

אור ישראל

OHR YISRAEL

and Other Writings

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יְדִידִי! הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי חֹשֶׁבְתִי לְמִשְׁפָּט, כִּי דְבָרֵי הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים יִסְפִּיקוּ לְמִדֵּי
לְעוֹרֵר לְבַבְכֶם אֶל חֲזוֹק לְמוֹד הַלְּזוּהָ הוּא לְמוֹד הַמוֹסְרִי, אֲשֶׁר לֹא
כָּכֵל הַלְמוּדִים לְמוֹד הַמוֹסְרִי הַלְּזוּהָ, אֵין לָךְ לְמוֹד אֲשֶׁר יִקִּיף חֵיבוֹב
עַל כָּל הַנִּפְשׁוֹת, הַנְּשִׁים פְּטוּרוֹת מִתְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה, קָשִׁי יוֹם וַחֲסָרֵי דַעַת
בְּמִצְוֹת רְעוֹת חֵס וַחֲלִילָה יֵשׁ מְקוֹם הַרְבֵּה לְפִטְרָם, אִישׁ אִישׁ לְפִי
עֲנִינוּ יִשְׁלַל מִחֵיבוֹב, לֹא רָאִי זֶה כְּרָאִי זֶה, כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִרְחִיב לְאָדָם,
כֵּן יִגְדֵל הַחֵיבוֹב וְכֵן יִרְבֶּה.

לֹא כֵן לְמוֹד הַלְּזוּהָ הוּא חֵיבוֹב מְקַף לְכָל הַנִּפְשׁוֹת אַחַת לֹא
נִעְדָר, כִּי הַמְלַחְמָה פְּרוּשָׁה עַל כָּל הַחַיִּים הַמְדַבְּרִים, הִיא מְלַחְמַת
הַיִּצָר וְתַחְבּוּלוֹתָיו, תְּאֵוֹת הָאָדָם וְעַלִּילוֹתָיו, אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה יִלְכְּדוּהוּ
בְּמַכְמְרֵיהֶם, לְבַל יִהְיֶה לוֹ תְקוּמָה חֵס וַחֲלִילָה, אֲשֶׁר כִּמְעַט קֵט יִפְשַׁע
הָאָדָם לְמַרְבֵּה בְּאֵין מַעְצוֹר לְרוּחוֹ, לְהוֹצִיא כָּל מַפְעֵל רַע וְנַחְעֵב
לְעֵינֵי הַשָּׁמַשׁ, אוּי! מָה נַעֲשֶׂה לְיוֹם פְּקָדָה, כִּי יִפְקֹד ד' הַמִּשְׁפָּט עַל
כָּל הַחַיִּים, מַעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם וְתַחְבּוּלוֹתָיו, בְּמָה נֶאָזֵר עֲזוֹ וְתַעֲצוּמוֹת,
לְעַמֵּד נֶגֶד הַמְלַחְמָה הַחֲזָקָה הַלְּזוּ, אִם לֹא בְלִמּוֹד הַלְּזוּהָ לְמוֹד

1. Compare *Tosefot Yom Tov* on Mishna Eiruvin 2:5, note 13.

2. Compare Bava Kamma 6a *et seriatim*.

3. Compare Isaiah 40:27.

4. Lit. "all life that speaks," a reference to the medieval definition of the superiority of human life over other animals because the human speaks.

Letter 3

My friends:

I thought¹ that my first words surely would more than suffice to awaken your heart to strengthen this learning, the study of Mussar. Mussar is not like any other study. There is no other study that is required of all people. Women are exempt from study of Torah. There is plenty of room to exempt destitute people and those who are preoccupied by desperate circumstances, God forbid. Each person, according to his own situation, may have his obligation to study Torah reduced. Each one is different.² The more comfortable conditions are for a person, the greater the obligation [to study Torah] grows.

Not so this [Mussar] study. This study is required of everyone; no one is excused.³ For there is a battle hanging over all intelligent beings:⁴ this is the battle with the [evil] urge and its [warped] strategies; human desire⁵ and its [consequent] deeds which capture him in their traps, so that he will never recover (God forbid). For in an instant, a person will sin without limit if there is no check to his spirit. He will carry out every evil and depraved project in broad daylight. Oy! What will we do on the day of remembrance⁶ [of being held accountable] when God will bring His judgment on all the living, on the work of man and his schemes?!⁷

With what can we strengthen ourselves to stand up to this tremendous battle, if not with the study of Mussar to refine our thought

¹ I.e., instinct.

⁶ Compare Isaiah 10:3.

הָאָדָם חָפְזֵי בְדַמְיוֹנוֹ, וְאָסוּר בְּמִשְׁכָּלוֹ. דְּמְיוֹנוֹ מוֹלִיכוֹ שׁוֹכֵב בְּדַרְךְ לֵב רְצוֹנוֹ, בִּלְיַחַת מִהֶעֱתִיד הַיּוֹדָאֵי, עֵת יִפְקֹד ה' עַל כָּל מַפְעָלָיו, וּבִשְׁפָטִים קָשִׁים יִוָּסֵר, בִּלְיִלְכֹד זָר בְּגִלְלוֹ, הוּא לְבָדוֹ יִשָּׂא פְרֵי חַטָּאוֹ, אַחַד הוּא, עוֹשֶׂה הָעֲבֵרוֹת וְהַנְּעֻנָּשׁ. מֶרֶה הִיא, בִּלְיִאמֹר הָאָדָם זֶה חֲלִי וְאִשְׁאָנוּ.

פְּגַעֵי הַתְּבַל מִצְעָרִים הֵמָּה, לְמַכְבִּיר, מוֹל עֲנֹשֵׁי הָעֲבֵרוֹת; תִּגְעַל וְקָשׁ הָאָדָם לְמַדִּי, יוֹם לְשָׁנָה יִחָשֵׁב. אוֹי לְדַמְיוֹן, אוֹיֵב הָרַע הַלְּזָה, מִיִּדְּיוֹנוֹ הוּא, בְּכַחֲנוֹ לְהַרְחִיקוֹ. בְּתַתְּנוּ אֶזֶן קְשִׁיבָה אֶל הַשִּׁכְלֵי, לְהַשְׁכִּיל עַל דְּבַר אֱמֶת, לְחָשֵׁב שְׂכָר עֲבֵרָה נֶגְדַת הַפְּסָדָה; וְיִמָּה נַעֲשֶׂה, הַדְּמְיוֹן נַחַל שׁוֹטֵף, וְהַשִּׁכְלֵי יִטְבַּע, אִם לֹא נוֹלִיכְנוּ בְּאֵנִיָּה, הִיא רִגְשֵׁת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְסִעֲרַת הָרוּחַ.

The human being is free in his imagination but fettered by his reason.¹ His imagination leads him, undisciplined, on the path his heart desires. He acts without fear of the inevitable future, when God will hold him accountable² for all his activities, and he will be chastised with harsh judgments. No one else will be held accountable in his stead. He alone will bear the fruit of his sin. The one who commits the sin is the one who is punished. It is a bitter fate. Let the person not say: This is my affliction and I will bear it.³

The misfortunes of the world cause pain but are enormously outstripped by the punishment for sins. The person's soul will feel utter revulsion. Each day of suffering will be experienced like a year. Woe to our imagination, this evil enemy.⁴ He is the product of our hands. We have the power to distance him by giving an attentive ear to reason, to be intelligent about recognizing this truth, to calculate the reward of a sin against its loss.⁵ What can we do? The imagination is a constantly flowing river, and reason will be inundated unless we guide it in a boat – the sentiments of the soul and the tempestuousness of the spirit.⁶

* *Iggeret HaMussar (The Letter on Mussar)* was first printed as an appendix to the 1858 edition of R. Moses Cordovero's sixteenth-century kabbalistic Mussar book *Tomer Devora*, published by R. Salanter in Koenigsberg, the year after he arrived from Kovno. This is the first piece written by R. Salanter for publication, in which he presents his rationale for the study of Mussar as an important requirement for every person.

1. One who lives according to his imagination is unbridled and instinctive, whereas one who lives according to the dictates of reason exercises restraint and recognizes boundaries.
2. Compare Isaiah 27:1.

3. Compare Jeremiah 10:19. He should not be complacent about the possibility of punishment, for it will exceed his capacity to bear it.
4. Compare Esther 7:6.
5. I.e., punishment. See Avot 2:1.
6. I.e., fear of God and of punishment.

הַנְשָׁגָב וְהַעֲקָר בְּשֵׁמוֹשׁ רְפוּאוֹת הַתּוֹרָה לְתַחֲלוּאֵי הַיָּצָר, הוּא לְלַמֵּד בְּעֵז וְעִיּוֹן עִמָּק הַיִּטֵּב, דִּינֵי הָעֲבֵרָה עֲצֵמָה, הַהֲלָכָה עִם כָּל סְעִיפֶיהָ. כִּי עֵינֵינוּ הַרְוֹאוֹת הַרְבֵּה מֵהָעֲבֵרוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָאָדָם נִמְנַע מֵהֶם בְּטִבְעוֹ, וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר עֲלֵיהֶם אִף גַּם בְּעַת אֲשֶׁר יִלְחָצְנוּ לָזֶה אִיזָה דְבָר, וַיִּשְׁנֶם עֲבֵרוֹת חֲמוּרוֹת מְאֹלָה, וְהָאָדָם הַזֶּה בְּעֲצֻמוֹ יַעֲבֹר עֲלֵיהֶם בְּנִקְלָה. דְּרַךְ מִשָּׁל, חֶלֶק גָּדוֹל מֵאֲחֵינוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמַעֲט רַבָּם כְּכֹלָם לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ, בְּלִי נְטִילַת יָדַיִם חֲלִילָה, אִף גַּם בְּעַת אֲשֶׁר יִרְעֻבוּ וַיִּצְטַעְרוּ הַרְבֵּה. וּבְלִשׁוֹן הָרַע הַחֲמוּרָה, בְּנִקְלָה יַעֲבֹרוּ עָלֶיהָ גַּם בְּלִי תַאֲוָה גְדוֹלָה. וְעַתָּה הִנֵּנוּ רוֹאִים כִּי עֲקָר הַשְּׂמִירָה מֵהָעֲבֵרָה הִיא, רַק לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַהֲרַגְל (הַשְּׂמוּר) טִבְעוֹ אֲצֵל הָאָדָם, עַל כֵּן אִף אִם יִתְאַמֵּץ הָאָדָם הַלְזֹה לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי הַמוֹסָר, לִיגַע עֲצֻמוֹ בְּהַשְּׂמִירָה מְלִשׁוֹן הָרַע עִם כָּל חוּשָׁיו וְרַעֲיוֹנָיו כִּפְאוֹת, בְּכָל זֹאת, כָּל עוֹד שְׂלֵא נִתְחַלֵּף טִבְעוֹ וְהֲרַגְלוֹ בְּזֶה שְׂלֵא יִהְיֶה לוֹ שׁוּם חֲפִץ טִבְעִי לְסַפֵּר לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, יוֹתֵר יַעֲבֹר בְּנִקְלָה עַל לְשׁוֹן הָרַע מֵאֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל בְּלִי נְטִילַת יָדַיִם חֲלִילָה. וְכֵן הוּא הָעֵנֶן בְּכָל מִינֵי עֲבֵרוֹת, הַכֹּל לְפִי הָאָדָם וְהַזְמַן וְהַמְּחֹז, כִּי גַם לֹא כָּל הַמְּחֹזוֹת שׁוּיִם בְּזֶה, כִּי אִם מִתְחַלְפִים בְּעֵנֵינָם, כָּל מְחֹז יֵשׁ לוֹ עֲבֵרוֹת אַחֲרוֹת אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמַר אֲצֵלָם בְּנִקְלָה וּמְרַחֵק מֵהֶם בְּטִבְעוֹ. וְזֹאת הִלָּא יְדוּעַ, כִּי הַשְּׂתַנּוֹת הַטִּבְעוֹ תוֹלֵד רַק מִלְּמוּד וְהֲרַגְל רַב, וְלִכְּן הִיִּסוּד הָעֲקָרִי וְהַעֲמוּד הַנְּכוּן, לְהַכִּיֵּן אֶת עֲצֻמוֹ לְשְׂמִירָה מֵהָעֲבֵרוֹת וְעֲשִׂית הַמְּצוֹת, הוּא רַק הַלְּמוּד הַרַב בְּהֲלָכָה זוֹ הַנוֹגַעַת לְעֲבֵרָה זוֹ אוֹ לְמִצְוָה זוֹ, וּבַפֶּרֶט בְּעִיּוֹן הַדָּק הַיִּטֵּב, כִּי זֶה הַלְּמוּד עוֹשֶׂה קִנְיָן חֲזָק בְּנַפְשׁוֹ, לְהִיּוֹת הָעֲבֵרָה מְרַחֶקֶת מִמֶּנּוּ בְּטִבְעוֹ.

כְּדוּמָה בְּמְחֹזוֹתֵינוּ אֵלּוּ, תְּהִלָּה לְאֵל אֲסוּרֵי גְבוּלוֹת וְטְרַפּוֹת וְדוּמֵיהֶם מְטִבְעִים בְּנַפְשׁוֹת הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי, עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִצְרַךְ שׁוּם אִישׁ לְאֲכֹף טִבְעוֹ וְתַאֲוָתוֹ לְהִתְרַחֵק מֵהֶם, כִּי הִמָּה לוֹ לְזוֹרֵא. הִלָּא לֹא יַעֲלֶה חֲלִילָה עַל לֵב שׁוּם אֶחָד מִמוֹכְרֵי בָּשָׂר בָּשָׂר, לְהִתְרַפּוֹת מִלְּדַרְשׁ

43. I.e., saying words which demean another.

44. The image is borrowed from the preparation of the incense, in which the priestly preparer would grind the ingredients into the finest powder.

The highest and primary aspect of using the Torah's remedies for the sicknesses of the urge is to study, with vigor and penetrating analysis, the laws of the sin itself – its halakha in all its detail. For we see with our own eyes many sins from which a person naturally refrains, even when under duress, while the very same person will commit more severe sins. For example, the greater part – the vast majority – of our fellow Jews will not eat without first ritually washing their hands, God forbid, even when they are hungry and feeling great discomfort. Yet when it comes to the much more serious sin of evil speech,⁴³ they will casually transgress, even without much appetite for it.

Now we see that the main safeguard against this sin is simply to make the habit (of refraining) second nature in the person. Thus, even if a person makes a strong effort to go in the ways of Mussar, to wear himself out guarding against speaking evil, with all his senses and ideas properly attuned to this goal, even so, as long as he has not changed his nature and his habituation so that he has no natural desire to speak evil, he will more easily violate the law of evil speech than he would eat without ritually washing his hands, God forbid. The matter is the same in all manner of transgressions; it is all according to the person, the timing, and the locale. For not all locales are the same in this respect; rather they vary in different matters. Each locale has different transgressions that are easily and naturally avoided, as it is against their nature. This is also well known: changing one's nature results from a great deal of training and habituation. Therefore, the essential foundation and the right pillar to prepare himself to keep from sins and to do mitzvot is only a lot of learning of the halakha that relates to this sin or this mitzva, especially with close attention to the finest details,⁴⁴ for such learning establishes a strong impression in the soul and renders the sin naturally distant from him.

Similarly, in our locales, praise God, the prohibitions against [eating] carcasses, improperly slaughtered animals, and the like [i.e., non-kosher foods] are deeply rooted in the Jewish soul, to the point that no one needs to force his nature and appetite to distance himself from them, for they are repulsive to him. It would not occur, God forbid, to any seller of kosher meat to fail to consult a local rabbinic authority⁴⁵ when

45. Heb. "moreh tzedek."

אֶצֶל הַמּוֹרֶה צָדֵק, בְּמִצְאוֹ שׁוֹם דָּבָר שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ חֲשֵׁשׁ טְרֵפוֹת בְּאֲכָרִים
הַפְּנִימִים, עִם הַיּוֹת לוֹ לַפְּעֵמִים בְּעִנְיַן כְּזֶה הַפֶּסֶד מְרֵבָה, מוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם
עָלָיו בְּטַבְעוֹ וְהִרְגָלוֹ, חֲלִילָה לוֹ מִרְשָׁע, לְהַכְשִׁיל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וְאוֹלָם בְּעוֹנוֹתֵינוּ הַרְבֵּים, בְּמִשְׁאֵא וּמִתֵּן הוּא בְּהַפְּךָ, רַב בְּנֵי אָדָם
לֹא יִדְרֹשׁוּ עַל חֲשֵׁשׁ גְּזֵל וְעִשְׂק מִעֲצָמָם. טָרָם יִתְבַּעְנוּ חֲבֵרוֹ, וּמֵהֶם
אֲשֶׁר גַּם אַחֵר הַתְּבִיעָה יַעֲשֶׂה תַחֲבוּלוֹת מְרָמָה אוֹ יַעֲזוּ. וְהֵלֵא בַתּוֹרָה
הַכֹּל שׁוֹה, זֶה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה וְזֶה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, כְּפִי עִנְיַן הַתּוֹרָה וּמִשְׁפָּטֶיהָ,
וּכְשֶׁר בְּשֹׁדָה טְרֵפָה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ, לֹא תֹאכַל כָּל גְּבֻלָה, אוֹ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂק
אֶת רֵעֵךְ, וְלֹא תִגְזֹל, וְדוּמִיהֶם. וְכִמוֹ שֶׁהַטֵּבַע בְּנַפְשׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי, שְׂכַל
מִינֵי טְרֵפוֹת שׁוּיִם אֶצְלוֹ, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יוֹרֵה הַמּוֹרֶה כִּי הוּא טְרֵפָה מֵרַחֵק
אֶצְלוֹ וְכַתּוּבָה יַעֲשֶׂה, בֵּן בְּמִמוֹן, הֵלֵא כָּל מֵה שֶׁעַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁיֵּךְ
לְחֲבֵרוֹ הוּי גְּזֵל וְעוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תִגְזֹל. וְאַנְחָנוּ רוֹאִים שֶׁבְּעוֹנוֹתֵינוּ הַרְבֵּים
אֶפְלוּ הַלּוֹמְדִים וְכִמְעַט גַּם הִירָאִים, אֵינָם נִזְהָרִים כִּיאוֹת בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה
הַלְזוֹ, אֲשֶׁר יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים וְגַם הַמִּיתָה אֵינָם מְכַפְּרִים עָלֶיהָ.

אֲכֵן אִם יֵשִׁים הָאָדָם לְבוֹ וְנִפְשׁוֹ, לְלַמֵּד הַהֲלָכוֹת הַשֵּׁיכוֹת לְמִמוֹן
בְּעִיזוֹ, גְּמָרָא וּפּוֹסְקִים אִישׁ לְפִי עֲרֵפוֹ, וּכְפָרְט אִם הַמְרָכּוֹ יִהְיֶה עַל
תְּכוּנַת אֶסוּר וְהִתַּר, לִידַע אֵיךְ לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּר מִגְּזֵל, (אִף אִם לֹא יִקִּים
בַּתְּחִלָּה, כִּי הַתְּאוּה רַבָּה בְּזֶה, וְגַם רְחוּק הַדְּבָר מִהִרְגָלוֹ הַמְדִינִי), מֵה
רַב כְּזֶה לְהַשְׁרִישׁ לְאֵט לְאֵט קִנְיַן רַב בְּנַפְשׁ, עַד אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה שׁוֹה
בְּעִינָיו שְׂאֵלוֹת אֶסוּר וְהִתַּר וּשְׂאֵלוֹת הַשֵּׁיכוֹת לְמִמוֹן. כֵּן אִם הָאָדָם
נִכְשַׁל רַחֲמָנָא לְצֵלָן בְּעִבְרָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין הָעוֹלָם רְגִילִין בָּהּ, כְּמוֹ בְּנֵאוֹף
וְכִיּוֹצֵא, כְּמֵאֲמָרָם ז"ל מִעוּטָן בְּעֵרִיּוֹת, וְתַקַּף עָלָיו יִצְרוּ שְׁנַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ
כְּהִתַּר רַחֲמָנָא לְצֵלָן, עַקֵּר רְפוּאָתוֹ (לְכַד הַתְּבוּנָנוֹת הִירָאָה וְהַמוּסָר
מֵאֲגָדוֹת וּמְדַרְשֵׁי חֻקֵּינוּ ז"ל וְסִפְרֵי מוּסָר הַשֵּׁיכִים לְזֶה), הוּא לְמוֹד

46. Exodus 22:30, referring, per the Sages, to improperly slaughtered meat.

47. Deuteronomy 14:21, referring, per the Sages, to unslaughtered carcasses.

48. Leviticus 19:13.

49. See Mishna Yoma 8:9. For interpersonal sins, one must appease the wronged party.

50. A veiled reference to the corruption of the Tsarist state.

51. See Bava Batra 165a.

he finds something in the internal organs that he suspects renders [the meat] *treif*, even though, sometimes, this would cause him a substantial financial loss. The fear of Heaven is upon him, both in his nature and by habit. Wickedness, causing Jews to stumble, is unthinkable to him.

However, due to our many sins, in business matters the situation is just the opposite. Most people will not inquire on their own about suspected theft or exploitation, until they are sued by another. Some of them, even after suit is brought, will resort to deceitful strategies or will brazenly deny. Yet in the Torah, all such sins are equal. Both [forbidden foods] and [stealing] are prohibitions, subject to the Torah and its laws: "You must not eat meat torn by beasts in the field";⁴⁶ "You shall not eat any carcass";⁴⁷ "You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not steal";⁴⁸ and the like. Just as it has been implanted in the Jewish soul that all forms of *treif* are the same to him, and whatever the rabbi decides is non-kosher is repulsive to him, and he will act as instructed, so too with regard to money, whatever, according to the Torah, belongs to his fellow, is stolen and in violation of "You shall not steal." Yet we see that, due to our many sins, even students of Torah and nearly even those who fear God are not properly careful about this prohibition – which is not atoned for by Yom Kippur or even death.⁴⁹

However if a person commits his heart and soul to learning monetary halakhot in depth, from the Talmud and codes, each according to his ability, and especially if the focus is on the character of the permitted and the prohibited, in order to know how to guard against stealing (even if he does not uphold these laws at first, for desire is great, and this is very far from official habits),⁵⁰ it has the power to slowly make a deep impression in the soul, to the point where questions of prohibited and permitted foods will be the same in his eyes as questions concerning financial matters.

So it is even if a person stumbles – God save us – in a sin which the masses do not commit regularly, such as adultery and the like – as they, of blessed memory, said: Only a minority [commits] sexual transgressions⁵¹ – but his evil urge so overwhelmed him that it became as if it were permitted, God save us. The main remedy (aside from contemplation of reverence and Mussar from the aggadot and midrashim of our Sages, of blessed memory, and the relevant Mussar books) is the

להביא בחדרה את אשר יורנו שכלו. ומקרא מלא דבר הכתוב (משלי ב') אם תבקשנה ככסף (קאי על התורה כהתחלת הפסוקים בני כו' וכמבאר בילקוט במקומו) ובקשת הפסוק אין די בחפץ האדם לבד רק אם ימצא לו ההכנות השייכים לבקשתו. בן גם בבקשת התורה. וביתר שאת כי בכסף היסוד היא עזר אלקי. ובתורה היסוד הכנות האדם (אם מעצמו אם מאחרים) ואז יזהיר עליו גם נגה עליון. כי לא בשמים היא והתורה נתונה לבני אדם. אכן לא בשביה היא אצלם להתנהג בה כחפצם רק כבעל דעת ישרה להקים הסבות הטבעיות המובילים להמסובב. היא ידיעת האמת. ובכלל לבקשת תורת האמת שני יסודות לה. היכלת בטבעי. והטהרה במחשבתו – היכלת – היא הבקיאות הגדולה בהקדמות והתבונה היתרה בשכל ישר וחד לבנות הרפכות חזקות כראי מוצק. ואחר העיון הרב על כל הצדדים לברר האמת. הטהרה – היא אשר יכונה החכמים בשם הפרה מדעית וחכמי המוסר בשם התפשטות הגשמיות הינו שיהיה השכל בודד בלי הרפכתו עם יתר כחות הנפשות אשר בהאדם. כי זולת נטיית כחות הנפשיות המה מסכים מבדילים בינו לבין הפרת האמת. אשר גם שקול דעת הישר בעוזרה. והנטייה תעקמה לצעד בדרך עקלקלות. מקור היכלת – את אשר נאצל מתבוננת רבים גדולים חקרי לב

16. Here, again, is R. Salanter's dialectic guidance. Humans cannot attain perfect rationality and objective knowledge of the Torah. God accepts that fact. This is the implication of giving the Torah to humans. They will mix in some of their subjective needs and distortions. However, God requires humans to try to neutralize the bias and reduce its distorting effects to a minimum.
17. E.g., correct understanding. There's a reasonable relationship between your conclusions and the material in the text. The student of Torah must carefully analyze how one thing leads to the next and determine that this is a reasonable conclusion. Coincidence or superficial resemblance is not adequate. Correct meaning is established by rational analysis and straight, commonsense deduction and analogy.
18. Lit. "a solid mirror."
19. "*Hakara mada'it*"; R. Salanter was apparently aware of the scientific method and was familiar with texts and sources that spoke of it. Its superiority lay in the fact that the empirical method stripped out human subjective needs and distortions and established the truth objectively.
20. "*Hitpashitut hagashmiyut*," meaning, the stripping away of all instincts and drives that come with embodiment. To R. Salanter, this means removing or neutralizing

Nor can truth be built simply by the desire of a person to seek knowledge of truth, bringing into its chamber whatever his reason has taught him. This idea is stated fully in a verse in Scripture (Prov. 2:4): "If you seek it as you do silver..." (this applies to Torah as indicated in the beginning of these verses, "My son..." [Prov. 2:1], and as explained in *Yalkut [Shimoni]* ad loc.). When seeking silver, a person's desire alone is not enough; only if he has prepared himself properly [will he succeed]. The same applies to the seeking of the Torah – and even more so – for when seeking silver, the basis is divine aid, whereas with respect to Torah, the basis is human preparation (by himself or others); only then will the divine light also shine on him.

"For the Torah is not in the heavens" (Deut. 30:12); rather, the Torah is given over to human beings. However, it is not held captivity by them, i.e., to act with it as they see fit; rather, as one who uses straightforward reason¹⁶ to devise causes that naturally lead to the desired effect.¹⁷ This constitutes knowledge of the truth.

In general, there are two fundamental principles in the search for the true Torah: natural ability and purity of thought. Ability means comprehensive mastery of basic premises and additional insight through strong and keen reason to build composites that are strong as cast iron,¹⁸ and after much analysis of all sides of the argument to clarify the truth.

Purity – this is what scientists call "scientific knowledge"¹⁹ and the Mussar sages call the stripping away of physicality,²⁰ meaning that the intellect stands alone and is not combined²¹ with other human psychic drives. Otherwise, the tendencies of the psychic drives are screens separating him from recognizing the truth. For, even though straight judgment helps [in recognizing the truth], tendencies distort [judgment, leading it] to proceed along crooked paths.²²

the self-serving egocentric bias which is embodied in the self so that undistorted reason can grasp the Torah's true meaning.

21. I.e., intermixed and distorted.
22. Hitherto, R. Salanter has presented Mussar learning and character refinement as ancillary activities, and in Letter 6 he stressed that learning Torah itself is the priority activity. Here R. Salanter is saying that without Mussar and character refinement, all the Torah that one studies will become distorted, because straight judgment is twisted by bias. Mussar and self-improvement are thus prerequisites for true understanding of Torah.

לחך, רק מרחוק הוא צופה אל תכליתו, אם ישר הוא אז מראשיתו שפט השכל עליו להחזיק בו, וכחות נפש האדם, זה דרכם כסל למו לחות מקרוב, ואת אשר ינעם להחושים יקריבו אל נפשם, אף כי מרה תהיה באחרונה, וכאשר כל מעשה האדם יביא האלהים במשפט, אם טוב ואם רע, על פן שופט שכל הישר לשמר כל מוצא פי ה' זהו יצר טוב, אכן כחות נפש האדם, ימשכו ברשתם את הערב לשעתו, גם להמרות נגד ה', זהו יצר הרע, וכשהאדם במצב כבישת המדות ותאות כחות נפשו על ידי השכל המכבישם, נקרא עובד ה' ביצר טוב הוא השכל. וכשהוא במצב תקון המדות ותאות כחות נפשו, עד אשר לא יחפצו רק את אשר ה' דורש מאתם, נקרא עובד ה' ביצר הרע, הם כחות הנפשיות אשר עצמותם לרע, והאדם תקנם למתק מרירותם להפכם לטוב, זהו בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר רע, בכבישת המדות ובתקון המדות (כנזכר לעיל).

והאדם בבחירתו היסוד לחפש בחינת תקון המדות, עד שיהיו כחות נפשו נמשכים רק אל הצדק והישר, ואז הוא בשמחה, כמאמר הכתוב (קהלת י"א) שמח בחור בילדותו וגו' והלך בדרכי לבך ובמראי עיניך, זהו להשתמש בכחות הנפשיות אשר דרכם לחזות בקרוב, והוא מאמרם ז"ל, עד כאן דברי יצר הרע, הינו ענין מצב האדם בעת בחירתו, לראות שיהיו מדותיו מתקנות ופעלותיו על פי כחות נפשו המכנים בשם יצר הרע, מפאן ואילך ימי העמידה, אשר אז היסוד להלך לרוח השכל הצופה למרחוק, ולכבש כחות נפשו, ולידע פי על כל אלה יביאנו האלהים במשפט, המה דברי יצר טוב בחינת השכל.

אכן בני עליה, המה אשר גם בימי העמידה והזקנה רב חילם

32. Compare Song of Songs 2:3.

33. Compare Psalms 49:14.

34. See Ecclesiastes 11:9.

35. I.e., undistorted.

36. Compare Deuteronomy 8:3.

37. Compare Micah 6:8.

on the sense that something is sweet to the palate.³² Rather, it looks into the distance, to the ultimate goal. If it is a just outcome, then reason will judge it so from the beginning and uphold it. Yet human emotions – this is their foolish way³³ – see the near term; whatever pleases the senses they bring closer to themselves, even when it will be bitter at the end, when all the human's actions, whether good or evil, will be brought to judgment by God.³⁴ This is why straight³⁵ reason decides to observe all of God's decrees³⁶ and is the *yetzer tov*, while the emotions draw into their net what is immediately pleasant, even when it goes against God. This is the *yetzer hara*.

When a person is in the mode of repressing his character traits and psychological drives, repressed by his reason, he is called one who serves God with his *yetzer tov*, that is, his reason. And when he sublimates his character traits and psychological drives, to the point that they only desire what God asks of them,³⁷ he is called one who serves God with his *yetzer hara*, that is, the psychological drives whose essence is disposed toward evil, which the person sublimated, sweetening their bitterness and changing them to good. This is “with both your urges, the good urge and the evil urge” – through repression and sublimation (as mentioned).

In his youth, a person's primary efforts should be in the mode of sublimation, to the point where his psychological drives are drawn only to righteousness and uprightness; then he will be joyful, as Scripture says (Eccl. 11:9): “Rejoice, young man, in your childhood ... and follow the ways of your heart and your eyes' delight.” This means using the psychological drives, which are predisposed to look at the short term. This is what they, of blessed memory, said: “Up to this point, these are the words of the evil urge.” That is, a person's concern in his youthful state should be to see to it that his traits are sublimated and his actions in accordance with the psychological drives, called the evil urge. From that point forward is the age of adulthood, when the primary concern is to follow the spirit of reason, which sees the long term, to repress his psychological drives, and to know that God will bring him to judgment for all of this. These are the words of the good urge, the rational mode.

Therefore, those who continue aspiring – those who, even into adulthood and old age, have the vigor to sublimate character traits and