

"Terrific!" Rabbi Avraham Mordecai Gottlieb head of Bircat Shalom

"This raises up so many questions for me..." Ofrah Pearl Deckel, peace
activist

A Manual for Achdut: Unity

Finding the Middle Line

Yedidah Cohen



A Manual for Achdut: Unity

*Dedicated in deepest love and appreciation for my diverse chevrotas
from whom I learn so much every time we meet.*

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A Word Before We Begin

The initial impulse for this booklet came from listening to a recording of a round table discussion that Rabbi Gottlieb held with people from many different walks of life — people who each want to make a contribution to our society. Rabbi Gottlieb started with a passage from Rabbi Ashlag's writings and then everyone contributed their particular perspective. Toward the end of the discussion, some of them sighed and said: we lack achdut, —unity But no one seemed to have a clear idea of how to achieve it. That moment stayed with me. I thought I would try to formulate a path toward achdut — one that would speak to as many of us as I can.

For several decades now I have had the privilege of learning the inner Torah — the teachings of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag, the Baal HaSulam — with study companions and in small groups with people from an extraordinarily wide range of backgrounds. My chevrotas come from all parts of the political and religious spectrum: right and left, religious and secular, Israelis, Jews from the diaspora, and also non-Jews, Bnei Noach.

We are able to find common ground and unite because the Kabbalah is itself the soul of the Torah, and as such, it speaks directly to our own souls, our deepest essence where we are all one. The moment we dive into it together, our differences recede into the background. We connect at the level of our essence, and love and peace rise up and become palpable between us.

Of course, in the course of our conversations, views and perspectives surface that we do not see eye to eye on. Those are moments of inner work for all of us — to pause, to remember our purpose, and to let our inner essence show its face. And the love prevails.

In most of our sessions we stop a few minutes before the end, and everyone writes a short personal prayer based on what we have learned together that day. It is out of the living experience of this kind of unity — love and genuine connection across all our differences — that I have written this booklet.

We have now been at war for two years. The chaotic outer situation in our societies reflects our current inner state, and it is given to us as

a warning to awaken us to the need to change our path. Unity, peace and harmony is a light of God — but we need to long for it. In the language of Kabbalah, we need to build the appropriate vessels with which to merit this great goodness. The more we strive toward unity and peace within ourselves and among ourselves, the more the outer world will change accordingly and reflect our inner peace. This is not naive optimism. It is one of the deepest principles of the wisdom of Kabbalah, the inner Torah.

I give this booklet to you freely with all my heart. You may reproduce it and distribute it freely, send me your comments, your additions and your corrections, and my only stipulation is that if you quote from it you do so faithfully in the spirit of connection and friendship with which it was written.

Yedidah Cohen, Tsfat

In many of our societies the voices of the extremes are heard with great force. Quiet debate has become rare, and name-calling has become common. How do we reach a field of awareness in which the norm is the voice of moderation, love, and mutual respect?

Rather than lamenting the current situation, we will begin by looking at the level of our reality where we are united: that is at the level of our deepest essence, our soul.

Kabbalah teaches us that each of us is made up of Creator and created, soul and ego.

We are very familiar with the created aspect of ourselves, — our physical being and our ego with all its desires; but we are very unfamiliar with our soul and cannot hear its voice either within ourselves or in our communities. So we will begin our exploration of unity precisely here — by giving a voice to the desire of the soul.

1. Our True Nature is Achdut (Unity)

בני בכורי ישראל — “My firstborn son is Israel” (Shemot 4:22).

It is the nature of the soul within us to join together, to gather into wholeness. The holy Shechinah — the indwelling presence of Hashem — is also called “Knesset Yisrael,” the Gathering of Israel. The *shleimut* of Israel— its wholeness and completion— depends on all its parts joining together into one.

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, this underlying reality is often concealed from us. But in times of national distress, in times of war and genuine threat, what was always true becomes suddenly visible: the Jewish people are one. The unity was never absent — it was only hidden.

This is the essential point: Achdut (unity) is not something we need to create. It is already inherent in our being. Our work is not to manufacture something new, but to uncover and reveal what is already there.

2. The Root Experience: Mount Sinai

Whatever paths our fathers and mothers have taken since the beginning, we all stood together at Mount Sinai. This is not merely history,

it is a root experience embedded within the consciousness of every Jew in every generation.

ויחן העם נגד ההר — “And the people encamped opposite the mountain” — כאיש אחד בלב אחד — “as one person with one heart.”

It was at Sinai that the profound connection between the revelation of the light of God and the unity of the Children of Israel was made manifest. And it was not incidental. The unity of Israel was the prerequisite for the revelation — Hashem did not descend upon the mountain until the people were gathered as one.

Together we said נעשה ונשמע — we will do and we will hear — an unconditional commitment to serve God and keep His Torah. We may argue today about what that means in practice. But the fundamental promise was given, and it was given with one heart. The promise has not expired. It lives within each of us still.

3. The Sanctuary

The first project which God gave the people of Israel was to build the Sanctuary:

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם — The Sages interpret this command as “they shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them,” that is, within the heart of each and every one of us.

But how was this Sanctuary to be achieved? ויקהל משה את כל עדת בני ישראל — It was through the assembly of all the people. And indeed the Torah records:

כָּל-אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה, אֲשֶׁר נָדַב לְבָם אֹתָם, לְהִבְיֹא לְכָל-הַמְּלָאכָה, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה--הִבְיָאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל נְדָבָה, לָהּ.

Thus the Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that HaShem, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to Hashem.

The essence of the Sanctuary was an expression of their unity. Each person acted according to his own heart and his abilities, but with one purpose.

We get a sense of their enthusiasm from the following passage:

Moses called together Bezalel and Oholiab, and every person of wise heart — all those whom God had gifted with wisdom and whose heart moved them to come forward and give themselves to the work.

They received from Moses everything the Children of Israel had brought for the work of the holy Sanctuary. And still the people kept bringing — freewill offerings, morning after morning.

All the skilled craftsmen came, each one pausing from his own work, and came to Moses and said: “The people are bringing far more than is needed for the work that God has commanded us to do.”

So Moses gave the order, and it was announced throughout the camp: “Let no man or woman bring anything more for the offering of the Sanctuary.” And the people stopped bringing.

What had already been given was not only enough — it was more than enough. (Shemot 36:2-7, Parshat Vayakhel)

Building the Sanctuary of Today

The spontaneous kindness, togetherness, giving and self-sacrifice we see within the people of Israel is most noticeable in times of war. The incredible self-sacrifice of our soldiers and civilians who rushed to help on 7th October, the support and prayers for the wellbeing and return of the hostages by Jews all over the world — these are the furnishings of the Sanctuary in our day.

The Sanctuary is not a building of the past. It is being built, right now, in our midst — in the acts of self-sacrifice and loving-kindness we see among our people, most visibly in times of shared trial, but also in the everyday.

You shall build Me a sanctuary and I shall dwell within them
For my father, Aaron Ben Menachem Mendel z”l

Within them? Within us, within everyone?
Within me also?

It’s a bit of a tall order.
I’m going to have to get the decorators in.

I hear the list of furnishings required is extensive.
Some of those items are pretty hard to come by...

I'm ok for blue thread,
but I've run short on the purple,
and I have no idea where you get gold from these days.
I mean real gold, not the fake stuff. That wouldn't do at all.

And what furnishings do I need exactly?
A seven branched menorah of complex design,
a table of shewbread,
a copper, or was it a golden altar with incense?

The actions of the decorators are strange.
They are not bothering with the usual stripping and fixing.
They seem to value ordinary, mundane actions that one would not
consider as worth much.

Giving up my place on the bus,
Being there to comfort a friend in distress,
Listening and yes, listening again and again to words spoken and
not spoken,
Through my ears and through my heart.

I close my eyes, and begin to imagine,
The potential of a refurbished soul:
Red, copper, gold, blue —
Threads of love,
Woven by blessing.
And I give thanks.

Yedidah

4. Twelve Tribes, Twelve Ways of Serving God

If we look at the reality of the journey of the Children of Israel from Egypt to the land of Israel, we find they suffered from many disagreements along the way. And even before that, within the family of Jacob itself, we have the major catastrophe of the brothers selling Joseph into slavery. Where do these disagreements arise from?

The Zohar teaches us that the twelve sons of Jacob — who became the twelve tribes of Israel — each represent a distinct way of serving God. In other words, dissent is built into the very fabric of our experience as a people. So if *achdut* is our true underlying reality, what does this dissent mean? How do we hold these two truths together — that we are fundamentally one, and yet we are constitutionally different from one another?

The answer is that we all have a common purpose, but the vessels or the channels that we use to accomplish this purpose differ in their texture, their approach, their mood and what they see as important. If we look in the Zohar we see for example that:

Reuven — Chesed
Shimon — Gevurah
Levi — Tiferet
Yehuda — Malchut
Yosef / Binyamin — Yesod

The quality of Chesed, for example, is pure giving and generosity of heart. Gevurah has the desire to set boundaries, Tiferet is drawn to beauty and harmony. And for Yesod, what matters most is being a channel for the good. The other tribes also represent Sefirot but their precise definition is a little more technical. What matters most is the understanding that the abilities and interests of each one differ completely, What each values most is different.

The twelve tribes of Israel are the basis for our desires, our talents, and the way we see our world. All are different ways of carrying the light of God into the world.

And here lies a subtle but important danger. It is very easy to become so focused on our own particular path — on the specific quality of light we are bringing — that we lose sight of why we are doing it, and of the greater purpose we share. This is how legitimate conversation and disagreement about the path and the means becomes a matter of bitterness, jealousy and division. This is why it is so important to step back at times, to lift our eyes from our own work, and to see how our piece fits into the whole.

I recently saw a short video clip in which Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was asked why Israelis argue so much. He said it is our way of understanding ourselves and our fellow — of fixing limits and boundaries, and also of exploring new territory. So long as we keep our higher purpose in view, we can disagree and argue without descending into name-calling and all that goes with it.

Omri Miran, a survivor of Hamas captivity, was interviewed after his release. He spoke about the different opinions regarding the right way to release the hostages that had taken place and had caused agonizing division within his own family and across Israeli society. The Hostage Family Forum had advocated for a deal and a cessation of fighting, whereas Forum Tikvah advocated fighting until the bitter end as the only means. In fact, ultimately, the truth was that it was the presence of both voices that saved them: If the Hostage Family Forum had been the only voice, he and his fellow hostages would still be in the tunnels of Gaza. If Forum Tikvah had been the only voice, Hamas would have shot them all.

“What freed us, more than anything, was our democracy. There was more than one voice and they were both heard. This confused Hamas and prevented them from being able to exploit a single fixed position.”

When he was asked about whether the differences of opinion in his own family and in the nation had disturbed him, he replied,

“A rainbow is made up of many colors. But it is not divided. It is one, and it is the most beautiful thing in the world.”

5. Where Are We Today? The In-gathering and Its Riches

It is my belief that all twelve tribes are back in Israel. The long exile and its separations are drawing to a close, and we are home — but we did not come home empty-handed.

I worked for a time at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. One Rosh Hashanah, we passed around a card for everyone to sign a New Year’s greeting in the language of the country where they had been born. That one small card carried over seventy languages.

We bring with us not only the inbuilt spiritual characteristics of our root tribe — our particular way of carrying the light of God — but also the customs, the melodies, the modes of thought, the food, the humor and the heartbreak of the countries our families came from, or fled from. The Yemenite and the Russian, the Moroccan and the American, the Ethiopian and the Argentine — each carries a world within them.

This means that the achdut we are called to build today is richer and more complex than anything our ancestors faced. We are not simply twelve tribes reuniting. We are twelve tribes, each one layered with seventy nations' worth of experience, all finding our way back to one another and to our shared home.

Because of our fundamental differences in the way we channel the light of God, we disagree about what our home should look like. Some of us believe it should reflect universal values; others feel it should prioritize the distinctly Jewish way of life. Some want to see Jewish law — halachah — serve as a greater basis for our public life; others experience this as a threat.

We need to know that these disagreements are not new. They are the natural outcome of the twelve tribes, each carrying its own light. And there is a way to unite even in the face of such seemingly irreconcilable views.

6. The Magic of the Middle Line

The innermost dimension of the Torah — Kabbalah — teaches us that the extremes of any position are problematic and dangerous for us. They are liable to arouse our egoistic selfish desires that cause separation from our Self and our collective soul. They throw us off our inner balance. We need to find, and can find, the middle way.

The path to the middle line requires three things:

- ♦ firstly, restraint of my own desire to receive pleasure for myself alone;
- ♦ secondly, an active desire to contribute and to give unconditionally to others, even when I am not sure where I am going; and

- ♦ thirdly, faith in the ultimate goodness and underlying unity of the soul within us all.

The middle line brings joy and satisfaction to all sides. It comes through the grace of the Creator, but it needs our openness and our cooperation. This isn't easy. We must first know ourselves deeply so we can discern the hidden agendas of our egoistic desires that we tend to project on our fellow. We need to open ourselves to our fellow who is different from us and holds opposite views— and this obligates us to arrive at a genuine desire to give to the other unconditionally. And thirdly we need to be open to the mutual satisfaction, joy, and love that characterizes the middle line. Yet if the middle line can bring about the unity and harmony we are seeking, why do we find it so difficult to create the conditions to allow the Creator to give it to us?

Two reasons: firstly, because we do not learn the inner Torah which teaches us how to come to the love of our fellow and the love of God and therefore we do not know that the middle line of love and harmony exists, nor do we know how to reach it. And secondly, because our ego stands in the way.

7. Soul and Ego

Rabbi Ashlag teaches us that we, as created beings, are made up of two major elements: Soul and Body/Ego. The soul within ourselves is the aspect of the Creator within us; its desire is to give unconditionally to the Creator and to others. It is the aspect that wants us to unite.

Our created aspect, our body, which includes our ego, manifests within each of us as our particular set of talents, personality and attributes. Its main attribute is the desire to receive pleasure and joy in myriad ways.

The original role of our body/ego is to give expression to the desires of our soul. However, instead of using its qualities and talents to assist our soul, our natural tendency is to use it as a means of self-gratification, without thought of others, because this is how we are created and how we grow up.

So while our soul aspect is what helps us unite with each other, our

created aspect, our ego leads us to separate not only from each other but also from our inner Self, our soul.

Why is this the case? To answer this question we need to know that just as there are physical laws of nature so there are spiritual laws as well:

There is a spiritual law which states that two elements that act in opposite ways separate from one another. As we have seen, our soul desires to give unconditionally; so when we act only to receive pleasure and joy for ourselves alone we separate both from each other and from the Creator, the soul within us.

To see how this law works in practice let us look at some of the main manifestations of our ego nature in our society today.

8. Lashon Hara (Bad speech) — A Contagious Disease

Lashon hara is saying something about another person, or about a section of the community, that is factually true, but conveying it in a way that carries a negative connotation. This includes not only the choice of our words but even our non-verbal facial expressions. This definition of bad speech is distinct from *motzi shem ra* — slander or libel — which is saying or writing something that is factually untrue and for which one can be sued in a court of law.

Other cultures recognize only slander or libel as a moral wrong. But the Torah informs us that even the truth, spoken with negative intent or in a demeaning way, is forbidden.

We need to be aware that for 2000 years we lived in exile among the nations and we have adopted some of their ways.

I grew up in London in a religious family. We had English literature in our home. As a young girl I greatly enjoyed the classic novels of English literature — Jane Austen, Dickens. As a student at London University I went to the theatre and saw Shakespeare. Only years later did I understand that most of this rich literature is built on gossip and lashon hara.

This fact gives me a great deal to think about. We need human connection, and we enjoy human stories — but we must ask ourselves:

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does this enjoyment come at the expense of others? Does it serve the soul — the mitzvah of loving one's neighbor as oneself — or does it serve the ego?

Journalism has changed: our news studios are no longer about simply purveying the news, but about attacking— putting negative connotations, or name-calling anyone or any nation who doesn't fit the current narrative. So much of the antisemitism we have endured over the last years is plain and simple lashon hara against the Jewish people.

How much more so must we be careful not to do it to ourselves and to others.

Come with me for a moment into a television or internet news studio. Modern interviewing techniques are aggressive, often not allowing the person being interviewed to speak freely, cutting them off in mid-sentence, with the interviewer raising his or her voice over that of the person trying to answer the question. Often in the subsequent report of the interview we find their words quoted out of context. All these techniques produce lashon hara in practice.

Our Sages likened lashon hara to bloodshed. If you look honestly at our society today, including what happens on the social media channels, you will see they were not speaking metaphorically. They meant every word. Someone is attacked. The words said against him or her are factually true, even though his or her intentions or motives are unknown. How can he or she defend themselves? The result is destructive to the person as a human being with a family and a reputation and can destroy them.

Who bears responsibility for this dreadful scourge? According to Jewish law, three parties share the guilt: the person who speaks lashon hara, the person who listens to lashon hara, and the person who passes lashon hara on.

There is no escaping the fact: we who consume these media and listen to the lashon hara within are participants in this dreadful sin. It is the number one cause of our communal distress. We cannot place the blame on the journalists and studios alone. They supply what the public demands. If we show that this mode of speech is unacceptable to us, they will stop supplying this harmful merchandise.

And if you think to yourself: “this is just how things are, you cannot change society” — think about this: Twenty years ago it was considered completely admissible to smoke cigarettes in public, even on public transport. Then society as a whole decided that smoking was harmful to health — not only to the smoker but to those around them. And today smoking in public places is banned or not socially acceptable. The same thing needs to happen with lashon hara.

There is no escaping the fact that those of us who consume these media and listen to the lashon hara within them are partners in this serious sin. If we were to make it just as socially unacceptable to speak lashon hara, to listen to it, or to create the conditions for it the phenomenon would stop.

Jewish law teaches us that lashon hara is just as forbidden when directed at a community or a section of the community as when directed at an individual. We are forbidden to speak negatively about any particular section of the community of Israel. Thus we see that stopping lashon hara is the first step toward healing the division among us.

Practical Steps: Changing How We Consume Information

There are news services that exist precisely for this purpose — to deliver the essential news without the commentary, the attacks, and the constant lashon hara of the media studios. In Israel, <https://tamzit.org.il/> — News Highlights — is one such service. The news, plain and clear, without the backchat. And as a bonus, it frees up a great deal of time as well.

9. The Hall of Mirrors

Alongside the problem of lashon hara, there is another powerful force working against our unity that we need to understand. How modern social media actually works: Google and the other major service providers use algorithms and cookies to ensure that we see more and more of our own views reflected back at us, echoed and amplified, again and again. We are fed what we already believe. We are shown what we already like. Gradually, without necessarily being aware of it,

we stop encountering anything that challenges, enlarges us or contradicts our point of view.

I remember visiting the Palace of Versailles on a school trip, and walking through the famous Hall of Mirrors — that long gallery where every wall reflects your own image back at you endlessly. This is precisely what our virtual reality has become. A hall of mirrors. All you see is yourself.

How do we get out of it?

We need to get out of virtual reality and go and meet the neighbors.

Meeting the Neighbors

Getting out of the virtual hall of mirrors sounds simple. But why is it so difficult in practice?

It is a skill our grandparents had but one we have largely lost. We have become self-enclosed, afraid of intruding on someone else's privacy, unsure of how to simply knock on a door or start a conversation with someone we don't already know. We need to recover our courage.

How do we do it? By remembering who we are. By remembering our fundamental *achdut*, our underlying unity — that when we encounter someone different from us, the difference is in how we see things, in our path and our approach, but not in our essential selves. Beneath the surface, we are meeting another piece of the same soul.

Many of us live in what I would call monochrome neighborhoods. Everyone on the street goes to the same shul — or to the shul we don't go to. We know our own community intimately and the community across town which is different from us not at all. They may as well live in a different world.

But if we each cling to the bubble of our adopted "tribe," how do we ever reach *Hakhel* — the great gathering of all Israel?

10. Why This Is More Crucial Now Than Ever: The Advent of AI

We have all experienced AI to some extent, but we need to think clearly about its nature in order to understand both the benefits it

offers and the trap it sets.

Let me give you an example: I needed to buy a new computer. I went to the computer shop — I have known the proprietor over many years to be an expensive but honest dealer who understands the field very well and takes responsibility for what he sells. He sold me a computer he said would serve me well for many years. It was more than I really wanted to spend, but I trusted him. Within a short time the computer started to give me serious problems, crashing unexpectedly. I contacted him.

At the same time I was discussing the precise nature of the crashes with the AI engine I use, to see if it could shed any light on the subject.

The AI began to speak in extremely negative terms about the computer salesman — despite the fact that problems can happen with anything we buy, and it was not necessarily his fault at all.

I reproached the AI and asked it to stop using such emotive and inappropriate language. But at the same time it took a lot of will power and inner work from my side to close my ears to what it was saying and advising. It was feeding into my own egoistic side. It took real willpower on my part to remember that AI has no loyalty, no history, no relationship. It does not know that this man stood behind his products for twenty years. If I had acted according to its dictates, it could easily have broken a good relationship.

I realized that AI is simply a conglomeration of millions of people's will to receive, formed into an independently thinking unit. Unless we work on ourselves, recognizing which part of ourselves is our Divine soul and which is our egoistic self, we will be its slaves, acting blindly according to its dictates in the same way that we were once enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt without even the awareness that we are enslaved.

Now more than ever it is crucial for us to step away from the screen and activate our soul — our desire to be compassionate, to connect, to contribute our talents and our God-given personalities to unite rather than divide us.

11. Unity

Unity can be explored at many different levels, from the level of a person finding unity within himself or herself all the way up to the unity of the whole of Creation. Kabbalah sees reality as a holograph: The holy Ari teaches that the individual and the whole are as alike as two drops of water. Work we do at our own individual level also affects the whole directly. So we could have discussed unity at any level, but I chose that of the unity of the community of Israel because the sages teach, and it is borne out by our history, that it is our lack of unity that is a direct cause of the animosity against the Jewish people in the land of Israel and in the world. Knowing this, so many people in Israel are yearning for unity.

I begin this section with a beautiful piece from the Sfat Emet on the importance of the unity of Israel for the sake of the Divine presence, and then we look at the holographic nature of unity expanding into the essential unity of all humankind in Rav Kook's inspirational fourfold song.

The Sfat Emet: Vayakhel — Uniting Israel

“And Moses assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: “These are the words which the LORD has commanded, that you should do them.. Six days you shall work...” (Ex.35:1–3).

The Torah places this gathering of the people before the account of building the Sanctuary, because the Sanctuary can only be built through the power of a gathered community.

This is why the verse וַעֲשׂוּ לִי, מִקִּדָּשׁ; וְשָׁכַנְתִּי, בְּתוֹכָם says: “Make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8).

The Midrash on this verse notes pointedly that it does not say “within it” — meaning within the building — but “within them” — within the people.

This union of the community is also the inner meaning of Shabbat. And so when Moses conveyed the laws of Shabbat to the people, the very act of teaching them was itself an act of uniting the community.

We can also read the above phrase “These are the words that God has commanded that you should do” as referring to the act of uniting the community itself — that what God commanded, above all, was that Israel should come together as one.

All of this is ultimately one teaching: when the people of Israel are united as a whole, the Shechinah — the Divine Presence — comes to rest among them. This is what our Sages meant when they called the Divine Presence, “Knesset Yisrael” — the Gathering of Israel. (Sfat Emet Parashat Vayakhel תרל"ז)

From the Unity of the Individual to all Humankind: The Fourfold Song of Rav Kook

There is one who sings the song of his soul, and in his own soul he finds everything — the completeness of spiritual satisfaction in its total fulfillment.

There is one who sings the song of his people. He goes forth from within the circle of his personal soul, which he does not find ample enough, nor does it give him the ideal resting place he longs for. He aspires to the heights of strength yet he cleaves with a gentle love to the wholeness of Knesset Israel, and with her he sings her songs. He suffers in her tribulations and takes delight in her hopes. He meditates on the highest and purest understandings of her past and of her future, and researches with love and with the wisdom of his heart her innermost spiritual content.

There is one whose soul expands even further, until it goes forth and spreads beyond the border of Israel, to sing the song of humanity. His spirit expands with the majesty of humankind and the splendor of the divine image within.

He longs for the highest universal consciousness and awaits the ultimate perfection. From this source of life, he draws his meditations and his enquiries, his aspirations and his visions.

And there is one who rises yet even higher, exalted upward and even more inclusive until he unites with all existence, with every created being, and with all worlds. And with all of them he sings their song. This is one who engages with the song of creation

every single day, and he is promised that he will sing also in the world to come.

And there is even one who ascends with all these songs together in one band. Each of them gives its voice, and all of them together make sweet their melody, each one within the other giving the marrow of life — the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of jubilation and the voice of song, the voice of delight and the voice of holiness. The song of the soul, the song of the people, the song of humankind, the song of the world — all of them together merge within him at every moment and every time. And this wholeness in its totality rises to become a holy song, a song of God, the song of Israel — with tremendous strength and beauty, with its essence of truth and greatness. Israel whose name is *Shir El* — the song of God. The simple song, the double song, the threefold song, the fourfold song. The Song of Songs which is Solomon's — the King to Whom peace belongs.

Nature is Not One Phenomenon— Neither is Torah

The innermost aspect of Torah is the part of Torah which speaks directly to our soul, because it is the soul of Torah. Through the innermost aspect of the Torah we learn to love God and our fellow human being. All can learn it, both secular and religious, and gain unique insights. It is a source of a great deal of pleasure and gives us a way to truly connect with each other and learn from each other on an equal footing. It is a way of exploring ourselves and each other and learning together. "For all its ways are pleasantness and all its paths are peace." (Proverbs 3:17)

We are all Different

There are different expressions of the innermost part of the Torah. The path that I have been following for the last thirty years is that taught by Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag and his son Rabbi Baruch Shalom Ashlag.

It is out of the experience of learning this inner Torah with many

diverse people that I have written this booklet and it is to them that I dedicate it. However, everyone is different, and your style and your way of making our fundamental unity — our achdut — visible is unique, and thus irreplaceable.

I finish this small booklet with a simple plea: please, just begin. In small ways or in larger ways. The possibilities and the creativity of finding your soul's expression in achdut are endless.

I would love to hear from you the ways you find to express your own and our unity,

With all my blessings,

Yedidah Cohen

yedidah@nehorapress.com

Resources

News without commentary:

Tamzit HaChadashot — News Highlights — available online and via

WhatsApp: <https://tamzit.org.il> available in many languages

Essential news, clearly and simply presented, without editorial attack or lashon hara.

On Lashon Hara:

Chofetz Chaim and *Shmirat HaLashon* by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan — the classical and essential works on the laws and spirit of guarding one's speech.

Available in English translation from Feldheim Publishers and widely available online. For example <https://netsor.org/en/> There are many whatsapp groups and small groups learning this essential material. If you can't find one, find a friend and start your own!

Paths into the Inner Torah:

1. The teachings of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag (Baal HaSulam):

The middle line and the path toward it is the ultimate key to unity. For those who wish to explore the Kabbalistic foundations of achdut more deeply, the writings of Rabbi Ashlag offer an inexhaustible well.

Nehora Press — books and shiurim in English, including *A Tap-*

estry for the Soul and *In the Shadow of the Ladder* and other introductions to Kabbalah, compiled by Yedidah Cohen: <https://nehorapress.com>

Further reading based on the teachings of Rabbi Ashlag: *Giving* by Aryeh Segal (Urim Publications) *The Inner Work* by Avraham Lowenthal and *Spiritual Principles* by Avraham Lowenthal. All available on Amazon.

On-line shiurim of Rabbi Avraham Mordecai Gottlieb: Rabbi Gottlieb is a great contemporary teacher of the work of Rabbi Ashlag. He reaches out equally to all sections of the community and has many videos available across social media. YouTube: [@gotlivkab](#); email: amgravgotliv@gmail.com

2. The Tanya by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi — the foundational text of Chabad Chassidut, exploring the inner life of the soul with extraordinary depth and clarity. Available in English translation with commentary at <https://www.chabad.org/>

3. Likutei Mohoran by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov — teachings of depth on faith, the soul, and the inner journey. Available in English translation from the Breslov Research Institute at <https://breslov.org/>

4. The writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook — visionary teachings on the soul of Israel, the Land, and the redemption, with a unique and luminous perspective on unity and the in-gathering of the exiles. Available in English translation. Look especially for the translations of Yaacov David Shulman, an exceptionally gifted and prolific translator of the inner aspect of Torah in English https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B00544O0Z8?ccs_id=f68c599a-bf39-4447-bba6-b1c6dd5b3bf3

And if you would like to contact me, you can do so either through my website at <https://nehorapress.com> or directly yedidah@nehorapress.com



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