divine emanation which transcends the ten *sefiros*. It is similar to a crown, which sits on the top of the head.}

<sup>21</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, “*Nitzavim*,” 49d, and its elucidation in *Or HaTorah*, “*Nitzavim*,” p. 1273 ff.; et al.

<sup>22</sup> {Lit., “the concealed intellect,” the level of *chochmah* within *kesser* — also referred to as *chochmah stimaah*;} see also *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaKodesh*,” ch. 28, where it is explained that atonement for willful sins is achieved by drawing upon *mocha stimaah*.

## 4.

### TWO DIMENSIONS OF SIN AND ITS RECTIFICATION

The general explanation of the above: Sin is damaging in two respects, and consequently, *teshuvah* rectifies the damage in both:

- a) A sinner becomes bound up with the evil within the sin — it “envelops him.”<sup>23</sup> Since a person’s soul is “a part of the name *Havayah*,”<sup>24</sup> the four-letter name of *Havayah* (in a person’s soul, and On High) is also tainted.
- b) When a Jew fulfills a mitzvah, including the mitzvah to refrain from violating a prohibited act, he “draws” a G-dly light {into the world}.<sup>25</sup> By violating a mitzvah (aside from causing evil to cleave to his soul), the person forfeits the light that should have<sup>26</sup> been drawn into the world by fulfilling the mitzvah (or by refraining from the prohibition).<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, it doesn’t suffice that the rectification accomplished by *teshuvah* cleanses a person’s soul from the filth of his sin — from “the soiled garments.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, *teshuvah* must also make up for the light that should have been elicited by the performance of mitzvos.

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<sup>23</sup> *Sotah* 3b; cited in *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 8 (98a) concerning the “the soiled garments, which are the evil {lit., ‘extraneous’} forces” brought about by sins.

<sup>24</sup> *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 4 (end of 94a).

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, “one who sits and does not transgress receives a reward as one who performs a mitzvah” (*Kiddushin*, end of 39b; see *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 27); in fact, by refraining from violating a prohibitive mitzvah, he draws a light that transcends the light drawn by a positive mitzvah (*Likkutei Torah*, “*Pekudei*,” 3b ff; *Maamar* “*Anochi*,” loc. cit.; et al.).

<sup>26</sup> Since everything that transpires happens by specific Divine Providence, when an opportunity for a person to sin was orchestrated from Above, it was **so** that he would **fulfill** this (negative) mitzvah).

<sup>27</sup> In addition to a blemish removing the light (*Sefer HaMaamarim* 5680, p. 74; *Maamar* “*Dirshu* 5691,” ch. 4; et al; see similarly *Or HaTorah*, “*Nitzavim*,” p. 1230), the light that should have been drawn by **observing** the negative mitzvah is also lacking.

<sup>28</sup> Wording of *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 8 (98a).

## 5.

### TESHUVAH RECTIFIES BOTH DIMENSIONS

*Teshuvah* has the power to rectify both of these facets because, through *teshuvah*, we elicit an effusion from “*Baal HaRatzon*,”<sup>29</sup> which is loftier than the “*ratzon*” for mitzvos.<sup>30</sup> An effusion from this level rectifies both of these facets:

*Baal HaRatzon* is neither compelled nor “grasped” by the *ratzon* for mitzvos. It is not possible for sin (the opposite of *ratzon*) to have any effect on Him. Therefore, by “drawing” a G-dly light from this level into the world (through *teshuvah*), the sin and the blemish are wiped away and nullified.<sup>31</sup>

And since the *Baal HaRatzon* has no limitation in terms of how He bestows, the *Baal HaRatzon* can also bestow an effusion when the light normally elicited by fulfillment of a mitzvah is missing.<sup>32</sup> [For only at the level {and vantage point} of the *ratzon* of mitzvos is there the limitation that G-dliness is drawn specifically through mitzvos.]

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<sup>29</sup> {Lit., “the Master of Will” — Hashem.}

<sup>30</sup> *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5562, p. 7 ff.; *Maamar* “*Tiku 5691*” (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, vol. 1, 126a ff.); see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Rosh Hashanah*,” 54b; *Siddur im Dach* 234d ff.; Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer HaMitzvos {Derech Mitzvosecha}* 39b; et al.

<sup>31</sup> See *Maamar* “*Shuvah Yisrael 5671*”; see *Siddur im Dach*, 158d (the first reason, based on *rommemus*); et al.

<sup>32</sup> See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5562, p. 7 ff.; *Maamar* “*Shuva 5671*” near the end; *Maamar* “*Tiku 5691*”; see also *Likkutei Torah*, “*Rosh Hashanah*,” 54b.

## 6.

### OPPOSING IDEAS

On this basis, it emerges that there are two paradoxical principles concerning the source for rectifying these two facets, the level of *Baal HaRatzon*:

{The first principle:} Sins and blemishes are nullified because people's actions are **immaterial** to the "*Baal HaRatzon*." ("If your sins multiply, what have you done to Him? If you were righteous, what have you given Him?")<sup>33</sup> He is **dissociated** from them.

The second principle is that the *Baal HaRatzon* **bestows** the light. In this respect, we cannot ascribe this to His dissociation. After all, He bestows light, *not* because *Baal HaRatzon* is dissociated from creation and it is immaterial to Him. On the contrary, He bestows light because His will is to be drawn into the world.

The advantage (in respect to **this** matter) of *Baal RaRatzon* over the *ratzon* for mitzvos: The *ratzon* for mitzvos is limited in terms of the G-dly downflow of light. The flow is contingent on the performance of mitzvos (and the downflow of each type of light is contingent on the performance of a particular mitzvah). In contrast, *Baal HaRatzon* has no limitations. There can be a G-dly downflow into the world even without a mitzvah being performed.

## 7.

### THE ESSENCE OF THE SOUL

On High, *teshuvah* is superior to Torah study and mitzvah performance because *teshuvah* reaches the *Baal HaRatzon*, which transcends the *ratzon* for mitzvos. Similarly, this holds true in the soul of man: *Teshuvah* expresses and reaches the connection between the soul's essence and Hashem's Essence —

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<sup>33</sup> *Iyov* 35:6-7.

*Baal HaRatzon* — that transcends and is more profound than the connection forged by Torah study and mitzvah performance.

The soul's essential connection {with Hashem's Essence} has two dimensions that parallel the two ideas mentioned above inherent in the level of the *Baal HaRatzon*:

- a) What awakens a Jew to engage in *teshuvah* is his deep connection with Hashem based on the essence of his soul, which cannot be blemished or weakened, G-d forbid, by sin.<sup>34</sup> “A Jew — even though he has sinned — is a Jew.”<sup>35</sup> Even while sinning, the soul remains “faithful to Him.”<sup>36</sup>

This bond with Hashem also affects a person's external faculties to the extent that his having (outwardly) severed himself from Hashem embitters him. In turn, the person is awakened to engage in *teshuvah* — he regrets his sins that “separate...”<sup>37</sup> {him from Hashem}, and he commits “never again to revert to folly...,” and “to serve Him and observe all of His mitzvos.”<sup>38</sup>

- b) The motivating **cause** that **brings** him to engage in *teshuvah* is the essential connection between his soul and Hashem (which transcends the connection that is expressed by Torah study and mitzvah observance). Therefore, the *teshuvah* itself is not only his firm decision “to serve Him and observe all of His mitzvos”; it is also his will to be **connected to Hashem, “to return {lashuv} to Hashem.”**<sup>39</sup> It is only because “one cannot truly cleave to Him except through the fulfillment of the 248 {positive} mitzvos”<sup>40</sup> that this will of the penitent is expressed by {desiring} “to serve Him and observe all of His mitzvos.”

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<sup>34</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1151.

<sup>35</sup> *Sanhedrin*, beg. of 44a.

<sup>36</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 24 (31a).

<sup>37</sup> *Yeshayahu* 59:2.

<sup>38</sup> *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 1 (91a).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 4 (8a); there the text is speaking of cleaving to Hashem in love; and this explanation greatly enhances our understanding of *teshuvah*.



Therefore, this person's fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos is not limited to the **obligations** that Torah law places upon him. When he fulfills Torah and mitzvos based only on his acceptance of the Heavenly yoke and the yoke of mitzvos, he is not expected to go beyond his {Torah-imposed} obligations. But when he undertakes "to serve Him and observe all of His mitzvos" due to his commitment "to return to **Hashem**" — Who is infinite — the person is not content to fulfill Torah and mitzvos according to his commanded obligations. Instead, he constantly desires to connect to Hashem more and more by constantly adding to his observance of Torah and mitzvos.

## 8.

### *TESHUVAH AND BAAL HARATZON*

These two ideas regarding the connection of the soul's essence {with Hashem's Essence} correspond to the two ideas mentioned above (in Section 6) regarding the level of *Baal HaRatzon*:

The idea of the essential connection {to Hashem} that is recognized as the **motivating cause** for a Jew to be stirred to *teshuvah* — the fact this {connection to Hashem} cannot be marred by sin and is always in a perfect state — is similar to the first idea discussed (above in Section 6) that sin is immaterial to the *Baal HaRatzon*.

And the idea of *teshuvah* being an expression of a person's essential connection {to Hashem} — the person's desire to cleave to and unite with Hashem (resulting in him fulfilling Torah and mitzvos) in a fashion that goes beyond legal obligation — is similar to the second idea discussed above. Namely, the *Baal HaRatzon* does not possess the limitation inherent in the *ratzon* for mitzvos, which is limited in terms of the G-dly downflow of light.

## 9.

### TWO TYPES OF *TESHUVAH*

We can posit that this is also one of the reasons that *teshuvah tataah*<sup>41</sup> is sufficient to clean and purify a person's soul from "the soiled garments," whereas *teshuvah ilaah*<sup>42</sup> is needed to replenish {G-dly} light lacking due to a deficiency in the fulfillment of mitzvos, is as follows:

Blemishes can be removed (as discussed above in Sections 5 and 6) because sin has absolutely no effect on the *Baal HaRatzon*. Similarly, sin does not affect the essential connection between the soul of man and Hashem. This connection is always in a state of perfection.

In contrast, the downflow of {G-dly} light (as discussed above) results from the fact that the *Baal HaRatzon* is not limited in how He bestows light. Similarly, the person's desire to be bound to Hashem is not limited to his legal obligation.

Therefore, to remove blemishes, *teshuvah tataah* is sufficient, whereas to replenish the missing {G-dly} light, *teshuvah ilaah* is needed. The reason for this: *Teshuvah ilaah* manifests (primarily) how a *baal teshuvah*<sup>43</sup> goes beyond his limitations to bind himself to Hashem (which is why the downflow of the missing {G-dly} light is elicited). As it says {concerning *teshuvah ilaah*, a *baal teshuvah* has} "a more intense longing of the heart, and with greater forcefulness, to approach the King."<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the intact state of the intrinsic attachment {of the soul with Hashem} (responsible for removing blemishes) manifests also in *teshuvah tataah*. This is because *teshuvah*, in general (no matter what level of *teshuvah*), is (as discussed) a function of the soul's essence. The soul's essence is always attached to Hashem (even while a person sins) —

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<sup>41</sup> {*Teshuvah tataah*, lit., "the lower-level repentance," is the return of a Jew to his status before he sinned (*Tanya*, "Iggeres HaTeshuvah," ch. 8).}

<sup>42</sup> {*Teshuvah ilaah*, lit., "higher-level repentance," is "is the return of the soul "to its source... as it was united with Him in the ultimate union before the breath of His mouth blew it forth to descend and be incorporated within the human body" (*Tanya*, "Iggeres HaTeshuvah," ch. 8).}

<sup>43</sup> {A penitent.}

<sup>44</sup> *Tanya*, "Iggeres HaTeshuvah," ch. 8 (98b), based on *Zohar*, vol. 1, 129b.

{the essence of the soul} “clings and cleaves to You... the one to affirm Your Oneness.”<sup>45</sup>

## 10.

### RECTIFYING BLEMISHES VS. RESTORING LIGHT

In light of all of the above, we can posit that there is a difference between these two outcomes of *teshuvah* — remediation of blemishes, and restoring the {G-dly} light that is lacking — as follows:

The rectification of sins is a consequence of the connection between the essence of the soul and Hashem’s Essence (the *Baal HaRatzon*), from Whose perspective, at the outset, no blemish exists. Therefore, *teshuvah* doesn’t **bring about** the rectification of sin; instead, *teshuvah* reveals the essential connection {between the soul and Hashem}, and **automatically**, the blemishes are rectified.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast, replenishing the missing {G-dly} light depends on a downflow issuing specifically from the *Baal HaRatzon*. Therefore, “a more intense longing of the heart, and with greater forcefulness” **brings about** and **draws** the light. [Similarly, this is true in a person’s soul. To replenish the missing light is contingent on eliciting and revealing the soul’s essence, when a person’s manifest desire to unite with Hashem (through *teshuvah*) is beyond measure and limitation.]

Put differently, *teshuvah (ilaah)* draws the light because the **sublime quality** of *teshuvah* (“a more intense longing of the heart, and with greater forcefulness”) **resembles** a “vessel” that attracts light.

This is analogous to how mitzvos, which are “limbs” and “vessels,” draw light. However, because of the level of *ratzon* associated with mitzvos, the

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<sup>45</sup> *Siddur*, “*Hoshanos*, third day of Sukkos.”

<sup>46</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1152.

effluence comes in a limited way through mitzvos. In contrast, when it comes to *Baal HaRatzon*, the effluence is (also) drawn down through *teshuvah*.

## 11.

### LIKKUTEI TORAH VS. IGGERES HATESHUVAH

Based on all the preceding, we will now understand why, in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, the Alter Rebbe emphasizes the idea that the remediation of blemishes derives from the supreme *ratzon*, “high, high above *chochmah ilaah*.” As explained in my father’s notes, this refers to *galgalta*, a level that transcends (even) *chochmah stimaah*. In *Likkutei Torah*, however, the Alter Rebbe states that the remediation of blemishes derives from *mocha stimaah* specifically (and not from *galgalta*).

*Likkutei Torah* speaks primarily of the idea that Hashem is “גִּזְוֹן עֲוֹן — **bears** sin.”<sup>47</sup> Hashem elevates the sin “to transform it from darkness to light”<sup>48</sup> so that a willful sin becomes like a merit.

Since willful sins becoming like merits reflects (in general) the mechanism whereby *teshuvah* draws the {G-dly} light that should have been drawn into the world through merits — the fulfillment of mitzvos<sup>49</sup>

[to the extent that the effluence is precipitated not only through the process of *teshuvah* itself but also through willful sins being transformed into merits]

this drawing of light is predicated on reason, on the sublime quality of *teshuvah* [and as it says in *Tanya*,<sup>50</sup> through *teshuvah* out of love, willful sins become like merits “since through them, he attained this great love”]

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<sup>47</sup> {*Shemos* 34:7; this is one of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.}

<sup>48</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, “*Nitzavim*,” end of 48d.

<sup>49</sup> This is implied in *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5562, p. 7; Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer HaMitzvos* {*Derech Mitzvosecha*} (39b).

<sup>50</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 7 (12a).

therefore, in this process, the level of **mocha** (*stimaah*) is significant — *mocha* {intellect} being associated with reason and logic. However, since we are speaking of willful sins, the opposite of the *ratzon* (for mitzvos), that which they also serve as a reason to elicit a downflow of light (through *teshuvah*) is precisely on account of (*mocha*) **stimaah** {concealed intellect}.

In contrast, *Iggeres HaTeshuva* is (primarily) talking about “וְנִקְּהָה — and clean.”<sup>51</sup> “He cleanses those who return to Him in penitence to clean and purify their souls from its soiled garments.”<sup>52</sup> That is why, in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, the Alter Rebbe emphasizes that this “cleansing” comes from supreme *ratzon* {*galgalta*}, which transcends *chochmah stimaah*, because this “cleansing” derives specifically from a place where sin is totally immaterial. It derives from supreme *ratzon*, which utterly transcends reason — even mystifying reason.<sup>53</sup>

— Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Haazinu*, 5731 (1971)

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<sup>51</sup> {*Shemos* 34:7; this is one of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.}

<sup>52</sup> {*Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*,” ch. 8.}

<sup>53</sup> {In the original, “*taam kamus*,” reasoning that is abstruse because of its profundity.}