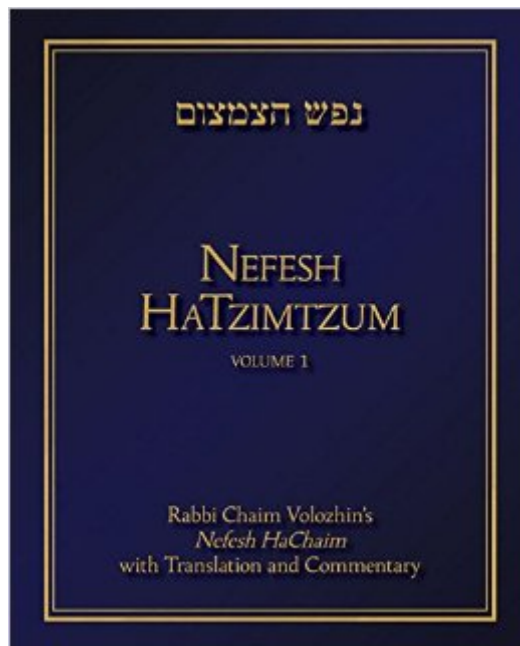


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Nefesh HaTzimtzum, Volume 1: Rabbi Chaim Volozhin's Nefesh HaChaim With Translation And Commentary



Synopsis

Nefesh HaTzimtzum provides the single most comprehensive and accessible presentation of the teachings and worldview of the Vilna Gaonâ€™s primary student, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin. It is focused on Rabbi Chaimâ€™s magnum opus, Nefesh HaChaim, a work that has lain in almost total obscurity for nearly two centuries due to its deep Kabbalistic subject matter. Nefesh HaTzimtzum opens up the real depth of the ideas presented in Nefesh HaChaim together with all of Rabbi Chaimâ€™s related writings, making them accessible to the public for the first time in any language. In addition to the complete English translation, Nefesh HaTzimtzum includes the full facing page Hebrew text of Nefesh HaChaim and many other writings by Rabbi Chaim, along with in-depth explanations, an informative historical overview, an easily consumable innovative presentation layout and a full index. After centuries of confusion, extensive clarification is provided of the central Kabbalistic concept of Tzimtzum, or the secret of how an infinite God occupies a finite world. Most importantly, it unequivocally demonstrates that the key Kabbalists, including the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin and the Baal HaTanya, all unanimously agreed on the underlying principles of the concept of Tzimtzum and that contrary to widespread historical misunderstanding, there was no fundamental dispute about the philosophical principles of Judaism between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim. Based on this Nefesh HaTzimtzum shows that both Nefesh HaChaim and Sefer HaTanya present the same methodology for serving God which is rooted in their identical understanding of the concept of Tzimtzum. Nefesh HaTzimtzum is published in two volumes which are sold separately. This volume contains the complete Hebrew text of Nefesh HaChaim which is brought to life by an illuminating translation and incisive commentary. It additionally provides extensive translated source material necessary to properly understand the basic text. The text is further complemented by an informative introduction which includes a historical overview.

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Customer Reviews

This is Avinoam Fraenkel's first volume on Nefesh HaChaim. This book, composed in two volumes contains a translation into English of a book called Nefesh HaChaim by Rabbi Chaim Volozhin (1749-1821). Nefesh HaChaim means "The Living Soul," or "The Soul of Chaim (Volozhin), and Nefesh HaTzimtzum means "The Compressed Soul." The books in essence discuss in great detail the arcane mystical doctrine of the Sefirot, "numbers," ten divine entities (parts of God) that function in ten different ways. The lowest entity Shekhinah, also called malkhut, is seen by mystics as the anthropomorphic feminine part of God that interacts with humans. Jewish mystics have many different ways of interpreting what the Sefirot are and how they function. Some few mystics believe that the doctrine should be understood as a parable. They reject the notion that God had taken up all space before creation and had to compress (tzimtzum) to make space available for the world, that there are ten parts of God, which sounds to them as polytheism, and the idea that God became separated, that humans have a duty to help reassemble God's ten disjointed parts, and that when this is done, the messianic age will arrive. But these mystics see lessons that can be learned from the parable. Others take the idea seriously: this is how the world was created and this is how God functions. Rabbi Chaim Voloshin takes the latter view and gives it his interpretation. Avinoam Fraenkel translates his book and explains it with copious notes. The concept of tzimtzum was first coined by Arizal (sixteenth century) in the writings of his students. Rabbi Chaim Voloshin felt that tzimtzum, according to Avinoam Fraenkel, "describes a guaranteed methodology for serving God." Rationalists reject the concept entirely.

Though I bought this book when it first came out it is only recently that I have begun to learn from it. Wow!! Besides being a truly masterful translation of the famous Nefesh Hachaim by the chief student of the Vilna Gaon, R. Chaim of Volozhin, this work is possibly the most extensive and accessible commentary that ever has and probably ever will be written on the text. And it was written in easily understood, literate English by a native-English speaker, R. Avinoam Fraenkel. Having spent more years than I would care to count plumbing the depths of Torah and kabbala in particular, knowing the languages, owning the pertinent sforim and having had a yeshivo education in the US and Israel, I am in awe of the work and the beauty of R. Fraenkel's contribution. R. Fraenkel spent

almost two years working with one of the greatest experts on kabbala in the world, R. Moshe Schatz, Jerusalem, whom I had the great fortune to briefly meet and study with many years ago. R. Schatz, who published Sparks of the Hidden Light Seeing the Unified Nature of Reality Through Kabbalah in 1996, as well as two highly acclaimed and groundbreaking sforim on understanding kabbala via the lens of the Ari Hakodesh, personally went over every sentence in these two volumes, checking and rechecking the translations, and adding his years of study and knowledge to make it the best book we have on this topic. Volume one is a translation with copious, fascinating and often crucially explanatory footnotes to the text. The original Hebrew text, with vowels, is printed opposite the translation. This, according to R. Schatz, is the most authoritative text which we currently have since it was the result of careful comparison of several manuscripts and printed texts.

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