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## THE SOUL FACTOR

“The greatest advantage of the Chassidic system over other psychological disciplines is that it perceives and depicts a human’s psychological existence in the context of his or her soul. Whereas scientific systems begin their analysis with the brain, Chassidus’ insight into human identity begins with the human’s unique soul. In fact, Chassidus identifies no less than five different levels within a person’s Divine soul.

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“The difference as to whether we commence our assessment of a human’s identity with the brain or with the soul is huge. It hardly can be overstated. It may be compared to the examination of a person’s internal organs by prodding and probing in the dark with one’s hands, versus the benefit of a CAT scan or MRI.

“To perceive a person’s essence as beginning with the brain is to perceive only half the person and the smaller half at that. For, if an individual comprises body and soul, the soul is certainly the more significant part. Hence, to construct a model of the human entity without the soul is stabbing in the dark.

“Most important, however, are the contrasting places to which these divergent approaches lead. The secular psychological system, inevitably, leads to selfishness. For, the more we follow the trail of that system back, the closer we get to our physical core. Logic dictates that the more attuned we are with our physical core, the more corporeal we become.

“In other words, if our own intellect and feelings represent the highest essence of our existence —*cogito ergo sum*—then, it only makes sense to do everything to enhance and vindicate that essence. So, we end up serving ourselves, which is the definition of selfishness.

“This path has but one eventual outcome: Emptiness and disillusionment. As our lives begin to appear feeble and fleeting, we find ourselves struggling for deeper definition and purpose: What is life’s true meaning and where does the individual—a tiny speck in time and space—fit into the scheme of things?

“In order to withstand the dread that our lives will soon be covered by eons of time, blotting out the fact that we ever existed at all, we frantically seek lasting impact and definition. But, in lack of essential purpose, where do we turn? Our desperate search for self-definition and realization is often satisfied by trivial attention-seeking and vain popularity.

“Thanks to the esoteric dimension of *Torah*, as articulated through Chassidus, we have the ability to know our essential human self in the context of our soul. Cognizance of our Divine soul, which is a sliver of the Sublime existence, leaves us humbled. For ‘Who am I and what am I, in face of the all-powerful and all-pervading core on whom I depend for every breath?’ The obvious conclusion of this outlook is a state of selflessness and awe.

“This state inevitably leads to true self-contentment. It spawns new channels for joy and serenity. Joy that stems from being part of something infinitely greater than one’s feeble self; from being part of the ultimate and eternal truth.

“Only through an overriding, all-encompassing relationship with a Higher Eternal Existence, can a person achieve the blessing of inner satisfaction and fulfillment in this world, and secure the highest memorialization for the afterworld. In the words of R’ Schneur Zalman:<sup>21</sup> ‘When one’s life centers on one’s relationship with the Almighty, the person will soar far above all obstacles.’ Meaning that if a person works

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<sup>21</sup> *Tanya*, Chapter 33.

WHAT CHABAD REALLY BELIEVES

at achieving mindfulness of the Divine presence, he or she will gain deep contentment.”