

## TRANSLATING THE INVOCATION TOWARD THE ONE Into The Hebrew of the Jewish Tradition

RABBI ZALMAN SCHACHTER-SHALOMI AND NETANEL MILES-YEPEZ

Toward the One,  
The Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,  
The Only Being,  
United with All the Illuminated Souls,  
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master,  
The Spirit of Guidance.

Years ago, when I first began saying the *Toward the One* prayer of the Sufi Master *Hazrat Inayat Khan*, I found that I was often unable to get beyond the opening words. For even as I was speaking, I would be lifted “Toward the One” to regions of “Love, Harmony, and Beauty” where my feet no longer touched the ground of materiality, but instead were grounded in “The Only Being.” I was overwhelmed by the energetic *qurb*—‘proximity’ to the One—in the words themselves. There was such holy precision in them and manifest spiritual energy that my heart could not fail to respond to them. And, as with other things that touched me powerfully from outside of the Jewish tradition, I immediately wanted to translate it into Hebrew, the language of my spiritual upbringing.<sup>1</sup>

In the years since I originally made this little translation for myself in the 1970’s, other Hebrew translations of *Toward the One* have appeared in various places. This is in no way meant to imply criticism of other Hebrew translations, but only to offer another version. The beauty of a translation is the access it gives to a ‘message’ originally given in another language, but we must always understand that it is an interpretation of that ‘message.’ For each language has a beauty and sophistication of its own which resists translation. There is no one-to-one equivalence for the cultural understandings of words translated from one language into another. Thus, there is a practical truth to what Muslims say when they speak of the miraculous *ijaz* (‘inimitability’) of the Arabic *Qur’an*. And when they say that a *Qur’an* in English is not *the Qur’an*, they are also right. It is an interpretation.

This is not to say that the spirit of the ‘message’ is not conveyed in the translation, only that there is variation between one and the other. And just as a translation is an interpretation of the original, different translations sometimes yield quite different interpretations. Thus, it is possible that there will be some who will find value in my particular Hebrew interpretation of *Toward the One*.

This is why I am now hoping to make this translation available, for I have noticed that the Hebrew translations of the *Toward the One* I have seen are interpretations into *modern* Hebrew. This is good, and I am delighted to see them, just as I am pleased to see renderings into modern Spanish, German, French, and Arabic. But with this translation I intended to render *Toward the One* into a Hebrew that has a resonance with the liturgical Hebrew of the *beit midrash*, where Jews traditionally prayed and studied. For today, there is both a traditional Hebrew of Judaism and a secular Hebrew of social discourse.

For Israelis (who have often been raised in a secular environment), modern Hebrew obviously makes more sense and is far more palatable, but for others who are more oriented toward the Hebrew of prayer and study, there are certain words and phrases in

modern Hebrew that are foreign to traditional Judaism and do not come across as authentically Jewish. Thus, I labored to translate *Toward the One* in such a way that those who have solid footing in Jewish tradition may add it to their prayers without it feeling like something foreign.

Here is my translation of *Toward the One* into traditional Hebrew:

*Liqrat ha'ehad,*

*Ha'yahid ha'ehad v'ha'm'yuhad,*

*Shleymut ha'emmet, ha'tzedeq v'ha'tiferet,*

*Hannimtza ha'yahid,*

*Ha'kolel kol hann'shamot ha'ne'orot,*

*Yotzrey hag'shammat harrabbi,*

*Ha'ruah haqqodesh.*

Of course, some of the words will be the same in nearly all translations into Hebrew, but there will also be critical differences, and in this case, even additions.

First of all, the phrase *Liqrat ha'ehad* is a fairly direct translation of 'Toward the One' into Hebrew. But if we wish it to impart more of the sense intended by *Hazrat Inayat Khan*, and to connect with how the Jewish tradition expresses this notion, we have to include another phrase here. In Hasidism, there is a distinction between *ehad ha'manuy*, the number one, and *ehad v'eyn sheyni*, the One that has no other, no two or three. The phrase in traditional Hebrew that best expresses this notion comes from the Italian Kabbalist and *hakham* ('sage'), Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747), the author of the *Mesillat Yesharim* ('Path of the Upright'), who gives us *Ehad, yahid, u'meyuhad*, 'One Uniquely Simple Unity.'<sup>2</sup> But since this phrase cannot follow *Liqrat ha'ehad* in a natural way, I created a kind of echo of it with *Ha'yahid ha'ehad v'ha'm'yuhad*.

In the next line, we have *Shleymut ha'emmet, ha'tzedeq v'ha'tiferet*, which is quite different from what we have in the English and requires some explanation. First of all, *shleymut*, 'wholeness,' is simply the word that best conveys the notion of 'perfection' in Hebrew,<sup>3</sup> but *ha'emmet, ha'tzedeq v'ha'tiferet* actually translates to 'truth, righteousness, and beauty.' Somehow, *emmet*, 'truth,' struck me as a better choice from within the Jewish tradition to put in this trilogy of words.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, I think *ahavah*, 'love,' (*ha'ahavah* if put into the whole phrase) would still be acceptable here. I chose to use *tzedeq*, 'righteousness' for 'harmony' because 'righteousness' in Hebrew carries with it the sense of balanced scales.<sup>5</sup> Now, *tiferet* is in fact the Hebrew for 'beauty,' but it is also a word that is loaded with meaning in the world of Jewish mysticism (*kabbalah*). In a very simple sense, *tiferet* is what balances and completes the forces of Love and Justice in the Universe.

The next three lines are fairly straightforward. *Hannimtza ha'yahid* is basically, 'the only one who can be found,' 'the only existent.' *Yahid* is also the One Infinite Being, the Simple Unity without separation or parts, the God without limits. *Ha'kolel kol hann'shamot ha'ne'orot* is 'Who contains all the souls that have been illuminated.' *Yotzrey hag'shammat harrabbi* is 'Forming the actualization of the master,'<sup>6</sup> the *rebbe*, in Hasidic parlance.

Finally, in the last line, I chose not to translate the words, "The Spirit of Guidance," but to replace them with the parallel concept from the Jewish tradition, *Ha'ruah haqqodesh*, 'the Spirit of Holiness,' or Holy Spirit. This is the phrase most often used in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature to denote prophetic inspiration. And while there are statements in the tradition that say that *ruah haqqodesh* departed after the passing of the prophets Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi, Hasidim clearly believe that it is still available, even today.

If one were to translate this Hebrew *Toward the One* back into English, it would probably come out something like this:

Toward the One,

Unique, One, and Unified,

The Wholeness of Truth, Righteousness, and Beauty,

The Only One in Existence,

Who contains all the Illuminated Souls,

Forming the actualization of the Master,

The Spirit of Holiness.

As you can see, there is clear variation in the sense of the words, but I believe that the Message is still available in them. The English prayer of *Hazrat Inayat Khan* is so precise and beautiful that all attempts at translation will fail in one way or another. It has its own miraculous *ijaz* and will stand forever among the great prayer-creations of the English language. Nevertheless, I offer this rendering into Hebrew as a way for those who wish to pray in Hebrew, but who are also committed to the Message, to add this to their other prayers in a way that will feel natural in the prayer-space of Judaism.

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[Read more about Netanel Miles-Yepeez](#)

Rabbi Zalman (Suleyman) Schachter-Shalomi, better known as 'Reb Zalman,' was born in Zholkiew, Poland in 1924. He was ordained by the HaBaD-Lubavitcher Hasidim in 1947 and is professor emeritus of Psychology of Religion and Jewish Mysticism at Temple University and World Wisdom Chair holder emeritus at Naropa University. Today he is primarily known as the father of the Jewish Renewal movement and is widely considered one of the world's foremost authorities on Hasidism and Kabbalah. He is the author of *Jewish with Feeling: Guide to a Meaningful Jewish Practice* (2005). In 2004, he co-founded The Desert Fellowship of the Message: The Inayati-Maimuni Tariqat of Sufi-Hasidim with his student, Netanel (Mu'in ad-Din) Miles-Yepeez, fusing the Sufi and Hasidic principles of spirituality espoused by Rabbi Avraham Maimuni in 13th century Egypt with the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and Hazrat Inayat Khan.

[Read more about Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi](#)

**Footnotes**  
(show footnotes)

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### Comments (1)

Shalom and Light upon a Light to you, dear Reb, and thank you for your beautiful inspiration. I had an inspiration for All Prophets Day to be observed July 5, 2010 in honor of all prophets and the spirit of guidance today, and co-incidentally on the birthday of Hazrat Inayat Khan. May I add your translation to those I am hoping to gather from as many languages as feasible?

— Ganesh Dawdy on July 24, 2009

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