BS’’D Shevat 5779, 31.1.19

To

Koren Publishers, Maggid Books

Book Proposal:

**The Flames of a Holy Fire: Chapters in the Teachings of the Rebbe of Piaseczno**

Author: Ron Wacks

Current publisher of Hebrew edition: Tevunot Press, Herzog College, Alon Shvut, Israel

Number of pages in the Hebrew edition, including Appendices and Indices: 360 pages.

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**Description of the Book**

*The Flames of a Holy Fire* focuses on the teachings of R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro, better known as “the Piaseczner Rebbe.” He is among the most unique figures of twentieth century Eastern European Chassidism. A revered rebbe, a scholar and Kabbalist, a distinguished leader who attended to the communal needs as well as those of individuals. A compassionate educator, he possessed a sensitive and poetic soul and piercing insight into the soul of man. The Rebbe led his chassidim until his final days in the time of the Holocaust, when he was taken from the Warsaw Ghetto to his death. Some of his writings, hidden in the ground of the ghetto, were discovered after the Holocaust and published.

In his books (*Hovat haTalmidim*, *Hakhsharat haAvreichim*, *Esh Kodesh*, *Derekh haMelekh*, and *Bnei Machshavah Tovah*) he sought to revive the inner world of Chassidism and to provide the tools for spiritual service to those who wished to grow in their service of God.

My book, *The Flames of a Holy Fire*, tries to provide access to the rich world of the Piaseczner Rebbe and to illuminate from different angles his personal figure and his Chassidic teachings.

The book also contains introductions to several Chassidic concepts and so can be seen as a sort of “Introduction to Chassidism.”

The book puts particular focus on his teachings and the role of imagination in service of God, in cultivating both ecstasy and calm and in the inner service of the heart, as well as the role of the *chavura* and the possibility of the revival of prophecy in our age.

**Intended Audience**

This book was written with the general public in mind. Whoever is interested in Chassidism is likely to take interest in the book, whether members of academia, students of religious studies, or lay readers, religious and non-religious alike.

Certain topics related to New Age studies, such as “Chassidic meditation,” are also addressed, and the book has sold among populations interested in spirituality as a whole.

**Distinctiveness of the Book and the Justification for an English Edition**

Recent years have seen a surge in interest in Chassidism in general and in the figure and teachings of the Piaseczner Rebbe in particular, both in Israel and abroad.

Various studies have been published on the Rebbe and his teachings since the publication of his writings, but the proposed book is distinguished by a number of features, among them:

1. Most of the articles written about him deal with his teachings from the time of the Holocaust. This book is intended to address the breadth of his Chassidic teachings, most of which were written before the Holocaust. To the best of my knowledge, there is currently **no such book** on the market.

2. The articles written about him have been academic in nature and do not appeal to the general public.

3. While the book’s style is at an academic level (including references to scholarly studies), it is not written in a “heavy” academic style. On the contrary, it appeals to a broad audience interested in Chassidism. One of the readers told the author, “The book was clearly written by a precise and academically trained person who is also a lover of Chassidism, one who even possesses a Chassidic soul.”

4. In order to illustrate the unique nature of this book, it is worth pointing out that on the one hand it is required reading in an academic course in the Jewish Thought Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and cited in various academic studies, while on the other hand it is distributed for free to students, groups travelling to Poland, and to graduates of various educational programs. It is also sold among the Haredi population in Meah Shearim, and one Chassidic rebbe of that community even contacted the author in order to continue the conversation after having read the book.

5. The book provides substantial knowledge about the teachings of the Piaseczner Rebbe and certain aspects of Chassidic teaching and enables the reader to “use” that knowledge in serving God.

6. It is important to note that the Hebrew edition has been a “best seller” (according to one of the managers at Tevunot Press) and has been reprinted a number of times. The Hebrew edition is currently slated for another press run.

7. Before being submitted for translation, the book underwent a process of editing and updating.

8. There is a large population in Israel and abroad that does not read Hebrew that would take great interest in the book’s contents.

**About the Author**

Dr. Ron Wacks learned for eight years in various yeshivot: Mercaz haRav, Yeshivat HaGolan, Yeshivat Shvut Yisrael in Efrat, and Beit haMidrash “Beit Morasha.” He sees himself as a student of Rabbi Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (‘Rav Shagar’) and R. Yehoshua Weitzman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Maalot.

Dr. Wacks received his BA and MA in General Philosophy and Jewish Thought from Hebrew University, where he also earned his PhD in Jewish Thought, writing his doctoral dissertation under Prof. Moshe Idel, a scholar of Kabbalah and Chassidism.

Dr. Wacks has already published a book by the name of *BeSod haYichud* through Cherub Press in Los Angeles (the publishing house of the academic journal *Kabbalah*).

He has published studies of Chassidism, Kabbalah, and Jewish educational philosophy.

He teaches Jewish thought and education at Herzog College, where he holds the post of Senior Lecturer in addition to fulfilling other academic roles.

He also studied at Touro College and Lander Institute as part of his graduate studies.

He has been active in the field of education and has taught Talmud, Tanakh, and Jewish Thought.