Appendix to Mussar Avikha

***Maamarei HaRe’iyah* I/ The Saint of Israel – Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory**

I think that it would be extremely difficult for someone to sketch the basic outlines of the spiritual character of a great saint long after his passing, even if he had the privilege of meeting him in person. All the more so in our case, since we only have secondhand recollections concerning the master of holiness, the outstanding giant of Torah scholarship, the paragon of piety, Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory, and it has been half a century since the holy ark was sequestered. It is a daunting task to write anything at all that might capture his greatness, holiness, and splendor.

Nonetheless, I feel an obligation to express some inkling of the radiant rays that penetrated my heart as I listened to the faithful recounting of the awesome spectacle which the previous generation saw, during the lifetime of this remarkably exemplary man who should serve as a role model for future generations, so that they may absorb the scent of his exalted soul and his mighty, holy, and pure spirit.

In the depths of his soul he was a hidden treasure and his sole wish was to serve God discreetly; he strove with all of his exceptional ethical strength to avoid fame and to conceal his greatness in Torah knowledge and the depth of his wisdom and especially his piety. Yet despite all of this, how could this beautiful, wonderful light fail to burst forth from its depths, causing all of the Jewish people⎯especially the leading Torah scholars and the spiritual elite⎯to know with certainty that a holy man of God who is the preeminent Torah scholar of his generation and its pride dwelt among them.

We occasionally find outstanding greatness, sometimes in terms of exceptional intellectual ability [*seikhel*] and sometimes in terms of exceptional will [*ratzon*]. As a rule, in the case of the giants who cause a sensation with their remarkable novel insights, it is their acuity which stands out. The supremely holy righteous people, who are exemplary in terms of their sublime holiness, tend to be outstanding in terms of their will, which has been sanctified and raised to a remarkable level. Remarkably, this light of the world attained both of these crowns. His brilliance astonished the Torah giants of his day. There was no limit to his acuity and erudition. For reasons of his own, he rarely recorded his incredible discoveries of the Torah’s secrets, and the tiny fraction of them that we have in writing consists mostly of notes on oral presentations that were recorded in accordance with the capabilities of those who transcribed them. Nonetheless, the memory remains of the admiration that filled the hearts of the great geniuses of his generation for the incredible brilliance of his analysis and in-depth study on those occasions when he lectured publicly. These lectures exhibited to a great degree all of the qualities of powerful genius: depth of thought, remarkable and precise erudition, tremendous acuity, and clarity. He was able to come up with his remarkable innovations with incredible swiftness, whenever needed, at lightning speed.

Yet the entirety of this tremendous treasure of intellectual abilities and incredible genius, which astounded everyone, was totally consecrated to the service of God. All of this stood ready for the purpose of serving the Lord, blessed be He, in purity and sanctity, perfectly and completely, in order to do the will of the Creator with all of his heart and soul. This saint of Israel’s excellence of will was always in perfect harmony with his intellectual prowess and was integrated with it in incredible unity; divine service itself⎯in all of its completeness, breadth, and depth⎯lit the pathways of his life. He thereby, “acted righteously and influenced the people to act righteously” in the fullest sense of that sublime description. This great man’s heart was always alert to love [*ahav**ah*] of the Lord, the Lord, blessed be He, and His reverence, and to the love of the Jewish people, to the very depths of his soul. The light of the Torah shone before him, and the treasure of reverence for God which The Holy One, blessed be He, stores in His treasury always revealed to him hidden treasures and a multitude of ideas and endless holy aspirations. In this great and holy soul, fear and love of the Lord, blessed be He, perfect and holy service of the Lord, the purity of his traits extending to the finest details, with remarkable sanctity and purity, were all integrated with the aspiration for social justice which was always alive and awake in its core. He would lecture and scold⎯in a state of awful trembling and awe penetrating to depths of the soul⎯concerning sins between man and his fellow. He would be sorely troubled about the fact that there are certain sins belonging to this category which people in general, and regrettably even those who are careful to a certain degree about sins between man and God, trample on, out of a lack of familiarity with the pure trait of reverence.

The idea which encompassed his entire life was inventing a comprehensive ‘bandage’ that would heal every type of illness that afflicts the soul. He wanted it to be effective for the simple masses on their level, and for the elite⎯the masters of Torah, reverence, and wisdom⎯on their level. He noted how profound the disease of distraction from self-examination is, how people are preoccupied⎯either with their daily physical concerns, or with their own intellectual fixations⎯and no one thinks of trying to find himself in the storm of life. As a result, pure reverence slips away from people’s hearts and, as a result, all of their traits and actions become corrupt, our generation degenerates, and the situation poses a danger to the standing of the Torah and true Judaism, God forbid.

True, the sages of ethical instruction [*musar*], early and late, had already dealt with this issue. In particular, the saintly Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, of blessed memory, clarified the matter cogently in his work, *Mesillat Yesharim*. It is for this very reason that this book was a great favorite of our master, the Torah giant, Rabbi Israel, of blessed memory, as is well known. Nonetheless, he reached the conclusion, by dint of his great spirit, that there was still more to augment since, given the state of our generation, there was a desperate need for the study of ethics and reverence. Having recognized the great significance of his contribution, he adopted this approach and dedicated his life to it, pouring all of his genius and the depths of his refined thoughts into this endeavor. His specific contribution related to the fact that while he realized that although there was a value to utilizing study as means of ethical improvement and self-examination, usually described as reckoning of the soul[*cheshbon hanefesh*], it was also necessary for ethical improvement to be acquired and to take hold in a person’s soul. In order for this to happen, a person must rehearse ethical lessons with great diligence and with intense enthusiasm and excitement. This requires establishing special times and places where this mode of study would be available to the public. As with all innovations, many opposed this one, as well. However, he stood firm and by means of his awesome genius and holy righteousness he carried out his fervent desire, his light did not fade from Israel and his great works continue to bear fruit.

The main thing that the current generation needs to know, especially now, is that which we pointed out above: that together with the deepening and fanning of the flames of the study of ethics, he undertook the task of publicly emphasizing social justice and the particular severity of commandments and obligations between man and his fellow, without which reverence and purity of one’s traits have no foundation. There are many authentic anecdotes, based on various sources, relating to all of his conduct which was replete with sanctity and purity that testify to the way in which the unique trait of deep introspection concerning reverence of the Lord leads to the intensification of social justice and its establishment in the world. A large and comprehensive book should be written about this, so that this righteous man be remembered for all eternity.

Since his holy and sublime aspiration to carry out this project was based on his brilliant, deep and insightful comprehension, it appears to us in the form of a comprehensive philosophy of divine ethics which also embodies a lyrical longing that penetrates to the depths of the human soul. As a result, different streams flow, over the course of time, from the unique approach of this light of Israel. All of these, who deal with and connect to some aspect of the advent of his great light, direct their attention to this focal point, to the source of a life of holiness and sublime ethics that began to flow like a river from the great and holy spirit of our great master, Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory. Even today, after half a century has passed since the holy ark was sequestered in the heavens, we tremble before the heavenly radiance drawn from his great spirit to illuminate the horizon of our lives, to raise up the torch of perfect reverence, to pave in this world the path of true justice, whose roots must always draw sustenance from the vital sap of pure divine reverence which is eternal.

May it be God’s will that the light of Israel be a fire, and his holiness a flame, speedily in our time, to illuminate all of the dark places and to warm all of the hearts that are chilled. And may the word of the Lord be fulfilled with respect to us: “Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

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**Encouragement for the establishment of a fixed course of study of the *aggadic* sections**

With God’s help, 7 Tammuz 5664

I hope to God that I will yet have the opportunity to discuss with his exalted genius at length, both orally and by means of written correspondence, the obligation to establish a fixed course of study⎯first superficial study and then in-depth contemplation and sharp analysis⎯of the area of ethical instruction in the Torah, which clarifies the details of the duties of the heart. For various reasons, this area has not been dealt with publicly for many years and has been sequestered in the hearts of the great scholars of Israel. Very little of this topic has been explained clearly in a way that this generation can comprehend, compared to the amount of elaboration and clarification that the details of the practical commandments commonly practiced have, thank God, received. This mission must be carried out by the truly great scholars among the people who undertake responsibility for the amplification of God’s honor. This is especially true of the great scholars of our holy land, as the Sages state, “The air of the land of Israel makes one wiser,” This is of particular relevance to our topic, as fear of the Lord is wisdom. Discussing and debating the laws of true fear of the Lord, always associated with joy and a pure heart, and the proper love for Him, will also lead to the clarification of a number of obscure halachic points and certainly in the area of *Aggadah*. This will raise the prominence of the Torah and of Israel in general, as there is no limit to what can be explained and pointed out in this great and broad field of study which is the basis of the Torah and the main foundation on which the entire world rests. This tremendous field of study is so deficient in terms of commentary that we have barely any literature discussing it in the manner befitting a Torah subject. Surely, in the realm of the minutia of the duties of the heart there are also novel concepts in the literature and innovative approaches in the later commentaries. In the practical realm of the Torah, many issues have, thank God, been clarified through critiques and determinations. But, to our discredit, in this other area of Torah, no one debates and analyzes the issues, virtually no one offers occasional criticism or even explains and develops the concepts.

This causes our generation to deteriorate in terms of its faith and true fear of the Lord, as one can only receive instruction and guidance from a person for whom the fundamentals of the subject that he is teaching in detail have been properly clarified. The fundamental difference between superficial understanding of the duties of the heart, which is rooted in fear of the Lord, blessed be He, and precise understanding, which results from extensive and intensive study, is the following: On a superficial level, reverence is associated with timidity, panic, excessive trembling, and sadness. However, from the perspective of understanding which is the product of study, reverence is actually connected to strength of the soul, courage of the spirit, inner joy and tranquility in the heart, as the text states, “And the Lord will provide you with that which is pleasurable, and He will grant you the desires of your heart.”

Sometimes, the writings of the sages of ethical instruction, and the great scholars of Israel in general⎯in their discussions of ethical instruction and guidance⎯require explanation and clarification. There are even occasions, albeit extremely rare ones, when critique is necessary. It is obviously impossible for one to explain and clarify, let alone critique, without first acquiring proficiency in the relevant areas and then studying the topic in depth. However, it is extremely easy for a person who truly wishes to devote time to it to and thereby succeed in terms of fear of the Lord. The people who are most capable of this are the Jewish scholars living in the holy land, if only they also dedicate a set time to study this primary aspect of the Torah. In terms of this point, what I seek differs from what the disciples of Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory, seek. For they seek the emotional element which sometimes results from ethical instruction. True, this can be positive, but only on the level of prayer which relates to transient existence and outpouring of the soul. The consequence of their focus on the intensification of the emotions is that they therefore fail to expand their knowledge to any significant degree in terms of erudition and insightful analysis attained through diligent study. Therefore, they remain on the lowly level of fear of punishment and are not quick to rise to the level of being in awe [*yirat haromemut*] of the Lord and loving Him, blessed be He, and His Torah, with inner mental pleasantness. As a result, their guidance often involves timidity, sadness, and the like, which suppress the body and soul. It is for this reason that they encounter opposition and enmity from many sides. Sometimes this also lessens the degree of diligence and swiftness of thought in deliberating and analyzing halachic issues, because undermining happiness severely interferes with all positive traits. Therefore, I humbly acknowledge that this approach is inadequate on its own. Rather, it must serve merely as a supplement to the main path, namely the study of this forsaken field, as the great Torah scholars have admonished throughout the generations. Indeed, as long as arrogance was not so prevalent, the flaw was not so glaring. So too, as long as there was a strong connection between master and disciples, everything was under the influence of the master, as we know, for example, from the case of the disciples of the Vilna Gaon who possessed all positive traits. But after the dispersion and the disintegration of centralization and greatness, the forces dwindled – until the obligation to pay attention to the *aggadic* sections of the Torah, the *musar* literature being their commentaries and devisors, was forgotten. This, in spite of the fact that the Sages state, “If you wish to know He Who spoke and the world came into being, study the words of the *Aggadah*, for you will, thereby, come to recognize He Who spoke and the world came into being, and to cleave to His ways.”

It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to be zealous for this crucial field which is the foundation of the honor of the Lord, blessed be He, in this world, and to try and see to it that a portion of a person’s time is devoted to the study of *Aggadah* and ethical instruction and later to other aspects of the duties of the heart, each person according to his status and level. – And if, in the course of time, this takes hold in the Yeshivot of our holy city and our holy land in general, then we can rest assured that there will be many wise and pure-hearted people who will assist us in sanctifying His name, blessed be He, in this world and to proudly and joyfully stand up to all of the corruptors and destroyers who surround us like mounds of earth surrounding a pit. Eventually, there will be a proliferation of fine new works, written intelligently in the spirit of clear fear of the Lord, awe and pure love which illuminates the eyes and the heart. Then all the adversaries of our Torah will be shamed, and the enemies of the Lord will retreat. The Lord will shine His countenance upon us, to raise us up and elevate us, as the verse states, ““Because he is devoted to Me I will deliver him; I will elevate him, for he knows My name.” There is no need, indeed no license, in my humble opinion, for us to be so lowly in our own eyes that we say that we are not worthy of this. Can one argue that he is unworthy of fulfilling the Torah’s commandments? This is like the reproach that the great early commentaries had to address to those who were negligent in wearing phylacteries, claiming that they were unworthy, as explained by the author of the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, of blessed memory, and the author of the *Sefer HaChinuch* after him.

Please forgive me, my master, for wearying you with my tiresome words, but when I discuss this topic, I am filled with life-giving dew and a powerful desire to act and achieve, with God’s help, in terms of this great matter which is attainable for us, since it is within our mouths and hearts to accomplish it. But the primary key is for us to resolve that joy should always nest in our hearts, if only because of our good intentions. Thank God that we have at least reached the point of wanting to fulfill His will, and to spread His name in His world. This was the trait of the Patriarchs of the world, about whom we are always obligated to say, “When will our actions overtake their actions.” Even the tiny amount that results from these attempts is more precious than any treasure, and nothing can equal its worth.

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**Responsa *Da’at Kohen / hilkhot basar-bechalav veta’arovet/* 51**

I was gladdened to hear from the esteemed Rabbi, the beloved of my soul, that he began learning some words of ethical instruction and fear of the Lord, which is the true wisdom, from the sacred writings, with his students. How fortunate his lot is! This is especially crucial in our time and place, since the transient desires for the temporal nonsense, jealousy, lust and illusory honor are in such an uproar. How can we awaken the hearts of our youth so that they open their eyes and see the majesty and magnificence, brilliance and splendor, of the Torah, if not through the study of true reverence based on the works of the great Torah scholars of Israel, who delved into and developed the study of pure reverence, and elevated its light by means of the sanctity of the divine light inherent in the souls of every Jew, revealing it to everyone, in all of its myriad lights which shine with the precious light of life.

I am currently unable to write to the esteemed Rabbi in an organized fashion and expound ideas befitting his dear students. It is especially difficult for me to formulate sublime concepts concisely in a way that is appropriate for students whose natures and intellectual capabilities I am unfamiliar with. Nonetheless, it seems that, to begin with, one should explain the following fundamental principle to all of the students: achieving success in one’s Torah studies, being able to master and comprehend, to ultimately reach a significant and worthy level in terms of the crown of Torah, is entirely commensurate with one’s degree of fear of the Lord and the depth of the sanctity of pure faith rooted in his soul. This is due to the fact that broadening and deepening one’s intellect, honing and bifurcating it⎯which is the major foundation of acuity and erudition⎯is contingent on the extent of his motivation to know the topics with which he is occupied. Since he is involved in the study of Torah which is the word of the living God, the quality of his inner recognition of the preciousness of being occupied with Torah is dependent on the core of holiness of true fear of the Lord that resides in the inner recesses of his heart. The more the blessing of reverence intensifies in his heart in sanctity and purity, the more the words of the Torah, which are the luminance of countenance of the living King, will become precious and exalted in His eyes. His affection for them will cause the inner desire of his soul to become attached to them. By its nature, his inner desire will awaken all the forces of the soul and infuse them with alacrity emanating from vitality, joy, and contentment, with great passion and pleasantness of ultimate, sublime spiritual pleasure. Once the forces of the soul are aroused⎯through the expansion of the holy trait of reverence⎯to the love of Torah and affection for all of its words, the awareness of the sense of its holy pleasantness grows from day to day. As a result, his mind’s faculty of memory will powerfully exert itself, due to the profusion of vitality which the holy desire of the Torah arouses in the soul of a person who studies it with true reverence and due to the great respect and exalted value which he ascribes to the words of the Torah. This appreciation increases daily in his heart, through his constant involvement with the holy study of pure reverence and its offshoots. Similarly, his intellectual diligence and mental brilliance intensifies, and his true acuity and proper understanding increases. It follows that the best advice for fostering our students’ success in their learning, so that their learning prospers and endures and that they receive satisfaction and pleasure from their study, is to broaden their hearts daily in the study of pure reverence and all of its fields. All of the wisdom of our souls and training of our traits are merely offshoots of the root, namely the exalted trait of fear of the Lord, which leads to flawless love for the Lord and love of the Torah and its commandments and love of Israel.

By presenting such concepts to the students, by pointing out that not only the eternal success, attaining everlasting life, is dependent on the degree to which reverence takes root in their pure hearts, but even their very success in Torah study⎯whether in terms of increasing their diligence or in experiencing the pleasantness, pleasure, and joy from the words of the Torah, from the Talmud, from reasoning, from learning, and reviewing, whether in terms of their very intellectual success, meaning a state in which the light of their intellect shines and glows and their learning endures, fluent in their mouths and clearly and lucidly situated on their lips⎯is contingent on the quantity of reverence which they acquire. Knowing that the trait of reverence spreads through a person’s heart in proportion to the degree to which he focuses on it, the more they realize and know this great truth, the more they will value the times that are allocated for the esteemed Rabbi to spend with his students in the study of reverence, based on authors and literature and on his pure, holy ideas, with which he has been blessed by the Lord. And as they delve into the matter and realize and know that the essence of reverence takes root in the depths of one’s heart in accordance with the quality of good traits implanted in it, they will immediately be aroused to acquire good and proper traits and try to love each other and be beloved to each other, to respect each other and to desire that the other receive respect and benefit. Most of all, they will come to realize and know that the eternal success which is more valuable and important than any other success that a person can achieve is the success of the sanctity of the Torah and the blessing of reverence, which is the true foundation of knowledge, as the verse states, “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” They will then became very attached with a bond of love to their Rabbis and teachers, who guide them in the paths of the Torah, who open locked gates for them, so that they may see⎯as they go from chamber to chamber among the chambers of the Torah⎯the great treasures of the magnificent light, splendid in sanctity, which are hidden and buried there. These are opened every day for those who study the Torah and fear the Lord and contemplate His name. And these precious traits, which by their nature adorn all those who cling to them with a crown of grace and dignity, are precisely what leads to true reverence and to the great blessing from the treasury of life which contains the true source of the Torah and true wisdom. With this guidance, we have full faith that with the assistance of the Lord, blessed be He, the Lord’s blessing and His holy light will rest on the esteemed Rabbi and his students who drink his words thirstily, and that he will succeed at increasing the study of Torah and glorifying it, as is the desire of his pure heart and the desire of his eternal friend who seeks the welfare of His esteemed Torah knowledge with all of his heart and soul and looks forward to the Lord’s redemption of His nation and His land.

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You gladdened me with your pleasant and precious words, more power to you!

I very much wanted to write to you at length concerning several items, especially about matters relating to conduct. However, you are aware of my labors and burdens along with my lack of swiftness due to my health. May the Lord, blessed be He, grant us strength and vigor for Torah and divine service [*‘avodah*].

I am very pleased to see from your letter that you have already agreed to establish yourself at this time in the holy city of Jerusalem, may it be built up and established. Be strong and courageous. Exert yourself, my dear son, especially in terms of good traits and fear of the Lord, blessed be He, and love for Him, diligence in Torah study⎯ to study and comprehend and to review well, so that the words of the Torah are fluent and precise in your mouth⎯and to perfect yourself as much as possible by acquiring all kinds of perfection, virtues, and knowledge, which endow a person with splendor. Do not view even the smallest virtue as being too minor to warrant making the effort to acquire it, nor should you view the smallest defect in your manner, traits or conduct as being too minor to merit correcting and improving. You should always be full of motivation, tend more towards joy and contentment, and associate with God-fearing people and great Torah scholars, possessing pure and faultless minds. You can also learn from their speech and conduct on occasion, with God’s help, if you focus your worthy thoughts and intellect on it…

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