



שמירת המצות זו דרך ה' לקיום בריאות הגוף ונפש
**The Kabbalistic Way to
Complete Mental and Physical Health**
Scrupulous Observance of the Mitzvot

**from the Kabbalistic Classic,
Sha'arei Kedusha of HaRav Hayim Vital**

*Introduction, Original Translation and Commentary
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Introduction

Sha'arei Kedusha is, in my opinion, one of the finest works ever written by Rabbi Haim Vital. In it he explains and combines the most profound Kabbalistic teachings and meditative practices with the most practical and necessary advice for everyday living. The first two sections of the work explain the value of righteousness and the corruption brought about by sin. Part three of the work lays the Kabbalistic foundation for the underlying understanding of the soul in the cosmic scheme of things in the prophetic universe. Part four of this work was considered so special and holy that to this day it has never been published with the entire work. Part four deals with the transcendental experience of prophetic meditation. It is in this section that Rabbi Haim quotes Abraham Abulafia's works Sefer HaHeshek and Hayei Olam HaBa' verbatim and by name. All in all, if one were to learn and apply all that is taught in Sha'arei Kedusha, one would indeed enter through the gates of holiness and stand in the courts of our G-d.

**Sha'arei Kedusha,
Part One, Gate One**

It is known to all masters of the sciences¹ that the body of a human being is not the person himself, for the body is called the flesh of the person, as it is written, "with skin and flesh have you clothed me; with bones and sinews have you covered me"(Job 10:11).² We thus find that a human being is [his] inner Self. The body is simply a garment that is meant to clothe the Nefesh HaSikhlit (thinking soul)³, which is the real person all the while that he exists in this world. After death the garment [of the body] is



cast off, and [the soul] is cloaked in another garment, [one] more refined and spiritually pure, as it is written, “take off the soiled garments” (Zech. 3:4). [The soul] is dressed in a beautiful form, which is called “haluka d’rabbanan” (the garment of the Sage).⁴

Just as a person’s garments are made by an expert in the form of a person’s body, thus did The Blessed One make the [physical] body which is the garment of the soul. [The body] is made in the image of the soul [which itself is made up of] 248 organs and 365 sinews that hold all the organs together.⁵

[These sinews] channel the blood and the life force to each of the organs in the same manner as a pipeline. After the formation of the body, a living soul is breathed into it; one that is made up of 248 spiritual organs and 365 spiritual organs. These in turn cloak themselves with the 248 organs and the 365 sinews of the body. Then the organs of the soul perform their functions through their vessels, the bodily organs, like a tool in the hands of the craftsman.

The proof of this is that the organs of the body do not function other than when the soul is within them. The eye will not see nor will the ear hear; with the departure of the soul the eyes are darkened and nullified along with all of the other 248 organs of the body.

In this same way the 365 spiritual sinews of the soul that are cloaked within the 365 sinews of the body draw down physical nourishment, which is the blood, to the 248 bodily organs, along with their spiritual nourishment concealed within. This [in turn] supports the 248 organs of the soul. After one dies there is no life left to be drawn down to the sinews of the body; they are no longer connected to the 248 [bodily] organs and they become as though they never existed. We thus find that a person is none other than the “thinking soul” that is cloaked within the body, which is its garment for this world.

Know that after the sin of Adam, when he ate of the Tree of Knowledge between Good and Evil, he bound himself body and soul to both good and evil.⁶ This is the subject of the injection of the filth of the serpent into Eve and Adam. Due to the evil and filth with which they were contaminated, this became the source of illness, disease and death, both to their bodies and their souls. Of this it is written, “on the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). This is speaking of the death of both body and soul.

When [Adam] sinned with the Tree of Knowledge between Good and Evil, he caused there to be a forbidden mixture [of good and evil] in all the worlds.⁷ [So today] there is nothing that is not a mixture of good and evil.⁸

We thus find that the human body is formed from the four lower foundations.⁹ They themselves are a mixture of good and evil. The human body is formed from the good that is to be found in the four foundations, which are fire, air, water, and earth. However,



from the evil that is within them there is formed in the body the four biles, which are the white, the black, the red and the green.¹⁰ When one of these are unbalanced, from the evil or from the good that is within it, sickness and illness come to the body. If the imbalance is severe, then the body will die.

As we have already explained, all the worlds are a mixture of good and evil. We thus find that also in the human soul this is true. For [the soul] is carved out from the four spiritual foundations, from which are formed all the worlds. These four are the four letters of the [holy] Name Yok-Kay-Vav-Kay, י'ק'ו'י' blessed be He. Of this it says, "From the four winds comes the spirit" (Ez. 37:9).¹¹ This is the human soul from the side of good.

Now, corresponding to the [good man] that G-d had made, He also made the vile man who combines within him the four master styles of harm, and the four appearances of disease. [These come forth] from the evil soul within us called the yetzer hara (the evil inclination).¹² When this aspect of evil overwhelms the aspect of good [within us], we become subject to harm and disease, the illnesses of the soul. If these overwhelm completely, death ensues.¹³

Now the pure soul, which [like the] fruit is made up of 613 organs and sinews; these are cloaked within the 613 organs and sinews of the unclean soul,¹⁴ which is like the peel to the fruit. Both of these are then cloaked within the 613 organs and sinews of the [physical] body. We thus find that the organs of the pure soul are cloaked within the organs of the evil soul, and the evil soul within the organs of the body. Now, each of these two souls needs spiritual nourishment in order to survive. However, the spiritual nourishment of the holy soul comes to it by the observance of the mitzvot, themselves made up of 613 commandments in the image of the 613 organs of the soul. These two are called "bread", as it is written, "Come eat your bread with mine" (Proverbs 9:5).

Each of the 248 organs is nourished by a specific mitzvah which corresponds to that organ. When a person lacks the performance of a specific mitzvah, the specific organ relating to that mitzvah lacks the [spiritual] nourishment that comes to it from the four letters of [the holy Name] Yok-Kay-Vav-Kay, as it is written, "You give life to all" (Neh. 9:6). [All one's organs] are dependent upon the mitzvot.

We thus find that the specific organ [left without spiritual nourishment] completely dies. With the removal of holiness [from that part], a spirit of uncleanness enters into it from the four foundations of uncleanness.

This is the meaning of what is said (Ber. 18B) that "the wicked, even when they are alive, are really dead"; for the spirit of holiness, which comes from the living G-d, has departed



from them. Instead, the spirit of death [dwells upon them], which is called the deepest level of uncleanness.

Similar to all this is when a person fulfills one of the 365 negative commandments, by not doing something that is forbidden, as our sages say (Kid. 39A), that such a one receives a reward for not doing a sin as though he had done a mitzvah.

Through the observance of a mitzvah, the spiritual nourishment has the power to channel through the 365 sinews of the soul to enliven the 248 organs therein. However, when one commits a sin, that specific channel which corresponds to the specific sin is closed down, due to the filth of the unclean forces that cling there. As the channel is closed, so the corresponding [physical] organ dries up, and thereby is blemished.

Therefore a person must do all that they are able to fulfill all the 613 commandments. When one does perform one of the 613 commandments, one should meditate upon removing from the specific organ corresponding to that mitzvah the filth of the klipah [that is clinging there]. Then shall that organ become filled with the holiness that comes [from the performance of] the mitzvah. This is the secret meaning of the verse, “and their sins have penetrated to their bones” (Ez. 32:27). For when the one rises up the other falls. Also when a sin presents itself before a person, he must avoid doing it. He should meditate that by not doing [the sin] the filth within the specific organ [which would have sinfully performed the evil act] is removed. Thus is the person ready and able to receive the Divine influx which comes down the spiritual pipeline. In this manner one’s soul becomes the throne and merkava for G-d blessed holiness.¹⁵ This is the secret of [what our Sages have taught]: “the Patriarchs themselves are the merkavah” (B.R. 47,6; Zoh. 1, 173A).

END NOTES

¹ Rabbi Haim opens up quoting from science and not just from a Torah source. His intent is to show how there are certain matters that are universal in acceptance. That the soul is the true person and not the body, Rabbi Haim wishes to claim as a scientific fact and not just a religious claim. Rabbi Haim was well-versed in a number of sciences and even wrote on such topics as alchemy.

² Having made the statement that science accepts the understanding of the soul being the true person, Rabbi Haim now quotes a verse so as to also validate this from the Torah point of view.

³ Rabbi Haim, and more so the Ba'al HaTanya, speak of human beings having two souls: the “thinking soul” and the “animal soul”. These are not really two separate entities but rather the dual expressions of the human race’s dual nature of being both physical and spiritual beings. Our true self, the Higher Self, is pure Mind, pure thought; far above the gross limitations and interests of physical living. Yet our bodies, in essence, have a mind of their own; and there is that aspect of us that wishes to do things that are physically appealing and enjoyable, regardless of how the mind views such things. This conflict is the result of eating from the forbidden fruit in the Garden where the forces of mind have become clouded



through their being influenced by the physical. The act of rectification therefore impels us to live in accordance to the nature of our higher selves, the “thinking soul”, and to learn to control the “animal soul” within us.

⁴ The Haluka D'Rabbanan is today referred to as the astral body. We are taught that just as the physical body needs its nourishment in order to be healthy and strong, so does the astral body. The nourishment of the astral body, which is the “thinking soul”, are the mitzvot of the Torah, i.e. acts of righteousness that have the ability to reverberate, focus and channel spiritual energy.

⁵ According to traditional Jewish medicine, the body is divided up into the same number of parts as there are commandments in the Torah. As Rabbi Haim continues, it becomes clear that the soul, which itself is the vessel for the Torah, is made in its image of 613 parts. The body, being the vessel for the soul, follows in the same pattern. Nonetheless, I know of no one text which outlines organ by organ how each of the 613 commandments corresponds to each part of the body; nor do I know of any text that outlines what all 613 parts of the body are. I apologize for my lack of information.

⁶ Of course there is much to be explained here; please reference my article The Sin of Adam.

⁷ The story of the Garden happened prior to Adam's descent into the physical world. Prior to the sin, Adam and Eve were astral beings, with no physical aspect to them at all.

⁸ The reason for this is that Adam's original level included within it all levels of creation. In other words, Adam was a being of multiple dimensions. When he partook of the forbidden fruit and was thereby contaminated, that contamination touched everything around him, at all the levels.

⁹ These four foundations are the basis of all physical matter. Really they are energy forces which we call water, fire, air and earth. Reference RaMBaM's Hilkhos Yesodei Torah for more information regarding this. I refer you to the material covered in my RaMBaM Y.T. tape series for more detail.

¹⁰ The four biles are spoken of throughout Jewish medical literature as being the cause of all illness. What is underlying Rabbi Haim's words here is that, in the realm of matter, there are manifestations that are helpful and there are manifestations that are harmful. In other words, not everything is beautiful.

¹¹ The words for “wind” in Hebrew is “ruht”, which also means spirits. The four wind-spirits are the powers of the four letters of the holy Name.

¹² This “evil man” is none other than our own selves, from the physical side as opposed to the spiritual.

¹³ In other words, live for the pleasures of the body and the body gets sick and dies. One might ask, “So what? We all die anyway”. While this is true, it is known that the death of the body is not the end of life but a process in its continuation. If a person is not prepared to go forward after departing this body, then they go backward, retarding the order of spiritual evolution. This is a spiritual felony for which each and every individual is held accountable.

¹⁴ The unclean soul being the physical inclinations of body consciousness which intervene between the thinking soul and the body.

¹⁵ And this is the key to all. Our purpose in coming into this world is to rectify the sin of Adam, which was the separation and division of the worlds through a misalignment of the supernal order. When we surrender to the Higher Self within us, we overcome the attractions of our bodies (which take us away from higher forms of human endeavors). When accomplished, we are able to not only channel our Higher

Selves into our bodies with conscious minds, we are also able to connect with the source of our souls with is G-d. In this way we bring Heaven (G-d) down to earth, thus uniting all as one.