



## **When Jews Made Fellow Jews ‘Other’: Hasidism and its Opponents**

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## 1. Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov*1:169, on *D'veikut*

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*Also known as the Besht; founder of Hasidism (Poland, c. 1700–1760). Keter Shem Tov is a collection of his interpretations of the Torah published in 1794.*

It is a great thing to keep in mind always that you are with the Creator, and that He surrounds you on all sides, as it is written, "Happy is the man who, when he thinks not of God, [this is considered] to him as a sin" (Psalm 32:2). This means that the instant you stop thinking of your attachment (*deveikut*) to God, you incur a sin. You should be so attached (*davuk*) to God that you won't need to reconsider from time to time that you are with Him....You should fulfill the verse "I have set the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:8), as stated in Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, section 1.

מַעֲלָה גְדוֹלָה כְּשֶׁאָדָם מְחַשֵּׁב תָּמִיד שֶׁהוּא  
אֶצֶל הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרֵךְ, וְהוּא מְקִיף אוֹתוֹ  
מִכָּל צַדְדָיו, כְּמוֹ שְׁכֵתוֹב, אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם לֹא  
יִחְשֵׁב ה' [לוֹ עוֹן] (תהילים לב, ב). פִּי'  
כְּשֶׁרִגַע אֵינוֹ מְחַשֵּׁב בְּדַבְּרֵיקוֹת ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ,  
לוֹ עוֹן. וְיִהְיֶה דְבוּק כָּל כֶּף שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה צָרִיךְ  
לִישֵׁב אֶת עַצְמוֹ בְּכָל פַּעַם שֶׁהוּא אֶצֶל  
יִתְבָּרֵךְ... וְיִקְיִים שׁוֹיֵתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָּמִיד  
(תהילים טז, ח), כְּמוֹ שְׁכֵתוֹב בְּשׁוּלְחַן  
עֵרוֹךְ אוֹרֵךְ חַיִּים סִימָן א'.

## 2. Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov*1:96, on *Torah Lishmah*

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The main point of studying Torah is to attach (*yidbak*) oneself to the inner spiritual light of the Infinite One, which is contained in the letters of the Torah. That is what is called "study for its own sake." Regarding this Rabbi Meir taught: "Whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits many things, and the Torah's secrets are revealed to that person" (Pirkei Avot 6:1). This means that such a person will know the future and all that will happen to him from within the Torah.

... שְׁעִיקָר עֶסֶק תּוֹרָה הוּא שִׁדְבַק אֶת  
עַצְמוֹ אֶל פְּנִימִיּוֹת רוּחָנִיּוֹת אוֹר א"ס  
שְׁבִתוֹךְ אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁהוּא נִקְרָא  
לִימוּד לְשֵׁמָה. שְׁבִיזָה אָמַר ר' מֵאִיר:  
כָּל הַעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה לְשֵׁמָה זוֹכֵה  
לְדַבְּרִים הַרְבֵּה, וּמְגַלִּין לוֹ רְזִי תּוֹרָה,  
ר"ל שִׁידַע עֲתִידוֹת וְכָל מְאוֹרְעוֹתָיו  
מִתּוֹךְ הַתּוֹרָה...

## 3. Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov*1:229, on *Simhah*

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Prayer that is said with great joy is certainly more worthy and desirable to God than prayer said with sadness and weeping. A parable for this: When a pauper asks, requests, and pleads before a human king, with great weeping, the king only gives him a small amount. But when a nobleman arranges for a king a great celebration, and in midst of his praises also makes his request, the king gives him a large gift, as is fitting for a nobleman.

...הַתְּפִילָה כְּשֶׁהִיא בְּשִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה, בְּוֹדָאֵי יוֹתֵר  
חָשׁוּב וּמְקוּבָּל לְפָנָיו יוֹתֵר מִתְּפִילָה בְּעֶצְבוֹת  
וּבְכִיָּה. מִשָּׁל עַל זֶה: כְּשֶׁעָנִי שׁוֹאֵל וּמְבַקֵּשׁ  
וּמִתְחַנֵּן לְפָנָיו מֶלֶךְ בְּשֶׁר וְדָם בְּבִכְיָה גְדוֹלָה, אֵף  
עַל פִּי כֵן אֵינוֹ נוֹתֵן לוֹ אֶלָּא דָּבָר מוֹעֵט. אֲבָל  
כְּשֶׁהֵשֵׁר מְסַדֵּר לְפָנָיו מֶלֶךְ שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה, וּמִתּוֹךְ  
הַשְּׂבַח מְבַקֵּשׁ גַּם בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ, אֵז נוֹתֵן הַמֶּלֶךְ מִתְּנָה  
מְרוּבָּה, כְּמוֹ שְׁנוֹתְנִים לְשָׂרָרוֹת.

#### 4. *Shivhei HaBesht*, compiled by Dov Ber of Linits, 1815<sup>1</sup>

*The classic compilation of stories and legends about the Ba'al Shem Tov, told by various rabbis, preachers, ritual slaughterers and teachers. Modern scholars struggle to separate out the historical and fantastic/miraculous strands of the stories.*

Once they had to say Hallel, since it was either the first day of the Hebrew month or one of the intermediate days of Passover. Rabbi Abraham was reciting Shaharit before the ark, and the Besht was praying in his usual place...During the voiced eighteen benedictions [i.e., the repetition of the Amidah], the Besht trembled greatly as he always did while praying. Everyone who looked at the Besht while he was praying noticed this trembling... Rabbi Wolf Kotses, the Hasid, looked at his face. He saw that it was burning like a torch. The Besht's eyes were bulging ... I already knew from his best disciples that he used to utter a great cry and pray louder than anyone else.

פֶּעַם אַחַת הָיוּ צָרִיכִים לֵאמֹר הַלֵּל, שֶׁהָיָה  
רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ אוֹ חוֹל הַמוֹעֵד שֶׁל פֶּסַח, וְהָיָה  
רַבִּי אַבְרָהָם הַנ"ל מִתְפַּלֵּל תְּפִילַת שַׁחְרִית  
לִפְנֵי הַתִּיבָה וְהִבְעֵל שֵׁם טוֹב הַתְּפַלֵּל  
בְּמִקוּמוֹ....וּבְשִׁמּוֹנָה עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁל קוֹל רָם  
נִתְרַעַד הִבְעֵל שֵׁם טוֹב רַעְדָה גְדוֹלָה, וְהָיָה  
רוֹעֵד וְהוֹלֵךְ כְּדָרְכוֹ לְרַעוּד בְּתִפְלִיתוֹ תְּמִיד,  
וּמִי שֶׁרָאָה אוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁעַת הַתְּפִילָה רָאָה  
הַרְעִידָה שְׁלוֹ....וּבָא הַחֲסִיד רַבִּי וּוּלף קִיצְעֵס  
וְהִצִּיץ בְּפָנָיו, וְהִנֵּה בּוֹעֲרוֹת כְּלִפְיָדִים, וְעֵינָיו  
בוֹלְטוּ...כִּי כֵן שִׁמְעֵתִי כְּמָה פְּעָמִים מִבְּחִירִיו,  
כִּי הָיָה מְנַשָּׂא רֹאשׁ כּוֹלֵם וְהָיָה מִתְפַּלֵּל  
בְּזַעֲקָה גְדוֹלָה.

#### 5. *Ban of the Hasidic Movement in Vilna, 1772*<sup>2</sup>

To our beloved brethren, the chosen of God, who follow the ways of their ancestors and observe the way of the Lord. You have surely heard that a new group has arisen, not imagined by our ancestors, who call themselves Hasidim. In every city they form an association of those who leave the [established] synagogues and houses of study, separating themselves from the community [see Avot 2:4]. "And the earth was split open by their uproar" (I Kings 1:40), the uproar of their house of prayer. Their practices are different, they have changed the liturgy coined by our sages....They have abandoned Torah study and spend all their days in frivolous speech and debauchery.... They dishonor the famous and extraordinary Torah scholars of our generation....All their days are like holidays, and [they believe] they are rewarded for refraining from Torah study, as is well known...

אַהוּבֵינוּ אַחֵינוּ בְּחִירֵי ה', אֲשֶׁר הוֹלְכִים  
בְּדַרְכֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם לְשִׁמּוֹר דְּרָךְ ה'. הֲלֹא  
שִׁמְעֵתֶם אִם לֹא יִדְעֵתֶם, כִּי חֲדָשִׁים  
מִקְרֹב בָּאוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא שִׁעְרוּם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,  
וּמְכַנְיִם שְׁמֵם חֲסִידִים. וּבְכָל עִיר וְעִיר  
עוֹשִׂים אֲגוּדוֹת עִיזוּב בְּתֵי כְּנִסְיוֹת וּבְתֵי  
מִדְרָשׁוֹת, רַק פּוֹרְשִׁים עֲצָמָם מִן הַצִּיבוּר.  
וְתַבְּקַע הָאָרֶץ לְקוֹלָם (מַלְכִים א, א, מ),  
קוֹל בַּיִת תְּפִילָתָם. וְדַתֵּיהֶם שׁוֹנִים, בְּשָׁנוֹת  
אֶת טַעְמָם מְטַבֵּעַ שֶׁטַּבְּעוּ חֲכָמִים....בְּטָלוּ  
תַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה וּמְבַלִּים כָּל יְמֵיהֶם בְּדַבְּרֵי  
הִיתוּל וְהִלְלוֹת....  
מְבַזִּים תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מִפּוֹרְסָמִין יְחִידֵי  
הַדוֹר...וְכָל יְמֵיהֶם כְּחִגִּים וּמוֹעֲדִים,

<sup>1</sup> In *Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov*, ed. and trans. Dan Ben Amos and Jerome M. Mintz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 50–51.

<sup>2</sup> In Mordechai Vilensky, *Hasidim u-Mitnagdim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 62–63.

Now please listen, brothers; take to heart and see the consequences of this sect...Aren't the earlier troubles we had from such sects enough? <sup>3</sup> Now a new one has sprung forth, "a stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood" (Deut. 29:17)....Whoever hears and sees these words should gird his loins like a man, and turn their evil intention against them, to fight them off and pursue them, as much as Jews have the ability. And from there we must disperse them so that they not gather in a minyan.

וּמְקַבְּלִים שְׂכָר עַל הַפְּרִישָׁה מִן הַתּוֹרָה,  
כְּאֲשֶׁר יְדוּעַ וּמְפּוֹרָסִים....  
וְעַתָּה שְׂמְעוּ נָא אֲחֵינוּ שִׁימוּ עַל לְבַבְכֶם  
וּרְאוּ אֶת הַנּוֹלֵד מִכֶּת זֶה...וְלֹא דֵי מִצְרוֹת  
הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִכֶּתוֹת כִּיּוֹצֵא בָהֶם,  
וּבְעוֹנוֹתֵינוּ יֵצְאוּ מָה שְׂיִצְאוּ, אִף גַּם עִתָּה  
חֲדָשָׁה תִצְמַח, שׁוֹרֵשׁ פּוֹרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה....  
וְכָל הַשּׁוֹמֵעַ וְרוֹאֶה אֶת דְּבָרִים יֶאֱזוֹר כְּנֶגֶד  
חֲלָצֵיו לְהִשְׁיב מִחֲשַׁבְתָּם הָרָעָה עַל רֵאשִׁים,  
לְהוֹדֵפִים וּלְרוֹדְפִים עַד מְקוֹם שִׂיד יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מִגַּעַת, וּמִשִּׁם יִפְיִצוּם לְמַעַן לֹא יִתְחַבְּרוּ  
בְּמִנְיָן.

## 6. The First Persecution of Hasidim in Vilna, 1772 <sup>4</sup>

And when letters came from Shklov to us, the holy community of Vilna, the Gaon [Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797)] declared: "The holy community of Shklov is right. This clan, they are heretics. They should be thrown into a pit and not lifted out of it" [Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 26b].

And the main organizer of this sect [in Vilna] was one named Isser, who is like his name, <sup>5</sup> and the second was one named Hayyim, who was the preacher of the community....This Hayyim said of the Vilna Gaon: "He is false, his Torah is false and his faith is false.... [In response,] there was a ruling to expel and disperse the minyan of the Karliner Hasidim...Hayyim was fired from his position as preacher. He was excommunicated for a thirty-day term. And Hayyim left the city.... Afterwards, the communal elders convened, with two sets of rabbinic judges and the communal rabbi. They ruled to burn their writings, near the manacles [in the great synagogue] before the beginning of Kabbalat Shabbat services. And [they ruled] that Isser, their main organizer, should go up to the top step [in front of the ark in the great synagogue], before *Shokhein Ad* [the beginning of the Shabbat Shaharit service], and no minyan will gather in any other synagogue except for the great synagogue [on that Shabbat]. There, he will recite the confession

וּכְשֶׁבָאוּ הַכֹּתְבִים מִשְׁקֵלָאב כָּאֵן  
לְקַהֵל קְדוֹשׁ וְוִילְנָא, אֲזִי אָמַר הַגָּאוֹן  
הַנִּי"ל: "הַדִּין עִם ק"ק שְׁקֵלָאב,  
בְּאֲשֶׁר שֶׁהַמְשַׁפְּחָה הַנִּי"ל הִמָּה  
אֲפִיקוֹרְסִין, וּמִוִּרְדִין וְלֹא מֵעֲלִין  
[עַבּוּדָה זְרָה כּו ע"ב]. וּבְתוֹךְ הַכֶּת  
הַנִּי"ל הָיָה רֹאשׁ הַמְּאֻסָּף הָרֵאשׁוֹן מו'  
אִיסוֹר בְּקוֹרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ, וְהַשְּׁנִי הָרֵב מו'  
חַיִּים, מִגִּיד דְּכָאן....וְהַשְּׁיב מו' חַיִּים  
עַל הַגָּאוֹן הַנִּי"ל שֶׁהוּא שֶׁקֶר וְתוֹרְתוֹ  
שֶׁקֶר וְאִמּוֹנְתוֹ שֶׁקֶר....וְהָיָה פֶּסֶק  
תִּיכָף לְגַרֵשׁ וּלְפַזֵּר אֶת הַמִּנְיָן שֶׁל  
קְאָרְלִינֵר....נִסְתַּלַּק מוה"ר חַיִּים מִן  
הַמְּגִידוֹת. וּמו' חַיִּים קִיבֵל נְזִיפָה  
וְנִידוּי עַל עֲצָמוֹ וּמו' חַיִּים  
נִסְעוּ...וְאִח"כ יִשְׁבוּ הַרוֹזְנִים וְגַם שְׁנֵי  
כְּתוֹת דֵּיִינִים וְהַגָּאוֹן אֵב בֵּית דִּין.  
וְהָיָה פֶּסֶק לְשֵׁרוֹף אֶת הַכֹּתְבִים  
שְׁלֵהֶם אֲצֵל הַקּוֹנ"ע קוֹדֵם קְבֵלָת  
שַׁבָּת. וּמו' אִיסָר רֹאשׁ הַמְּאֻסָּף  
יַעֲלֶה בְּמַעֲלֵה עֲלִיוֹנָה שַׁבָּת קוֹדֵם  
שׁוֹכֵן עַד, וּבְכָל בֵּית הַכְּנִסֵּת וּבֵית

<sup>3</sup> "Sect" is a polemical term. Here they are likely referring to Frankist and Sabbatean messianic movements.

<sup>4</sup> In Mordechai Vilensky, *Hasidim u-Mitnagdim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 64–65.

<sup>5</sup> A pun between the Yiddish name "Isser" and the Hebrew word *issur*, meaning "prohibition."

as composed by the rabbinic court. And the *shamash* [synagogue administrator] will excommunicate them, and all who joined him.

הַמְדַרְשׁ לֹא יְהִי שׁוֹם מִנֵּין בְּכֹאן,  
רַק הַפֶּל יְהִי בְּבֵית הַכְּנֻסָּת וּבְבֵית  
הַמְדַרְשׁ הַגָּדוֹל, וַיִּתְּוֶדֶה כְּפִי הַנוֹסֵחַ  
אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִבֵּית דִּין. וְאִח"כ יִחְרִים  
הַשֹּׁמֵשׁ אוֹתָם וְכָל הַנְּלוּיִם אֵלָיו.

## 7. Yehoshua Heschel Levine, *Aliyot Eliyahu*, 1856<sup>6</sup>

*Renowned Torah scholar and Rosh Yeshiva at the Volozhin yeshiva (Lithuania and Belarus, 1812–1883). Aliyot Eliyahu was the first book written about the Vilna Gaon and is the source of much of what we know about him.*

All his virtues were the consequence of his diligence...He took upon himself never to sleep more than two hours in a single day....He never walked four cubits without [a book of] Torah and Tefilin, and never engaged in idle conversation....If one of his sons [who lived in other cities] came to visit him, he would greatly rejoice, not having seen him for a year or two, but he would not ask him about his material welfare. After he [the son] rested from his journey for an hour, he [Rabbi Elijah] would hasten him to return to his studies, and would say: "On the road, you were idle from study; you will make it up in my house."

Behold my brother, how great is the spiritual delight and sweetness of the God-fearing, who leave the ways of this world and its affairs to labor in the [study of] Torah and the commandments!

There did not arise like him in his [explication of] Torah, in his numerous compositions on the written Torah, the Oral Torah, and the secrets of the Torah. He composed more than seventy volumes.

תִּרְאֶה שְׂכּוֹלִים בָּאוּ בְּתַכְלִית  
הַחֲרִיצוֹת....קִיבֵל עַל עֲצָמוֹ כָּל יָמָיו שֶׁלֹּא  
לִישֵׁן יוֹתֵר ב' שָׁעוֹת בְּמַעַת לְעַת....מְעוֹדוֹ  
לֹא הֵלֵךְ ד' אַמּוֹת בְּלֹא תוֹרָה וּתְפִילִין,  
וְלֹא שָׁח שִׂיחָה בְּטֵלָה מִיָּמָיו...וְאִם בָּא  
אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו בְּגִבּוּלוֹ, גַּם כִּי הִגְדִּיל  
הַשְּׂמָחָה כִּי לֹא רָאָה אוֹתוֹ שָׁנָה אוֹ  
שְׁנַתִּים, אָפֶס לֹא שָׂאֵל אוֹתוֹ עַל עֲנִין  
פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ, וְכֹאֲשֶׁר נָח מְדַרְכוֹ שִׁיעוֹר שְׁעָה  
אַחַת, מֵהֵר יִמְהַרְנוּ שׁוֹב לְקַבּוֹעַ סֵדֶר  
לִימוּדוֹ. וְכֵן אָמַר: בְּדַרְדָּר, בְּטֵלָתָה  
מִלְּהַשְׁלִים שִׁיעוֹר סֵדֶר לִימוּדָךְ, הוּא  
יְשׁוּלָם בְּבֵיתִי.

רְאֵה אַחִי וְהַבִּיטָה, מֵה רַב טוֹב הָעוֹנֵג  
וְהָעֲרֹבוֹת בְּנַפְשׁוֹת הִירְאִים הָעוֹזְבִים  
דְּרָכֵי עוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְעֵסְקִיָּה לְעַמּוֹל בְּתוֹרָה  
וּבְמַצְוֹת...לֹא קָם כְּמוֹהוּ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ בְּרִיבוֹי  
חִיבוּרָיו בְּתוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתֵב וְשֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה  
וּבְנִסְתָּרוֹת, חִיבֵר יוֹתֵר מִשְׁבָּעִים כְּרָכִים.

<sup>6</sup> Vilna, 1871; accessible at: <http://hebrewbooks.org/14220>, 14, 15, 17, 25.

## 8. Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoye, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, 1780<sup>7</sup>

*Disciple of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and author of the first published Hasidic book (Ukraine, 1710–1784).*

The purpose of the entire Torah and the mitzvot, the reason they were given, is in order that one can have the privilege of attaching oneself to God, may He be blessed, as it is written “to Him shall you hold fast” (Deuteronomy 10:20). But with the passing of the years, hearts have grown smaller, and people fail to understand this matter. Instead they make the Torah into a crown with which to aggrandize themselves (see Avot 4:5), and to glorify themselves....When one learns a single law, one glorifies oneself a bit, and when one learns more, one glorifies oneself more....Behold the Talmudic scholars who break their footsteps going from city to city [to study Talmud]....This explains the verse “Why do you break, and stray even further: (Isaiah 1:5). The more they break their footsteps to go to a yeshiva to study, the more they stray and distance themselves from God.

תְּכַלִּית כָּל הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת, לֹא נִיתְּנוּ  
אֶלָּא כְּדֵי שְׂיִזְכֶּה לִידְבַק בּוֹ יַתְבָּרֵךְ, כְּמוֹ  
שֶׁכְּתוּב: “וּבֹ תִדְבַק” (דְּבָרִים י,  
כ)....וּבְרַבּוֹת הַשָּׁנִים נִתְמַעְטוּ הַלְּבָבוֹת  
לְהֵבִין וְלִהְשָׁפִיל עַד הַנֶּל, רַק לַעֲשׂוֹת  
מִהַתּוֹרָה עֲטָרָה לְהַתְגַּדֵּל בָּהֶם  
וְלִהְתַּפְּאֵר בָּהֶם....וּכְשֶׁלּוּמַד הֵלְכָה  
אַחַת מִתַּפְּאֵר מַעַט, וּכְשֶׁלּוּמַד יוֹתֵר  
מִתַּפְּאֵר יוֹתֵר....וְהֵנָּה הַתְּלַמִּידֵי חֻכְמִים  
הַמְּכַתְּתִין רְגְלֵיהֶם לִילָךְ מֵעִיר  
לְעִיר....וּבִזְזָה יוֹבֵן: עַל מַה תִּכּוּ [עוֹד  
תּוֹסִיפוּ סֵרָה] (יִשְׁעִיָּה א, ה), שֶׁמְכַתְּתִין  
רְגְלֵיהֶם לִילָךְ בִּישִׁיבָה לְלִמּוּד, עוֹד  
תּוֹסִיפוּ סֵרָה לְהִתְרַחֵק וְלִסּוֹר מֵה'  
יַתְבָּרֵךְ.

## 9. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, Letter to a Supporter of Hasidism Living in the Anti-Hasidic Community of Shklov, 1787<sup>8</sup>

*Founder of Chabad Hasidism (Lithuania and Russia, 1745–1813).*

While I don't know you, and have never seen you, I have heard about you—that the spirit of the Lord moves you, and that you did not join the laughers and mockers of those who wish to serve the Lord truly, with “service of the heart—that is prayer” (Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 2b). Their hands are uplifted with regard to Torah [study] and acts of kindness, and I truly wish this for them forever. But they transgressed teachings and violated laws by gathering together to issue a decree banning prayer different from their own—that one should pray in haste, without any movement or raising of the voice....

Those who say that prayer is [merely] a rabbinic commandment [i.e., not a commandment from the Torah]

הֵנָּה אֵף כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּיהוּ וְלֹא אָכִיר  
מְרָאָהוּ, אֵךְ שָׁמַע אֲזַן שְׁמַעְתִּיו אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ  
ה' נֹוֹסֶסָה בּוֹ, שֶׁלֹּא לַעֲמֹד בְּסוֹד  
מְשַׁחֲקִים הַמְּלַעֲיָגִים בְּחֻפְצִים לַעֲבֹד אֶת  
ה' בְּאִמָּת בַּעֲבוּדָה שְׁבַלֵּב זֹו תְּפִילָה  
(תַּעֲנִית ב, ע"ב). כִּי יָדַם רָמָה בַּתּוֹרָה  
וּגְמִילוֹת חֻסְדִּים, וּמִי יִתֵּן זֶה לָהֶם בְּאִמָּת  
כָּל הַיָּמִים. אֵךְ עֲתָה עָבְרוּ תּוֹרוֹת חֲלָפוּ  
חֹק בְּהוֹסְדִם יַחַד עָלַי לְגִזּוֹר גְּזִירַת שְׁמַד –  
עַל הַתְּפִילָה, לְהַתְּפַלֵּל כְּמוֹתֵם דְּוֹקָא –  
בְּחֻפְזוֹן בְּלִי שׁוּם תְּנוּעָה וְהִרְמַת קוֹל....

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Joseph of Polnoyye, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* (Jerusalem: Agudat Bet Vielipoli, 1973), Vol. 1, 124.

<sup>8</sup> In Mordechai Vilensky, *Hasidim u-Mitnagdim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 299–300.

have never seen light. For while the wording of the liturgy and its recitation three times a day are indeed rabbinic commandments, the matter of prayer is the foundation of the entire Torah. Namely, to know God, recognize His greatness and splendor...to love God, to attach oneself to Him, and to His Torah, and to desire His commandments. This objective is achieved in our times through the recitation of the morning Psalms, the Shema, and the blessings before it and after it—out loud, and with a voice that arouses intention of the heart....Anyone close to God, who has tasted the flavor of prayer a single time, will understand that without it, you cannot even begin to serve God truly, instead [your service] will be “a commandment of human beings, learned by rote” (Isaiah 29:13).

וְגַם הָאוֹמְרִים תְּפִילָּה מְדַרְבְּנָן לֹא רָאוּ  
מְאוֹרוֹת מִימֵיהֶם. כִּי אִף שְׁנוּסַח  
הַתְּפִילָּה וּמִנְיַנָּה ג' פְּעָמִים בַּיּוֹם הוּא  
מְדַרְבְּנָן, עֵיקָר עֲנִינָה מֵהוֹתָה הוּא יְסוּד  
כָּל הַתּוֹרָה, לְדַעַת אֶת ה' לְהַכִּיר גְּדֻלוֹתָו  
וּתְפָאֲרָתוֹ...לֹאֲהָבָה אֶת ה' וּלְדַבְּקָה בּוֹ  
וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ וּלְחַפּוֹץ מְאוֹד בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, אֲשֶׁר  
כָּל עֲנִין זֶה נַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ בְּזָמַן הַזֶּה עַל יְדֵי  
אֲמִירַת פְּסוּקֵי דְזִמְרָא, וּבְרִכּוֹת קְרִיאַת  
שְׁמַע, לְפָנֶיהָ וּלְאַחֲרֶיהָ בְּפֶה מְלֵא וּבְקוֹל  
מְעוֹרָר כְּוֹנֵת הַלֵּב....כָּל הַקְּרוֹב אֶל ה'  
וְטַעַם טַעַם בְּתְפִילָּה פְּעַם אַחַת, יִבִּין  
וְיִשְׁכִּיל כִּי בַלְעָדָה לֹא יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ  
וְאֶת רַגְלוֹ לְעִבּוֹד ה' בְּאַמְת, כִּי עִם מִצְוֹת  
אֲנָשִׁים מְלוֹמְדָה (ישעיה כט, יג).

## 10. Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim*, Introduction to Gate 4, Chapters 2, 4, 6<sup>9</sup>

*Prime disciple of the Vilna Gaon and founder of the Volozhin yeshiva (Belarus, 1749–1821).*

A person's worshipping God with a pure heart can lead him to arrogance. He will look down at someone who does not pray with pure thoughts, who keeps all the commandments written in God's Torah, but without *deveikut*. All the more so, if such a person sees someone studying Torah, and thinks that he is not learning for its own sake, he will sneer at him. Such an attitude is a grave sin. For truly...anyone who performs mitzvot as God commanded us in the Written and Oral Torah, even without *deveikut*, is called a servant of God, and is beloved by Him.

The person who studies God's Torah, not for its own sake—although he has not reached the highest level, should not be disdained, even in one's heart. On the contrary, every Jew should show him respect....Even a person whose Torah study is not for its own sake, but for some ulterior motive, will be rewarded by God. As long as it is not done for the sake of strife, about which our Sages said “It would have been better had his placenta

גַּם תּוֹכַל לְגְרוֹם לְאָדָם הַהִתְנַשְּׂאוֹת בַּלֵּב,  
מְאֲשֶׁר הוּא עוֹבֵד אוֹתוֹ ית' בְּטַהֲרַת הַלֵּב  
שִׁיקַל בְּעֵינָיו חֶסֶד וְשָׁלוֹם אִם יִרְאֶה מִי וּמִי  
שָׂאִין עֲנִינֵי עִבּוּדָתוֹ לוֹ ית' בְּמַחְשְׁבָה  
טְהוֹרָה, וּמְקַיִים כְּכֹל הַכְּתוּב בְּתוֹרַת ה'  
בְּלֹא דְבִיקוּת. וְכָל שֶׁפֶן כְּשִׁירְאָה אֵיזָה אִישׁ  
עוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרַת ה' וְיִתְבוֹנֵן עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא שְׁלֵא  
לְשָׁמָה, יִתְבַּזֶּה בְּעֵינָיו מְאוֹד חֶסֶד וְשָׁלוֹם.  
וְהוּא עֲנִין פְּלִילִי הֶרְחַמֵּן יִצְיִלְנוּ. כִּי  
בְּאַמְת...כָּל הַמְקַיִים מִצְוֹת ה' כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר  
צִוְנוּ בְּתוֹרַתְנוֹ הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁבְכָתָב וּבְעַל פֶּה  
אִף בְּלֹא דְבִיקוּת נִקְרָא גַם כֵּן עוֹבֵד אֱלֹהִים,  
וְאֵהוּב לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ.  
וְכֵן הָאָדָם הָעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרַת ה' אֲפִילוֹ שְׁלֵא  
לְשָׁמָה, אִם כִּי וְדַאי עֲדִיין אֵינּוּ בְּמִדְרַגָּה  
הַגְּבוּהָה הָאֲמִיתִית, אֲמָנָם חֲלִילָה וְחֲלִילָה  
לְבִזּוֹתוֹ אֲפִילוֹ בַּלֵּב, וְאֲדַרְבָּא כָּל אִישׁ

<sup>9</sup> Reprint of Vilna 1874 edition (accessible at: <http://hebrewbooks.org/14565>), 85–88, 90.

strangled him and he had not been born" [Talmud Yerushalmi 8a; Rashi on Berachot 17a]...

God gives him [a person who studies Torah for an ulterior motive] his just reward for the study of Torah is precious in the eyes of the Lord, more precious than all the commandments, [even if] performed for their own sake with holiness and pure thoughts....For it is an explicit mishnah: "and the study of Torah is equal to all of them" (Peah 1:1)....

Be cautious and do not let the evil temptation beguile you by telling you, "The main thing is to occupy yourself at all times with purifying your thoughts." ...Evil temptation tells you "Torah and mitzvot without *deveikut*, attachment to God, is worthless." ...It will make you believe that a prayer or mitzvah done with great devotion, holiness and purity—even after its set time has passed—is more precious [to God] than a mitzvah performed at the proper time without devotion....You will end up considering it permitted to disregard the time of a prayer or mitzvah....This is no different that someone blowing the shofar with profound devotion on the first night of Passover instead of eating the prescribed amount of matzah, and eating the prescribed amount of matzah on Rosh Hashanah!...Then, what will be with the Torah? The essential part of every mitzvah is its performance. Purity of thought is something one adds to the performance. It enhances the mitzvah but is not an indispensable condition....God forbid that we should reject a single detail of performing a mitzvah, even the fine point of a rabbinic enactment, let alone change the time of a mitzvah, because of the absence of pure thoughts. And anyone who increases his stringent performance of mitzvot, behold he is praiseworthy.

ישראל מחויב לנהוג גם בו כבוד....הרי  
אפילו האדם שעסקו בתורתו יתברך שלא  
לשמה כראוי, אלא בשביל איזו פניה  
לגרמיה — רק אם אינו לקנטור ח"ו, אשר  
עליו אמרו רז"ל נוח שתהפך שלייתו על  
פניו (ירושלמי ברכות ח ע"א, רשי על  
ברכות יז ע"א)...

הקב"ה קובע לו שכר טוב שמגיע לו הרי  
עסק תורתו יקר מאוד בעיניו יתברך, יותר  
מכל המצוות לשמה בקדושה וטהרת  
המחשבה...שהרי משנה שלימה שנינו  
"ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם." (פאה א, א)....  
לזאת הזהר נפשך מאוד, שאל ישיאך יצרך  
לאמר, שעיקר הכל תראה שתהא אף עסוק  
כל ימך לטהר מחשבתך....יאמר לך שכל  
התורה והמצוה שבלא דביקות איננה  
כלום... ויראה לך פנים שכל תפילה או  
מצוה שנעשית בכונה עצומה בקדושה  
וטהרה אף שלא בזמנה, הרי היא יקרה  
מקיום המצוה בזמנה, שלא בכונה.... עד  
שממילא יהא לך כהיתר להעביר מועד  
התפילה והמצוה...וכי מאי נפקותא בין זה  
למי שהיה תוקע שופר בכונה עצומה  
בליל ראשון של פסח, במקום מצות  
אכילת כזית מצה, ואוכל הכזית מצה  
בראש השנה....ואיך מקום לתורה?  
העיקר בכל המצוות הוא חלק המעשה.  
טהרת המחשבה אינה אלא מצטרפת  
למעשה, ולמצוה ולא לעיכובא....חלילה  
וחלילה לנו לדחות שום פרט מפרטי  
המעשה, אף דיקדוק אחד מדברי סופרים  
וכל שכן לשנות זמנה חס ושלום בשביל  
מניעת טהרת המחשבה, וכל המרבה  
לדקדק במעשיו הרי זה משובח.