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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***A rabbi's lifelong journey to discover the real Baal Shem Tov,
and the source and inspiration of Hasidism.***

"Burt has striven his entire life to hand over the legacy of Hasidism and of my father to generations to come. Let us listen to his voice." —**Susannah Heschel**, from the Foreword

As a student of Abraham Joshua Heschel's at Jewish Theological Seminary 60 years ago, Burt Jacobson was moved to devote his life to the study of Israel Baal Shem Tov—the founder of Hasidism. Heschel considered the Baal Shem the greatest Jewish teacher and communal leader of the last 1,000 years. ***Living in the Presence: A Personal Quest for the Baal Shem Tov*** (650 pages; Paperback ISBN 978-1958972632, US \$49.99; Hardcover ISBN 978-1958972670, US \$69.99) is Rabbi Burt Jacobson's tour de force and labor of love, publishing on Tuesday, November 19, 2024.

It is a wide-ranging portrait, revealing numerous facets of the Baal Shem Tov's biography, and revolutionary thought previously unknown. Through his knowledge of the world's wisdom traditions, and his own personal journey, Jacobson is able to place the Baal Shem in the company of the great world spiritual teachers. He reveals the Baal Shem's vision as an ecstatic mystical encounter that opened to the transcendent unity of existence. It was this that inspired his love and compassion for all creation, especially for the people he met. His disciples testified that their experience of these truths transformed how they understood their own identities as manifestations of the divine, altered how they lived as spiritual leaders of their communities, and laid the foundations for Hasidism as a movement.

"A masterpiece of profound insight, powerful love, and intimate longing. Rabbi Jacobson has opened us to a vast stream of timeless Wisdom, illuminated by his own deeply personal journey into Mystery and ultimate meaning." —**Rabbi Shefa Gold**, author of *Torah Journeys: The Inner Path to the Promised Land*

"Jacobson shares his intimate struggles with faith and how he eventually found a way to integrate his universal aspirations as a child of the Sixties with the radical wisdom teachings of Hasidism. This is not just another book on Kabbalah and Hasidism, but a masterpiece crafted over many decades of deep contemplation of the mystical teachings and life of the Baal Shem Tov." —**Estelle Frankel**, psychotherapist, spiritual director; author of *Sacred Therapy*

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"This deeply profound and personal work transcends genres—memoir, history, mystery, theology, text study, spiritual practice—and is an indispensable guidebook for those looking to find modern meaning in ancestral wisdom." —**Zvika Krieger**, spiritual leader, Chochmat HaLev; former director of responsible innovation, Facebook/Meta

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Rabbi Burt Jacobson z"l was a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he studied with Abraham Joshua Heschel, and was mentored in Kabbalah and Hasidism by Rabbi Arthur Green. After moving to California in the early 1970's, Jacobson joined with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and others in founding the Jewish Renewal movement, helping to reintroduce Jewish spirituality and mysticism in the US and throughout the world.

In 1984, Jacobson founded Kehilla Community Synagogue in Berkeley, which presently has a membership of 560 families. One of his tasks at Kehilla was the creation of new Jewish liturgy that was both universal and non-patriarchal. Out of this work he co-edited with Rabbi Leila Berner *Or Chadash: New Paths for Shabbat Morning*, the first liturgy for the Jewish Renewal movement, published by P'nai Or Religious Fellowship. Rabbi Burt was also instrumental in designing the curriculum for the Rabbinic Training Program of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.

Jacobson was a student of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, for more than a half-century. He lived in El Sobrante, California with his wife, Rabbi Diane Elliot, until his death earlier this year.