

Contemporary Neo-Chassidism: Accessing God in a Global Village.

What defines Chassidism vs. "Mitnagdim" or 'mainstream' Orthodox?

I. Kabbalistic Underpinnings

A. When Hashem willed to create the world, there was no space in which to create it for all there was was The Infinite Light. Therefore he withdrew His Divine Light to the sides, leaving an 'empty void' in which all the worlds and middot could come into existence. Now this withdrawal and this void cannot be understood because one needs to say about it two opposites, Yesh and Ayin. For on the one hand this void must be entirely t of Godliness for if not, all wouldbe Endless Light and there would be no place of the creation. On the Other hand, even that lack of Godliness is also Godliness for how could it exist without his life force being invested in it. Therefore it is both Yesh and Ayin and cannot be understood... And Know that *Machloket* (dispute) is in essence the creation of the world since the creation was by means of the empty void. if all the Talmidei Chachamim were of one mind, there would be no room for the world since there would be no empty void about which it must be said two opposites, Yesh and Ayin. Rather because each takes one side of the Machloket, between them there is an empty void and the world can continue to exist. (Likutey Moharan I, 64)

II. Definition of Torah L'shma

A. "When a person knows and comprehends with his intellect such a verdict in accordance with the law as it is set out in the *Mishnah, Gemara, or Posekim*, he has thus comprehended, grasped and encompassed with his intellect the will and wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, Whom no thought can grasp, nor His will and wisdom, except when they are clothed in the laws that have been set out for us. [Simultaneously] the intellect is also clothed in them [the Divine will and wisdom]. This is a wonderful union, like which there is none other, and which has no parallel anywhere in the material world, whereby complete oneness and unity, from every side and angle, could be attained. **As for the meaning of "For its own sake," it is [study with the intent] to attach one's soul to G- d through the comprehension of the Torah, each one according to his intellect,** as explained in *Peri Etz Chayim. (Tanya Ch. 5)*

B. "The definition of learning Torah L'shma and the clear truth is that L'shma does NOT mean "in Dveikut" like most people today think. For Our sages say in the Midrash Socher Tov that King David A"H beseeched The Holy One to consider anyone saying Tehillim 'as if' they had been immersed in learning Negaim and Ohalot. This clearly shows that putting effort into in-depth learning of Halachot is a loftier endeavor in His (may He be Blessed) eyes than saying Tehillim. And

should you suggest that Lshma meant Devekut, and that this is the purpose of learning Torah, there is no greater Dveikut than saying Tehillim all day!" (Nefesh HaChayim, 4:2) **But the Truth is that the meaning of "for its own sake" is for the Torah... That all your speaking and dealing in Torah should be exclusively for the sake of the Torah, such as to understand it and know it. (4:3)**

III. What is the Ikar, Torah or Yira?

- A. Shabbat 31B "And the faith of your times shall be a strength of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge, the fear of the Lord is his treasure" ([Isaiah 33:6](#)) With regard to this verse, Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him in the order of that verse: Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom or understand one matter from another? And, nevertheless, beyond all these, if the fear of the Lord is his treasure, yes, he is worthy, and if not, no, none of these accomplishments have any value. There is a parable that illustrates this. A person who said to his emissary: Bring a kor of wheat up to the attic for me to store there. The messenger went and brought it up for him. He said to the emissary: Did you mix a kav of homton, a preservative to keep away worms, into it for me? He said to him: No. He said to him: If so, it would have been preferable had you not brought it up. Of what use is worm-infested wheat? Likewise, Torah and mitzvot without the fear of God are of no value.
- B. "This Parable refers to intermingling Yira with ones acquisition of the produce of the Torah. For without Yira, the Torah will not be preserved... And This is the true path which H' has chosen for us. That when a person prepares to begin learning, they should sit a short while before learning in Yira and purity of heart, confessing their sins from the depths of their heart in order that their Torah should be pure and Holy. (Nefesh Hachayim 4:5)
- C. If one looks carefully at this parable in its context one can see that the primary issue is the acquisition of Yira. Conducting fair business, studying Torah etc. are means of acquiring that which is truly a treasure, Yira. (Sefer Ba'al Shemtov on Breishit ch. 1)

What makes Neo-Chassidism Neo?

1. “When I came from Lakewood and met the Rebbe (Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the Sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch), he gave me a new heart. All of a sudden I wasn’t caring about this Rambam and that Tosafot. I was caring about this Jew on the street and that Jew on the Subway. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach on his first encounter with Lubavitch Chassidim
2. Tumat Met (The ritual impurity gained by encountering a dead body) is about anger at God. Someone who is angry at God can’t really teach people the living Torah. After the Holocaust all our old teachers are Tamei Met. How can somebody see so much death and not be angry at Hashem?! This is why so many of our young people are going looking for spirituality in the East. They are looking for people who aren’t angry with Hashem. Why should the Hindelach be so Angry. So what we need a Torah that’s not angry. A Torah of sweetness, of Love a Torah of the Neshama. The Heilige Zohar tells us that the Torah has a body and a Neshama. Tamei Met comes from a body without a Neshama. When you are Angry at Hashem all you can teach is the body of the Torah, you can’t give over the Neshama of Torah. (Reb Shlomo on Parshat Chukas)
3. Hasidism is the willingness to make ourselves transparent to God’s grace and will, to live in the authentic Presence of God—nokhah p’nai Ha’Shem—as if facing God in every moment, allowing this awareness to change our behavior, to make sacred acts out of potentially profane and purely secular moments.

From this perspective, Hasidism is both the origin and fulfillment of Judaism’s spiritual potential, arising and developing in different periods to meet the unique needs of a specific time and place. Through the millennia, Judaism has witnessed the emergence of numerous Hasidic movements, both large and small, some bearing the name, and others not. Among the former are four significant Hasidic movements which represent the Hasidic ideal as it existed in three different paradigms and historical periods: the classical period of Greco-Roman Palestine; the medieval period of Muslim Egypt and Christian Germany; and the pre-industrial period of Eastern Europe and Russia.

With the emergence of a global consciousness in the 20th-century, perhaps best articulated by the first images of our planet as seen from outer space, the paradigm of every known religion began to shift irrevocably. Once the ‘shape and sharing of the planet’ was known, all trajectories began to align, causing upheaval in every religious

tradition and spiritual lineage. Thus, a global consciousness is both the primary catalyst for, and the defining characteristic of the Fourth Turning of Hasidism.

-Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi from his book [Foundations of the Fourth Turning of Hasidism: A Manifesto](#)