



Empowering our Present with the Future

Why did our souls come down to earth? Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi prepares us for a never-ending battle.

Many Chassidic discourses open by asking why our souls descended from the highest of the heights to the darkness of this world. Although the discourse will go on to give many good answers, explaining our wondrous mission to “make for God a dwelling place in the lower worlds” and the eternal gain that the souls receive from the descent-for-the-purpose-of-ascent, the next discourse will open with the same question. Apparently, this question is existential and constantly prods at our consciousness.

One of the ways to deal with the questions and difficulties that reality unleashes upon us – so much so that we may experience the words of our Sages, “It would be preferable to a person if he was not created, rather than being created” – is to empower ourselves with belief in God’s goodness. God desires to bestow good upon us. If God, the Good and Bestower of good, has brought us down to this “valley of tears”, then we can rest assured that good results are guaranteed. This applies not only to those who pass the trial with flying colors, but also to those empty people who have few mitzvot and who, on the surface, have done more spiritual harm than good. This experience of the difficulties of this world makes the powerful good promised in the next world more tangible. As our Sages say, “It is worthwhile for a person to endure all the suffering of purgatory in order to merit the pleasure of the World to Come”.

This week we will celebrate the 19th of Kislev, the new year of Chassidut, when tens of thousands will once again begin learning the book, Tanya, by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe. The Tanya is the basic book of Chassidut, defined also as “the book of advice for illness of the soul”. The Tanya, the “book of intermediary souls” brings us a sober-minded perspective on reality. The Alter Rebbe writes in his book that “all this world is difficult and evil and the wicked people dominate all the rest”. The ‘intermediary’ person can anticipate a life of never-ending struggle. As the Alter Rebbe asks, “If so, why did their souls descend to this world to exert themselves for nothing, God forbid, and to battle their evil inclination all their days and they cannot overcome it?”

Nonetheless, the Alter Rebbe comforts the ‘intermediaries’, guides them as to how to achieve joy in the purpose of creation and how to draw strength to serve God. The very name of the Book of Tanya holds the answer and a promise. In Hebrew, Tanya (תניא) is an anagram for *Eitan* (איתן). Tanya reveals the *Eitan* of the soul.

In the Bible, the word *Eitan* means hard-assertive and also ancient-primal. The *Eitan* of the soul is the essential, primal, root of the soul, whose wholeness is not sullied by the tribulations of reality, the crucible of our psyches and our human failings. It promises that nobody will ever be lost or pushed away from God. This is a constant, powerful point that exists in the heart of every Jew. It gives him the strength to withstand difficulties and to serve God in any situation. It promises that ultimately, he will successfully negotiate the path and fulfill his life’s mission.

How do we reveal this primal point of power? In Hebrew, the four letters of the word *Eitan*: *alef, yud, tav, nun*, are the four letters that we use to designate a word in the future tense (I will, he will, you will, we will). This alludes to the fact that the full revelation of the *Eitan* in the soul will be in the future. Thus, Eitan Ha’eizrachi, (Eitan the citizen) mentioned in Psalms, is, on the one hand, a local citizen from time immemorial (his tenure makes him stable and assertive) and on the other hand, he will shine in the future (*Eizrach* also means “I will shine”). The revelation of our *Eitan* depends upon our ability in the present to affix our souls to the future good - to our faith and trust in God. While still experiencing the difficulties of life, the *Eitan* opens a skylight to the power of the good that will be revealed through our faith and trust in God’s goodness. This faith and trust reveal that this powerful good is concealed in our souls and is available as a source of strength - even in the present.

Projecting this “new light that will shine on Zion” from the future to the present is expressed by the new, original Torah thoughts that flow from “the new Torah that will go out from Me”, which will be revealed in the days of the Mashiach. The new, revolutionary, sweetening quality of all the Chassidic teachings heals and strengthens the soul. It exposes it to a new perspective on the ancient Torah – to a new light on the Torah of redemption.