

Biography of the Author



Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the Alter Rebbe (the elder Rebbe), founder of the Chabad movement, was born to his father Rabbi Baruch and his mother Rivkah on 19 Elul, 5505, September 15, 1745. He possessed a brilliant mind, extraordinary skills, and was widely recognized as a prodigy. By thirteen years of age he was given the title of "Rav Tana Upolig" At the age of 18, Schneur Zalman was already fluent in the entire Talmud, Kabblah, Midrash, early commentators, and Halachic codifiers. He was also proficient in astronomy, mathematics, and many of the sciences.

In 1760 he married Rebbetzin Sterna Segal.

In 1764, at the age of twenty, he was faced with a choice to study in Vilnius, home to the famed Gaon of Vilna, or in Mezrich, the center of the Chassidic movement. He chose Mezrich. Although initially unimpressed, Rabbi Schnuer Zalman eventually stayed on and became an ardent follow-

er of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Great Maggid, successor of the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of Chassidism. After completing eighteen months of intensive study, he returned home to Vitebsk, travelling back to Mezrich frequently.

1767 Rabbi Schnuer Zalman becomes a Maggid (spiritual teacher) in his hometown Liozna, where he would remain for thirty years.

1770 He is assigned the enormous and awesome task of writing a Shulchan Aruch, a Code of Jewish Law, an undertaking that gained him even greater admiration and reverence. This work is a timeless classic.

1772 He begins developing the Chabad Philosophy.

19 Kislev 1772 his Rebbe the Maggid passes away and Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok (author of Maor Einayim) assumes the mantle of leadership, until his move to Israel. Following Rabbi Menachem Mendel's move the Chassidim appoint Rabbi Schneur Zalman as Rebbe, although he would not officially accept that position until Reb Menachem Mendel passed away in 1788.

1773-78 Rabbi Schnuer Zalman establishes a school of three divisions for elite students.

1792 The manuscripts of the Tanya begin circulating, eventually prompting the author to send it to print.

1796 The first edition of Tanya is printed in the city of Slavita.

1798 The opposition of the Misnagdim (the opponents to Chassidim) reaches a peak; they inform on Rabbi Schnuer Zalman and he is imprisoned by the Czar on charges of treason.

19 Kislev 1798 Following a frightening ordeal and an intense trial, the Rebbe is liberated.

1800 The Alter Rebbe is arrested again by the Czar and liberated ten and a half months later. He relocates from Liozne to Liadi.

1812 Napoleon invades Russia, and the Alter Rebbe assists Russia in its war effort against France.

12 Teves 1812 The Alter Rebbe arrives in Pena, Kursk Providence.

23 Teves 1812 The Alter Rebbe pens a profound letter of Chassidic thought.

24 Teves 1812 The Alter Rebbe returns his soul to its maker and is interred in Haditch.

The Tanya

The title page written by the Alter Rebbe reads as follows:

ספר

לקוטי אמרים

חלק ראשון

הנקרא בשם

ספר של בינונים

מלוקט מפי ספרים ומפי סופרים קדושי עליון נ"ע
מיוסד על פסוק כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפך ובלבבך לעשותו
לבאר היטב איך הוא קרוב מאד בדרך ארוכה וקצרה בעזה"

SEFER

LIKUTEI AMARIM ("A Compilation of Teachings")

PART ONE

ENTITLED

SEFER SHEL BEINONIM ("The Book of the Intermediates")

Compiled from sacred books and from teachers of heavenly saintliness, whose souls are in Eden; based upon the verse, "For this thing is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it"; explaining clearly how it is exceedingly near, in both a lengthy and a short way, with the aid of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30

11. For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away.

יא. כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום
לא נפלאה הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא:

12. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?"

יב. לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו
השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה:

13. Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?"

יג. ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו
אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה
ונעשנה:

14. Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it.

יד. כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיה ובלבבך
לעשתו:

Talmud—Eruvin, 53b

אמר רבי יהושע בן חנניה... פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך וראיתי תינוק יושב על פרשת דרכים ואמרתי לו באיזה דרך נלך לעיר אמר לי זו קצרה וארוכה וזו ארוכה וקצרה והלכתי בקצרה וארוכה כיון שהגעתי לעיר מצאתי שמקיפין אותה גנות ופרדיסין חזרתי לאחורי אמרתי לו בני הלא אמרת לי קצרה אמר לי ולא אמרתי לך ארוכה נשקתיו על ראשו ואמרתי לו אשריכם ישראל שכולכם חכמים גדולים אתם מגדולכם ועד קטנכם:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya related: Once, I was travelling and saw a child sitting at a fork in the road. I asked him which route shall I take to the city. And the child replied 'this is short long, this one is long short'. I took the short long way and as I neared the city entrance it was obstructed with gardens and orchards. I retraced my steps and said to the lad, did you not tell me this is the short way? To which the lad replied 'did I not say it was long'. I kissed him on his head and said blessed are you the Jewish people, for you all are smart; from the great ones to the young ones.

What is Kabbalah?

What does Chabad mean?

What are the characteristics of the Beinuni?

Why don't most self help books help?

What is the meaning of the long short way?

How does the Tanya differ from other books on behavior and personality development?