CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A TESTAMENT TO THE CHILDREN

The last part is presented in the literary template of a testament:

And you will see the rule that emerges, dear reader, in the conclusion of this work, which includes all the warnings a man must give his children. I have therefore written them for my children as the will of a man about to die, for them to have from now on and after my death... May God be with you, who are mine and God's children, the Lord is your God, pay attention and heed my words.¹

Structurally, the testament belongs in the normative section (Tiferet Bahurim), which also closes with a chapter on preparations for the day of death,² indicating that the manuscript’s various sections were closely linked and included in a book meant to be published in its entirety at a later stage. The message of the work is thus delivered in two parallel axes—one resorting to normative-Halakhic channels and the other to sermons.

Despite the official title (“testament”), this section does not deal at all with the topic of death, with preparations for it, or with its influence on people’s religious behavior throughout their lives.³ Rather, it is a collection of recommendations and instructions in various realms, which the author does not bother to weave together systematically but lists one after another. Three main directions are nevertheless discernible: (1) Ritual instructions that are part of a person’s daily life, from morning until night, including a brief reference to the Sabbath. (2) “Derekh Eretz”—instructions for refining/civilizing behavior in the personal and public realm. (3) Guidance on preserving closeness between adult brothers.

¹ Tiferet Bahurim, 34b, 67a.
² See Section 12 above.
³ See Zeev Gries, Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidim (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990), 51–53, who mentions that the wills literature does not deal only with burial and with the division of assets after death but also includes conduct, moral homilies. Its place as a stage for spreading moral advice is rather marginal during the seventeenth century.
The ritual instructions offer a kind of popular version of the *Shulkhan Arukh* for young people, detailing ritual and Halakhic obligations for the various hours of the day. The observance framework is only a front, and behind it is a clear motivation to spread the kabbalistic message. This section is further evidence of Kabbalah’s penetration into everyday life, of the interpretation of religious practice it avails to the faithful and of the innovation and ritual freshness that were the secrets of its strength:

- Waking in the morning and washing hands immediately afterward. The explanation of this practice rests on the *Book of the Zohar*: “Wake up from your slumber, open your eyes, and take in your hands a covered vessel full of water that you should place beside your bed at night and, before anything, be careful to pour water over your hands. It is forbidden to walk four cubits without this early morning pouring, as explained in several places in the Zohar.”

- A rigorous instruction to avoid full nakedness and always be sure to wear underwear. The basic argument is to preserve holiness and purity: “Dress yourself in purity and holiness. If you sleep without a robe or wish to change your robe for another, do not put on your robe sitting down but take it and slide your arms into it while lying down, so that when you rise up you will be covered. Always, day and night, be sure to wear a waistband.”

- Modesty in the toilet.

- Kissing the *mezuzah* before leaving the house. This act is meant to direct consciousness to God’s presence in the world from the start of the day and help in the struggle against bad thoughts and “false notions” that go beyond the bounds of Jewish Orthodoxy.

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4 *Tiferet Bahurim*, 67a.

5 Ibid. This was also the ruling in *Shulkhan Arukh*, *Orakh Hayyim*, # 2, § 1–2, which emphasizes “purity and holiness” in this regard.

6 *Tiferet Bahurim*, 67b: “You should develop a habit of evacuating every morning as part of ‘prepare to meet your God, O Israel,’ both small and big [euphemisms for urinating and defecating]. Be modest in the toilet, and do not expose yourself until you are sitting, and do not sit quickly and exert force, and do not strain yourselves excessively lest you injure your intestine, and beware not to hold with your middle finger when urinating lest you should come to waste your seed.”

7 I use the term Orthodoxy in its “Catholic” sense, that is, the faith positions (“theology”) defined by the Church as valid, contrary to “heretic” ones beyond the pale, which bring power-wielding bodies to impose sanctions on those supporting them.