

"Correspondence"
file

October 15, 1971

Mr. Michael Tabor
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Dear Michael:

I cannot tell you how very pleased I was to make your acquaintance during your recent visit to New York. My family was ad delighted as I -- an impression confirmed when we replayed the violin piece you allowed us to record!

Now as to what to make of the discourse on Lekh-Lekha -- your "favorite sichah" -- of the present Lubavitcher Rebbe. As I mentioned to you over the phone, my first impression was that the idea was a put-on, a mere semantic juggling of traditional Habad nomenclature, far more mystifying than enlightening. I must be honest with you: I am still not 100% sure that the idea is really valid -- but I think the effort is, at least, a worthy and intellectually honorable one.

The problem, basically, is that of divine omnipotence vs. Free Will. Given the radical immanentism of Hasidism, the divine omnipotence must be taken for granted. If there is, in an ultimate sense, no reality other than that of God, certainly His power is not only perfect and absolute, but also exclusive; no other power exists. But this must include moral choice as well, the power to decide and execute a life of Torah and Mitzvot. However, if the decision in this realm is attributed to God, it loses its volitional character, and hence is no longer what it must be: a free act.

The Rebbe tries -- or so it appears to me -- to solve the problem by an analysis of the divine Will, the instrument of His power. He distinguishes between the inner and outer aspects of the divine Will. The "outer" will is that of the divine governance of the natural universe. Here the relation between Will and existence is clear, determinate, coercive and in a one-to-one correspondence. There is no question of freedom or accident or chance -- all is the product, directly, of the divine Will. But man's moral life (what the Rebbe calls his life of Torah and Mitzvot) is the realm of inwardness, and