

Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl:
Personal Practices of a Hasidic Master

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Hasidism is a mystical revival movement that began among east European Jews in the mid-eighteenth century. It started in Podolia, the southeastern corner of the old Polish kingdom, in what is today the Ukraine. Within the course of less than a hundred years it had spiritually "conquered" most of Polish Jewry and become a major force on the historical scene, transforming the formerly obscure and elitist Jewish mystical tradition into the basis for a broad-based popular religious movement. Until the present day, and despite many changes in its inner character, Hasidism has continued to play an important role in the religious and social life of the Jewish people.

From the outset, the Hasidic revival operated on two levels. On the one hand, it represents the fullest development of popular pietism among Ashkenazic Jews. It glorified the simple devotee over the learned rabbi; it offered access to the most profound sorts of religious experience to those who approached only with a humble heart and a passionate desire to do God's will. It took long-venerated terms and categories (especially the *sefirot*, the ten aspects of the Divinity), which for earlier mystics had referred to secrets of the inner life of God, and used them in the most casual way to refer to emotional experiences accessible to nearly anyone. On the other hand, Hasidism set out to create a new elite model of the *zaddik* (lit., "righteous one" or holy man; pl. *zaddikim*) who would serve as standard-bearer of the Hasidic message, model of the pious life, and actual channel for the flow of divine blessing into the lives of his adherents. These *zaddikim*, sometimes also called *rebbe*s or teachers, and their descendants (dynastic leadership was copied from the pattern of eastern European nobility) came to serve as leaders of the various Hasidic communities, as they do to this day. Each *rebbe* bears the name of the town where his dynasty originated, carrying it with him even as the dynasty moves to another country or continent.

Hasidism was a movement originally disseminated mostly through oral teaching. Each week the rebbe would speak at his Sabbath table about the Torah portion read in the synagogue that week; these homilies were often memorized and were much discussed by his disciples. Only later were collections of such teachings committed to writing, published either by the master himself or posthumously by sons or followers. These collections of teachings became the "classic" writings of the Hasidic tradition. The oral homilies were accompanied by tales, stories about the rebbes themselves, parables for moral edification, or wondrous accounts of the deeds and rewards of simple pious souls. The tales remained an oral genre, growing and gaining embellishments as they passed from one generation to the next. Only much later (toward the turn of the twentieth century) were most of them committed to writing.

The text presented here belongs to a third (and much smaller) genre of Hasidic literature, called *hanhagot* or Regimens of Conduct. It became customary for religious figures to record for their disciples brief lists of personal practices to which they gave special attention. The list served as a sort of ethical testament, studied and followed carefully by family members and followers after the master's death. The custom of recording *hanhagot* is not limited to Hasidism. Its roots go back to the Middle Ages and the Pietistic communes of early Ashkenazic Jewry. In the great mystical revival of the late sixteenth century, centered around the Pietists of Safed, the custom became widespread among both Ashkenazic and Sephardic figures.

This text is published in Hebrew under the title *Hanhagot Yesharot (Upright Practices)* by Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (c. 1730–1798). The preacher of Chernobyl was one of the leading disciples of R. Dov Baer of Mezrich (Pol. Miedzyrzec), who turned the teachings of his own master, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (1700–1760) into a religious movement to be spread throughout the Jewish world. The Ba'al Shem Tov was the charismatic spiritual figure in whose image Hasidism was created. Throughout the movement's history, each *hasid* (devotee) has traced his own relationship back, through a chain of masters and disciples, to the Ba'al Shem Tov. R. Dov Baer, the *maggid* (preacher) of Mezrich, was the mystical ideologue and driving force behind the movement's spread. After his death in 1772, each of the followers led in his own way, and Hasidism began to take on distinctive dynastic and regional variations.

R. Menahem Nahum, a traveling preacher, made his home in Chernobyl, a mostly Jewish townlet near Kiev. He was succeeded by his son, R. Mordecai of Chernobyl (1770–1837), one of the most popular and powerful Hasidic leaders of his day. During this period the family took on the surname Twersky. R. Mordecai was father to eight sons, each of whom, and many of whose further sons and grandsons, became rebbes in various Ukrainian towns, mostly in the areas south and west of Kiev. The *hanhagot* of R. Menahem Nahum, along with his collected homilies *Me'or 'Eynayim* (The Light of the Eyes), are seen as foundational documents to the various dynasties that spring from this family tree, including those of Tolne, Skvira, Rakhmastrivka, Hornistopl, Trisk, and, through

marriage, the various dynasties of the Ruzhin-Sadegora line. Several of these dynasties continue to exist, their centers now located either in Israel or the United States.

Lists of *hanhagot* were among the tools used to give each Hasidic group its particular coloring. Bear in mind that these lists were issued to communities that were already committed to living wholly within the strict regimen of *halakhah* or the “path” of Jewish law. Careful observance of the Sabbath, thrice-daily prayers, and countless other traditional practices could be taken for granted. The *hanhagot* of the rebbe lay atop this universally accepted grid of halakhic praxis. Its point (as our author quotes in the third paragraph below), is to “sanctify yourself within the realm of that which is permitted.” Even the full halakhic life with all its restrictions and obligations does not automatically make for holiness. The Hasidic revival comes about because Jews who observe the Law in all its detail can still do so without sufficient *kavvanah*, inner spiritual direction. It is this lack that Hasidism comes to fulfill. True, every deed is to be filled with *kavvanah*, for there is no deed, place, or moment where God is not to be found. “God needs to be served in every way,” as the Hasidic sources have it. That message, well conveyed in our text, is of the essence of Hasidism. Nevertheless, the rebbe took special care in these matters and you, as his disciple, are to give them extra attention as well.

Hasidism, like the Kabbalah that precedes it, is a mystical tradition overlaid on a revelation-based normative tradition of great antiquity. Although some of the roots that shape later mystic expression may be as old as the tradition itself, the mystical language and theology are fairly late. Thus Hasidism constantly struggles, for example, to find elements of its own semi-panteistic God concept in the highly personified theology of the biblical and early rabbinic sources. Hasidism’s well-known emphasis on joy and a sense of well-being as required for God’s service sometimes seem to fly in the face of the rabbis’ denigration of this world as the place of tears and scene of our bitter exile. The Hasidic faith that God is everywhere and that all things can be vessels of God’s service sometimes seems belied by the very strong distinctions made in the normative tradition between holy and profane, permitted and forbidden, pure and defiled. Although the *Hasidim* lived wholly within the norms of halakhic praxis, in theory they were constantly seeking to stretch its limits.

The texts translated here are partly from the original edition of 1817 and partly from those additional *hanhagot* of R. Menahem Nahum first printed in *Razin de-Orayta* (Secrets of the Torah) of Ze’ev Sevi of Zbarash (Warsaw, n. p., 1903).

Further Reading

The full text of the *Hanhagot Yesharot* has been translated by the author of this chapter as *Upright Practices*, published together with *The Light of the Eyes* in the

Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Although there is no current history of Hasidism that can be recommended, Gershon Hundert's *Essential Papers on Hasidism* (New York: New York University Press, 1990) contains some important materials. More recent scholarly studies are found in *Hasidism Reappraised*, edited by Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: Littman Library, 1996). A beginner's guide to understanding Hasidic texts is the author's "Teachings of the Hasidic Masters" in Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources* (New York: Summit Books, 1984). Topically arranged selections from Hasidic sources are to be found in Louis Jacobs's *Hasidic Thought* (New York: Behrman House, 1984), and in Norman Lamm's *The Religious Thought of Hasidism* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999). The only scholarly treatment of the *hanhagot* themselves is Ze'ev Gries's *Sifrut ha-Hanhagot* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989).

TEXT 1

1. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord" [Ps. 1:10]; keep this ever before you. Believe with full faith that the Creator, blessed be He, the King of Kings whose glory fills all the earth, stands before you in each moment and sees all your deeds, both those that are public and those hidden in the depths of your heart. This should lead you to a constant sense of shame, of which Scripture says: "So that His fear be on your faces and you will not sin" [Exod. 20:20]. On this verse the sages asked: "How is the fear of God present on a person's face? And they answered: "In shame."

2. Purify your mind and thought from thinking too many different thoughts. You have only to think about one thing: serving God in joy. The word Be-SIMHaH [In Joy] has the same letters as MaHaShaBaH [thought]; all thoughts that come to you should be included in this single one. [Serving God in joy is one of the essential pillars of Hasidism.] Of this Scripture speaks in "Many are the thoughts in a person's mind, but it is the counsel of the Lord that will stand" [Prov. 19:21]. Understand this.

3. Our rabbis say: "Sanctify yourself within the realm of that which is permitted." In the moment of sexual union turn your thought to the sake of heaven. Recite the prayer of the RaMBaH [Rabbi Moses ben Nahman] as it is printed in *The Gates of Zion*. [Before the sex act] say: "For the sake of the union of the Holy One, blessed be he, with His *Shekhinah*. . ." [The physical union of man and wife is taken as an earthly replica of the union of "male" and "female" forces within divinity.] See further what is written in the *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* [R. Joseph Caro's Code of Jewish Law], section two hundred forty, concerning holiness before the act of union. Remember how careful the sages sought to be concerning this holiness.

4. Give as much in alms as you are able, as Scripture says "You establish me in righteousness" [= almsgiving; Isa. 54:14]. How good and pleasant it is to

have a box for alms and to place three coins in it (or at least one) before each prayer. Before eating too you should set aside a coin.

5. Fast one day in each week. Be alone with your Maker on that day and confess explicitly all your sins against Him, even those of your youth. Be ashamed and ask forgiveness; cry, for "all the gates are locked except that of tears." Then turn back to rejoicing over the fact that you have attained full repentance.

6. Keep away from depression to the utmost degree. Thus you will be saved from several sins, especially those of anger and pride. Be intelligent and judicious in the matter of worry over your sins. Depart from them with a whole heart, ask God for forgiveness, and then serve Him wholeheartedly. Have complete faith [in the effectiveness of your repentance], following the rabbis' teaching: "If a man betrothes a woman on the condition that he be a righteous person, that woman is considered betrothed, even if he had been [well-known to be] completely wicked. He might have had a thought of repentance."

7. Fulfill the teaching of the *Sayings of the Fathers* that teaches: "Be of very, very humble spirit before every person." When you see a wicked person, say in your heart "Even he is greater than I." "The more the knowledge, the greater the pain" [Eccles. 1:18].

8. Pray and study with fear and love. [Love and fear of God, the key emotions of the religious life, must be held in proper balance.] Know that the letters [of the text before you] are called heaven and earth, and that all the worlds and all creatures great and small are given life by His word. "This is the whole of man" [Eccles. 12:13]. Understand this.

9. Keep yourself from being cross toward your household in any matter. Let your speech be pleasant, for "the words of the wise are heard when pleasant" [Eccles. 9:17].

10. Cleave to the wise and to their disciples; learn always from their deeds. Keep away from people who do not have good qualities of character. This is the main thing: good qualities.

11. Study books of moral teaching each day, something on the order of *The Beginning of Wisdom* [by R. Elijah De Vidas, first published in Venice, 1579]. That work is filled to overflowing with wisdom, fear of God, and praiseworthy qualities.

12. Keep away from having your head turned; accept not a drop of human praise. Praise that you receive from people is to be considered a great liability. Those who speak ill of you are in fact doing you a great favor. Your intent should be only for the sake of His great Name, to do that which is pleasing to Him.

13. Accept whatever portion the Lord gives you in love, whether it be for good or for illness and suffering. Thus did our rabbis teach on "with all your might"

[Deut. 6:5]—thank God for every portion that He gives you, whether good or ill. “Evil does not come from the mouth of the most high” [Lam. 3:38], but only good. Compare this to those bitter medicines that are needed to heal the body. The same are needed for healing the soul.

14. If you find yourself unable to study or pray with fear and love, continue in any case to engage in study and to recite your prayers to God with complete faith. This is what the rabbis have taught: “A person should ever involve himself with Torah and the commandments, even if not for their own sake.” “Not for their own sake” means that even if he has no fear or love, he should keep doing them for the sake of heaven. They also said: “From doing them [even if] not for their own sake, he will reach the stage of doing for their own sake,” that is, he will attain to fear and love. Of this the prophet speaks when he says, “‘Are not my words like fire?’ says the Lord” [Jer. 23:29]. [The words of study and prayer are so powerful that they will ignite the proper religious emotions.]

15. Perform many acts of loving-kindness: dowering poor brides, visiting the sick, and all the other things of which the sages spoke. This is one of three things that stand at the very pinnacle of the world order. Praise no one and speak ill of no one. The Ba'al Shem Tov has already said it: “If you want to praise anyone, praise God; if you want to speak ill of anyone, speak ill of yourself” and know your lowly state. If you possess some good quality, it belongs not to you but to God. Thus Scripture says: “Let not the wise man praise himself for his wisdom, nor the rich man for his wealth” [Jer. 9:22]. All this was given to you by God. Your bad qualities—those are indeed your own.

16. Remember God always: “I place YHVH ever before me” [Ps. 16:8]. If you fail to do so even for a moment it is considered a sin. Thus the Ba'al Shem Tov taught on “Blessed is the man for whom God does not think of a sin” [Ps. 32:2]. [“What does the verse mean?”] he asked. “Does the Lord give up on sins?” Rather interpret it this way: When a person does not think of God—when God is out of his thoughts—that is sin. Consider this to be a very grave matter. Thus you will take care and not forget Him. Such a person [one whose thoughts never depart from God] is indeed blessed.

17. Each day study from the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, from the Mishnah and the Gemara [Talmud], each in accord with your own abilities. Do it all for the sake of God's great name, and for no other purpose. “Then you will walk surely on your way.”

18. Take care, insofar as possible, not to speak before [the morning] prayer. Do so only for very great need. Consider your deeds before you pray, and repent of them. Humble your heart by considering your own smallness and lowliness. Thus will you prepare all the rungs of your soul to receive some bit of the fear of heaven as you stand before Him. Of this Scripture says: “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel” [Amos 4:12].

TEXT 2

Know first that God exists. He was first, and He created all things, both above and below. His creations are without end!

All began with a single point—the point of supernal wisdom, *hokhmah*. The power of the Creator is present in all of His creations; the wisdom of God fills and takes on the garb of every thing that is. Of this Scripture speaks in saying: “Wisdom gives life to those who possess it” [Eccles. 7:12].

Believe with a whole and strong faith that the Creator is one, single, and united. He is the first of all causes and origins, utterly endless, blessed is He and blessed is His name. He created many worlds, higher and lower, without limit and without end. Of these Scripture says: “Worlds without number” [Song of Songs 6:8; a word play of *‘alamot* and *‘olamot*].

Believe with a whole and strong faith that He both fills all the worlds and surrounds them, that He is both within and beyond them all. He created the lower world for the sake of the Torah and Israel, that His blessed divine Self might be revealed. There is no King without His people Israel.

Believe with a whole and strong faith that “the whole earth is full of His glory” [Isa. 6:3] and that “there is no place devoid of Him.” His blessed glory inhabits all that is. This glory serves as a garment, as the sages taught: “Rabbi Yohanan called his garment ‘glory.’” His divine Self wears all things as one wears a cloak, as Scripture teaches: “You give life to them all” [Neh. 9:6]. This applies even to the forces of evil, in accord with the secret of “His kingdom rules over all” [Ps. 103:19]. All life is sustained by the flow that issues forth from Him. Were the life flow to cease even for a moment, all that is sustained by it would become but an empty breath, as though it had never been.

Believe with a whole faith that the slightest motion of your little finger can move great spiritual worlds above, as the Ba’al Shem Toṽ has taught.

Believe with whole faith that man contains all the worlds within him, as the ARI [R. Isaac Luria, famous kabbalist of the sixteenth century], the holy *Zohar* [the great book of kabbalistic teachings], and various midrashim have taught. This being the case, God must be proclaimed King through every single deed we do, through study and prayer as well as fulfilling the commandments [for thus is His kingdom proclaimed] over all our limbs. Even ordinary conversation must be made holy.

God’s sight should be brought into our daily words and thoughts. With every word and with each thought we must cleave again to their root in God, since it is only by His power that we think or speak. When you have full faith in this, You will come to realize that all the events of your life have come about through God. Whether or not they have turned out as you wanted, you will consider them all to be for the good, since “evil does not come from the mouth of the most high” [Lam. 3:38], but only good. Of this I have spoken earlier. Within every bad thing there dwells His power of goodness, that which gives

it life. This can be seen only by one whose eyes are properly directed; otherwise the veils of sin tend to intervene and blind the human eye. To purify your sight, do not look beyond your own four ells; these will be the four letters of the name YHWH, that which calls all being to be. [Here the “four ells” or the narrow boundaries of *halakhah* are interpreted mystically, to stand for the four letters of the divine Name.]

Mend all your bad qualities by means of goodness; subsume the left within the right, as the holy *Zohar* has taught. [Cultivate] all those qualities of which the pious authors speak. Then the good will gain in strength and lift itself out of the evil in which it had been enshrouded. Once evil is left on its own it will vanish altogether, and then our righteous Messiah will arrive—speedily and in our day! Amen. Selah.

Believe all of the above with a whole faith, and at every single moment be prepared to give your life for it . . .

. . . By holding fast to the praise of God, by singing the hymns of Israel's sweet singer [the psalms of David] you will be able to destroy the accusing and evil forces. Indeed King David prayed that his songs would be sung in the synagogues and houses of study. By them we can restore the crown to its former place, and the lily [*Shekhinah* or the divine presence, “asleep” in exile] will awaken.

Be among those who take stock of themselves each night before they lie down. Give an account of your sins and repent of them. Even a thought of repentance will suffice. Since *teshuvah* [repentance, return to God] was one of the seven things that preceded the world into existence, time does not apply to it, and thus a thought alone will do to “sweeten” all. In this way you can send forth your soul (all three of its levels) to rise upward to the place of contemplation.

Rise up from sleep at midnight, for that is a time when God's desire is especially to be found. Serve him in the midst of night and perform the midnight vigil [prayers instituted by the kabbalists to mourn the exile and increase Israel's longing for redemption]. As that vigil is joined to your morning prayer, you will be unified and will attach yourself to that which is above; then you will be able to bring forth whatever it is that you seek from God. Midnight prayer and service is a great thing; it is this that brings about peace above. If not for this, God forbid, those who are joined together [the transcendent God and his indwelling presence] would be separated.

Take special care when reciting the *Shema* to pronounce each word. See that you are not distracted, at least not during the *Shema* (the twice-daily proclamation of God's unity), but recite it in fear and love. Each letter you recite in this way will help to bring life to your limbs.

See too that you honor the Sabbath as fully as you are able within your means. Do so with food and drink and in other ways as well. The letters of SHaBbaT are those of TaSHeB [return], to indicate that “he who keeps the

Sabbath, even if he is as idolatrous as was the generation of Enosh, will be forgiven."

Here is a basic principle: The root of all things is in almsgiving. By this deed you uplift the sparks from their broken state, and in this way you uplift your own self as well. The letters of ZeDaQaH [almsgiving] contain the letters of ZeDeQ [righteousness]. In acting as a ZaDDiQ you are a holy spark of the cosmic ZaDDiQ, [by your righteous act you partake in the Zaddiq's uplifting of *zedeq-shekhinah*], from poverty and exile. Enough said. [The ways in which the commandments allow humans to partake of divinity are among the secrets of the Kabbalah, not to be discussed publicly.]

Here is the rule: By any holy deed or by any life-sustaining alms that you offer to the poor, you uplift a holy spark that lay amid the evil forces, and thus you come to holiness. No "act of holiness" can take place, however, in the presence of fewer than ten [a *minyan* or quorum of ten Jews, required for public ritual], and those ten are in turn a hundred. In this way is ZeDaQaH formed, and thus is a soul uplifted from its broken state.

This too is a basic principle: See that you bring your own negative qualities to submission. Hold fast to good qualities. In this way too you will cause sparks to rise from their broken state. This is why a person must recite a hundred blessings each day. The meaning of this is as follows: "Blessings" refer to the pond above [BeRaKHaH, "blessing" = BeReKHaH, "pond"] and the streams that flow forth from it. You have to bring about the flow of these hundred blessings upon you, these hundred that also represent the ten good qualities. Overcome your own bad qualities and cleave to Him, bless His name, and in every way bring down the flow of His bounty upon you.

When you stand up to pray, decide first that you will attach yourself only to pure and virtuous thoughts, rejecting this lowly world down to the very last degree. Thus you may bring yourself to the most sublime joy of spirit, becoming joined to Him in a wondrous way. In this you attain to *malkhut*, the "T" of God. Thence you may bind yourself further and enter into a state of union, until you reach the Nothing, the World of Contemplation, that which is referred to as "Who?" Of this the sages say, "Know before *Whom* you stand," meaning that: You stand before the "Who" [the mysterious, unknowable God-head]. Unification means that you not separate mind from words, especially during the *'amidah* [prayers], when the true union and coupling takes place. In this way that union may come to be revealed in the lower world as well. Amen. May this be His will.

When you awake at midnight, as we have suggested above, be sure that your very first thought is that of attachment to God. How great is the Creator! He has just restored your soul to you! As you glorify God, ask yourself for what purpose He has sent that soul back to you. Realize that it is for the sake of His service, that you serve Him with soul through Torah, worship, and commandments. As you begin to pray, accept the fact that you worship Him even though

your soul may pass out of you in prayer. Keep your thought fastened on your blessed Creator throughout the day.

Do the same with your emotions: [Here begins a list of the seven lower *sefirot*, (aspects of divinity) understood by Hasidic authors as the divine roots of human emotions. The seven are described here as love, fear, glory, victory, praiseworthiness, attachment, and kingship.] Should something like improper love of this-worldly pleasure be aroused in you, know that it stems from a spark of divine *hesed* [love]. You have caused that spark to fall into the hands of evil; it alone gives life to those evil forces. It is within your power to uplift those holy sparks, to separate the proper food from that which is to be cast aside, to find the hidden good. The Creator has so made it that we might have a choice: "See that I place before you life and death, good and evil. Choose life . . ." [Deut. 30:19].

Treat all other emotions and human qualities in the same manner: improper desire for glory, for praise, improper attachments and loyalties.

Fear no one but God. Scripture's words "The fear of the Lord is His treasure" [Isa. 33:6] are to be understood thus: [Our] awe before His greatness is God's own treasure. There are various types of fear, to be sure, but [the true treasure is] that sense of awe before His greatness, fear of the Lord because He is Master and Ruler, indeed the very source of all the worlds. Such awe will lead you to serve Him with all your strength and intensity. No longer will you be pulled away by the attractions of this lowly and despicable world. Day by day you will grow in the strength of His service. You will do this not for fear of death, of punishment, or of hell: all of these are nought in the face of your true fear of the Creator.

Further: Do not *glorify* yourself, however great your learning or your good deeds, your wealth or your fine qualities. Glory belongs only to God.

So too all the rest. Do not *triumph* over any person. Grant triumph only to Him, His alone is the only true victory. Yours is rather to triumph over your evil urge, that which leads you away from the good and into the path of evil.

Further: If people should come to *praise* you, do not let it lead you to self-importance. Rather give praise constantly to God, to Him who created you out of nothing and brought you into being. It is He who sustains you from your mother's womb unto the very day of your death. Were the Creator's concern to depart from you for but a moment, you would not survive that moment in the world.

Further: with regard to *attachment*. Attach your thought always to the Creator; do not turn it away even for a moment to think of the vanities of this world. As soon as you turn your thought elsewhere you are considered as an idolator, as Scripture says: "You will turn aside and worship other gods" [Deut. 11:16]. [As soon as you turn away from the Lord, you are inevitably worshipping other gods.]

Further: with regard to *kingship*. Proclaim God King over all your limbs; "Let there be in you no other god" [Ps. 81:10]. On this verse the sages ask:

“Who is the “other god” that dwells inside the human heart?” Their answer: “The evil urge and his retinue are called by this name.”

God has made everything in parallel form: As there are seven holy qualities, so are there seven evil ones parallel to them. It was so made in order to “grant reward to the righteous who sustain a world that was created by ten utterances,” who triumph over the seven wicked qualities and cleave to God through their own goodness, breaking down the evil urge and those that support it. So too in order to “take leave of the wicked who destroy a world that was created through ten utterances,” who spend all their days in pursuit of their own desires, seeking out the pleasures of this lowly and despicable world. In doing so they deny the One, Single, and Unified God. In the end they will have to give account to the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, for every single one of their deeds.

Should someone whisper to you, however, that he is so thoroughly defiled by the stain of sin that there is no repentance for him—God forbid that this be the case! There is nothing that stands in the way of repentance, for repentance was one of those seven things that preceded the Creation itself. No force of judgment has a place there, and just a thought—a thought of complete repentance and resolve never to return to that folly—will suffice to gain forgiveness for all one’s sins. From that day forward, of course, one must cleave firmly to God and break down all one’s bad qualities. Of this the rabbis said: “Whoever sacrifices his own [evil] qualities has all his sins forgiven. Subjugate your evil qualities and rise above them. Join your mind to your body [for the upper three *sefirot*, representing the mind, are like the seven lower ones, the bodily emotions], and rise above all these measured qualities to that place where there is no judgment at all.

Raise everything to the level of *binah* and there it will all be “sweetened,” as the *Zohar* says: Even though *binah* is the source of judgment-forces [*binah* is the mother of the seven lower *sefirot*, including *din*, the force of judgment], it is only in their root that they can be transformed. Then are all your sins forgiven. Everything you have done up to that day, however, you will still have to weigh, all in accord with the pleasure you took in this world and its delights. The same will apply to all the other qualities. You must bring yourself to sorrow over this, fasting regularly on Mondays and Thursdays, either those following Passover or those following Sukkot, during the weeks referred to as *shovevim tat* [an acronym for the first eight Torah portions from the Book of Exodus]. So too every eve of the new moon, considered to be a small Day of Atonement. Fasting on that day has to do with the waning of the moon. We have mentioned its meaning above: The *Shekhinah* is in exile, as Scripture says: “I am with him in sorrow” [Ps. 91:15]. You have to participate in the *Shekhinah*’s suffering.

JUDAISM

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