
Additional Readings Lesson 1

Critique of Pan-Determinism

by Victor E. Frankl

Psychoanalysis has often been blamed for its so-called pan-sexualism. I, for one, doubt whether this reproach has ever been legitimate. However, there is something which seems to me to be an even more erroneous and dangerous assumption, namely, that which I call “pan-determinism.” By that I mean the view of man which disregards his capacity to take a stand toward any conditions whatsoever. Man is *not* fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself whether he gives into conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining. Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment.

By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant. Therefore, we can predict his future only within the large framework of a statistical survey referring to a whole group; the individual personality, however, remains essentially unpredictable. The basis for any predictions would be represented by biological, psychological or sociological conditions. Yet one of the main features of human existence is the capacity to rise above such conditions, to grow beyond them. Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary.

Let me cite the case of Dr. J. He was the only man I ever encountered in my whole life whom I would dare to call a Mephistophelean being, a satanic figure. At that time he was generally called “the mass murderer of Steinhof” (the large mental hospital in Vienna). When the Nazis started their euthanasia program, he held all the strings in his hands and was so fanatic in the job assigned to him that he tried not to let one single psychotic individual escape the gas chamber. After the war, when I came back to Vienna, I asked what had happened to Dr.

J. “He had been imprisoned by the Russians in one of the isolation cells of Steinhof,” they told me. “The next day, however, the door of his cell stood open and Dr. J. was never seen again.” Later I was convinced that, like others, he had with the help of his comrades made his way to South America. More recently, however, I was consulted by a former Austrian diplomat who had been imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain for many years, first in Siberia and then in the famous Lubianka prison in Moscow. While I was examining him neurologically, he suddenly asked me whether I happened to know Dr. J. After my affirmative reply he continued: “I made his acquaintance in Lubianka. There he died, at about the age of forty, from cancer of the urinary bladder. Before he died, however, he showed himself to be the best comrade you can imagine! He gave consolation to everybody. He lived up to the highest conceivable moral standard. He was the best friend I ever met during my long years in prison!”

This is the story of Dr. J., “the mass murderer of Steinhof.” How can we dare to predict the behavior of man? We may predict the movements of a machine, of an automaton; more than this, we may even try to predict the mechanisms or “dynamisms” of the human *psyche* as well. But man is more than *psyche*.

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. That is why *I recommend that the Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.*

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been published in thirty-eight languages. His most famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, has sold more than nine million copies in the United States alone.

Man's Search for Meaning [New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1985], pp. 154–156

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The Human Personality

by Nissan Mindel

The Two Souls

We have already had occasion to note¹ that Rabbi Schneur Zalman begins his ethical work with an analysis of the psychological composition of the human—more specifically, the Jewish—personality. As a practical ethical philosopher and moralist, his immediate concern is with the psychic forces which mold the pattern of the daily conduct of the “average” individual.

Thus, in the very first chapter of the *Tanya*, the author lays down the foundation of his psychological system, which is based on the doctrine of the “two souls.” These souls are conceived as the sources of all human activity, and of the conscious and unconscious forces behind them.

The first is the so-called “animal soul” (*nefesh ha-bahamit*). It is the vital principle that animates the physical body, the “life” of the body. Indeed, it is also called the “vital soul” (*nefesh ha-chiyunit*), and the author uses the two terms interchangeably and, frequently, conjointly: “the vital animal soul” (*nefesh ha-chiyunit ha-bahamit*). It is the source of the bodily instincts and appetites and from it the senses derive their perception. The “vital” soul in man is akin to the “vital” principle that animates all created beings, inasmuch as it is the principle of their existence and functions. For this reason the mineral, vegetative and living forms of existence are said to possess a “vital” soul. But in addition to its animal functions, the vital soul in man possesses certain

essential qualities, such as intellectual and emotional attributes, which are not to be found in the lower animal species, and which make the “animal soul” in man distinctly “human.” These would include self-esteem, pride, modesty, ambition, and many other dispositions, both good and bad, which are “natural” to most men, and which come under what is commonly called “human nature.”

The second soul is of an entirely different category. It is defined as “a part of G-d above indeed,”² and termed the “Divine soul” (*nefesh ha-elohit*). It is completely independent of the body in the sense that it exists before its coming into the body, and it survives the body after the latter’s death. The Divine origin of this soul provides the extra-mundane dimension which enables the soul, while residing in the body and animal soul, to rise above them and act in defiance of the natural dispositions of the individual.

In other words, Rabbi Schneur Zalman presupposes two *distinct sources* of human activity: one *natural* and *this-worldly*; the other *supernatural* and *otherworldly*, and in his terminology—the “animal soul” and “Divine soul,” respectively. These two sources are combined in the living individual.

The doctrine of the “two souls” provides the basis for a number of interesting deductions, the most significant of which may be summarized as follows.

The complexity of human dispositions, especially the commonly experienced conflict between that which one is *disposed* to do and that which one knows one *ought* to do, does not stem from the division between the body and the mind, as had been assumed by some psychologists of the Middle Ages. In some Medieval analyses of human psychology, particularly those following the Neo-Platonic tradition, the body, as the vehicle for the lower faculties of the soul, was blamed for the evil impulses in man’s life, which man shared with the lower species. The rational faculties alone, namely, the intellect and rational will, were believed to be uniquely human. Consequently, a moral life could be attained only by the mastery of the mind over the body, i.e., by the mortification of the flesh.

¹ Mindel, Introduction, *Likutei Amarim [Tanya]*, Part One, pp. xxv, ff.

² *Tanya*, beg. chap. 2.

Moralists held that such mastery was possible because they believed that the mind was independent of the body, and that the rational contents which constituted the mind did not arise within, nor were they a real part of, the impulsive life.

In Rabbi Schneur Zalman's analysis, however, the human being is not simply a being composed of a body and a mind, but of a body and two minds, since each of the two souls has a mind of its own, with a will and reason of its own. The animal soul is the source of intellectual perception which is limited to the individual's *natural* mental capacities; the author calls it the "human intelligence" (*sechel enoshi*). This "human" intelligence manifests itself in such activities as the sciences, arts, handicrafts, and the like. The Divine soul, on the other hand, is the source of a higher, or "Divine intelligence" (*sechel elohi*). The "Divine" intelligence manifests itself in the quest for knowledge of the Creator, in love and awe of G-d, in the sense of the sublime and the holy, and in concern with similar purely spiritual matters.

Inasmuch as the animal soul is concerned with mundane matters and is the source of the instincts and impulses, its mind, will and reason are all influenced by the nature of this animal soul, since they arise within, and are part of, this animal soul. In this case the mind and the body act in unison, and there could be no freedom of will in a moral sense. It is only by virtue of possessing at the same time also a Divine soul, which is "otherworldly" and which transcends the body with all its dispositions, that man truly has freedom of choice in his actions.

As for the body itself, with all its natural dispositions, it need not at all be assumed that it is bad, any more than nature at large may be assumed to be bad in a moral sense. In Rabbi Schneur Zalman's analysis, the body is neutral ground, an instrument which can be used for either good or bad. Moreover, the very natural dispositions themselves are innocent forces which can be debased or sublimated at will.

The two souls, as conceived by Rabbi Schneur Zalman, do not constitute a dichotomy in the strict sense. The animal soul and the Divine soul do not reside in the body side by side, as two separate and irreconcilable entities. Rather

are they closely interlocked, with the Divine soul informing the animal soul and acting through it, while both together inform the body and act through the bodily organism. Nevertheless, they are distinct in their essence, being derived from two distinct sources, and this distinction provides the polarity of dispositions in human experience. It is the Divine soul, however, which constitutes the true essence of the human being. The Divine soul is the unifying principle which is potentially capable of making the individual a whole and harmonious man. Indeed, on balance, the Divine soul is potentially the stronger of the two, standing in relation to the other as light is in relation to darkness. Where light and darkness meet, light must prevail as a matter of course. In Rabbi Schneur Zalman's view there is no doubt but that the human being is essentially a moral creature.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman's doctrine of the "two souls," as he indicates in the opening chapter of the *Tanya*, is based on Chayyim Vital,³ the exponent of Lurianic Kabbalah, and is loosely related to a Scriptural text.⁴ Rabbi Schneur Zalman develops it at great length, and makes it a corner-stone in his ethics, philosophy and mysticism. He gives us a detailed analysis of the nature and functions of each of the two souls, which will be summarized below.

The Divine Soul

The "Divine" soul (*nefesh elohit*) is conceived as a substance which is "a part of G-d above, indeed." Its relationship to its Maker is based on more than a vague spiritual affinity. Rabbi Schneur Zalman sees the soul as emanating from G-d. To describe the soul's close relationship to its Maker, the author draws a parallel between the descent of the soul from the Divine Mind and the physical process of procreation, whereby a child "evolves from the paternal drop of semen deriving from the paternal brain."⁵ Thus, the Scriptural text, "Ye are children unto the Lord your G-d,"⁶ is to our author more than a figure of speech, or an expression of endearment. The relationship between the Divine

³ *Sha'ar haKedushah* and *Etz Chayyim*, Portal 50, ch. 2.

⁴ *Isaiah* 57:16.

⁵ *Tanya*, chap. 2.

⁶ *Deut.* 14:1.

soul and its Heavenly Father is more real to him than the corresponding blood relationship in the physical world. For, whereas in the physical world a father and son constitute two separate entities, the Divine soul and its Heavenly Father are never detached, since in the metaphysical order there are no limitations.⁷

The concept of such an absolute affinity has far-reaching implications, not only for the man-God relationship, but also for the inter-human relationship. It lends reality to the Chabad concept of true brotherhood. For although the author acknowledges that there are myriads of gradations in the quality of souls, he insists, nevertheless, that all emanate from the Supreme Mind, or Supernal Wisdom (*Chochmah Ila'a*), and all thus truly have one Father. Hence, those individuals who are conscious of possessing such a soul must be conscious of the close affinity that unites them with others. It is only such individuals who accentuate the physical and material aspects of life that see themselves as separate bodies. But, after all, it is the spirit and not the body that constitutes the essence of man, and those who, like Rabbi Schneur Zalman, can see through the outer shell and perceive things in their true essence and reality, must be conscious of unity rather than separateness. This feeling of real brotherhood is not restricted, of course, to the Chasidic community.⁸

Turning to the nature and faculties of the Divine soul, Rabbi Schneur Zalman develops an elaborate anatomy of the psyche.

He, too, speaks of the psychic triad, the *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*. But in the *Tanya* this triad is not conceived in terms of faculties distinct from the soul's substance, as in Platonic thought, but rather in terms of the soul's substance.

What exactly is meant by the triple distinction of *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*, as conceived by Rabbi

⁷ Cf. Isaiah Hurwitz, *Shenei Luchot haBerit* (Amsterdam, 1698), pp. 326b, 380b.

⁸ See *Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov*, by Abraham H. Glitzenstein, KPS (Kfar Chabad, Israel, 1960), pp. 154 ff. Rabbi Schneur Zalman's doctrine of *Ahavat Yisrael* is completely influenced by the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings.

Schneur Zalman, is not explained specifically in the *Tanya*. Apparently, the definition of these terms is of no immediate concern to the main theme of this work, which, as we had occasion to note, centers on Divine service reaching to the highest levels of love and awe of G-d. However, from other sources where Rabbi Schneur Zalman deals with the subject, we gather that the said three categories of the soul are conceived as three dimensions of the soul's essence itself. Broadly speaking, it may be said that *neshamah*, the highest dimension, is reflected in the soul's intellect powers; *ruach*—in its emotion powers; and *nefesh*—in the soul's outer manifestations, or "garments," namely, the faculties of thought, speech, and action. Be it as it may, the *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*, "constituting the Divine soul even of the 'ame-ha-aretz and the most worthless, all emanate from the Supreme Mind, which is, as it were, the Supernal Wisdom (*Chochmah Ila'a*)";⁹ all belong in the higher source of consciousness and have nothing to do with the lower instinctual or impulsive life, which lie within the realm of the animal soul. Rabbi Schneur Zalman's concept of the soul as being composed of *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah* is largely derived from the *Zohar*, where all three are conceived as being already contained in every soul.¹⁰

The soul operates by means of its *powers* which in turn are manifested through the bodily organism. The *Powers of the Soul (kochot ha-nefesh)* are divided into two broad categories: General Powers and Particular Powers. The *General* powers are Delight (*oneg*) and Desire or Will (*ratzon*).¹¹ They are termed "general" because they are not associated with any specific organ of the body. One may find delight in intellectual activity, or in emotional experience, or in the activity of any of the physical organs. Similarly, the desire and will exercise influence over the intellect and emotions, as over the conscious movement of the bodily organs.

The *Particular* powers are subdivided into two categories: Intellect-powers (*sechel*) and emotional qualities (*middot*). The Intellect-powers are said to "reside" in, i.e., act through, the brain, whence they extend to the

⁹ *Tanya*, chap. 2.

¹⁰ *Zohar* I, pp. 79b, 141b, 206a; III, 70b, etc.

¹¹ The Hebrew word *ratzon* means both desire and will.

heart. From their primary seat in the brain, the intellect powers extend to other bodily organs by means of the nervous system, such powers manifesting themselves in various skills and arts performed by the bodily organs.

The intellect has three faculties: *chochmah*, *binah* and *da'at* (hence the abbreviation ChaBaD). These are generally translated as “wisdom,” “understanding,” and “knowledge,” respectively. But in the *Tanya* these terms mean something quite different. What is meant here by *chochmah* is the power of conception, the faculty where an idea is first conceived; *binah* refers to the cogitative faculty, where the idea is analyzed; and *da'at* represents the final state in the mental process, where the idea attains its most definite comprehension, which, in turn, gives rise to corresponding emotions and feelings. *Da'at* is the mental faculty that transforms ideas into motivated dispositions.

Chochmah is creative; *binah* is developmental; *da'at* is concluding. The conclusion produced by *da'at* will vary with the type of subject engaging the mind: in theoretical speculation it will produce the logical inference or opinion, e.g., the verdict in a legal problem; in moral judgments it will produce a disposition consonant with the judgment, such as a feeling of attraction or aversion in relation to the moral issue under consideration. It is with the latter function of *da'at* that our author is specifically concerned.

Creative intellectual activity begins with a “flash,” or a “point” (comparable to the geometric point that is the beginning of all construction). The Hebrew word *chochmah* contains the letters that can be reconstructed to form the two words *koach-mah* (“the potential what”).¹² Undefined and unarticulated, this “point” already contains the whole concept *in potentia*, like a seed potentially containing the whole tree within its fruits. Because it is as yet amorphous, comprehension is lacking, and the flash of illumination might be dissipated unless it is promptly developed. Here it is where the faculty of *binah* takes up this “point” and begins to expand it. The idea begins to take shape and form, depth and

¹² *Tanya*, chap. 18. The faculty of *chochmah* is identified with humility and self-abnegation (*bittul*). Cf. *Zohar* III, p. 34a.

breadth. The “point” develops into a structure. (*Binah* comes from the root *banah*, to build.)

In the mystic language of the Kabbalah and Chasidut, *chochmah* and *binah* are termed “father” and “mother,” because *chochmah* impregnates *binah* and from the union of the two the higher emotions are born.¹³

However, even after the idea is conceived and developed, it might still remain in the abstract, in the realm of pure speculation, unless the mind becomes completely imbued and thoroughly saturated with it, producing mature conviction and total commitment. This is the function of the third faculty, *da'at* “knowledge,” in the Biblical sense of the word, as in “And Adam knew Eve,”¹⁴ in the sense, that is, of attachment and union, resulting in a close correspondence between the intellect and the emotions.¹⁵

The faculty of *da'at* is of special importance in Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s psychological system. It is not only the concluding phase of the reasoning process, but also that intellect-power which exercises control over the consciousness; it compels and concentrates attention on the ideas arising in the mind. *Da'at* is the link between the reason and the emotions, and since the steadfast occupancy of the conscious mind is the prime mover of the higher emotions, and the latter in turn determine action, *da'at* has a decisive and dynamic role in determining the whole personality of the individual.

The intellect-powers of the Divine soul manifest themselves in contemplation of the Divine Being, of the *En Sof*. The emotions which these intellect-powers produce are fear, or awe, of the Divine Majesty, specifically the dread of being separated from G-d; and love of G-d, namely, the desire to be attached and united with Him. Love and awe are the primary emotions, from which all others evolve.¹⁶

In addition to the three intellect-powers, the Divine soul possesses seven essential affections, or emotional

¹³ *Tanya*, chap. 3. Cf. *Zohar* II, pp. 85a, 290a.

¹⁴ *Gen.* 4:1. Cf. *Shenei Luchot haBerit*, op. cit., p. 149b.

¹⁵ *Tanya*, chap. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

qualities (*middot*). The Hebrew word *middot* means “measures,” and the emotions (or affections) are so termed because they vary in quality and intensity in accordance with the quality of the intellect-powers of the individual which produce them.

The first three emotional qualities are the principal ones. They are *chesed* (“kindness”), *gevurah* (“severity,” in the sense of restraint), and *tiferet* (“beauty,” in the sense of harmony). The next three—*netzach* (“victory”), *hod* (“splendor”), *yesod* (“foundation”)—are secondary and auxiliary. The seventh, called *malchut* (“majesty”) is the outlet through which all emotions are communicated.

Chesed (kindness) is an affection which manifests itself in the outpouring of benevolence. It finds expression in charity, sharing of knowledge and in all acts of love and goodness. It is, in fact, identified with the primary emotion of *love*. It knows no limits.

Gevurah (severity) expresses itself in contraction, constraint, withholding. It is related to the primary emotion of *fear* (or awe).

Tiferet (beauty) is a synthesis of the first two, with *chesed* predominating; a moderated kindness, resulting from the interplay of *chesed* and *gevurah*.

Kindness by itself, unlimited and untempered, despite its apparent attractiveness, can be self-defeating and harmful. Too much love spoils the child; too much bounty can be corruptive.

To be fully effective, the attribute of kindness must be tempered with that of severity, limiting the endowment to the absorptive capacity of the recipient. The injection of severity into kindness produces a new quality called *gevurah she-b'chesed* (“severity-in-kindness”).

Severity unmitigated is clearly undesirable. It must be tempered with kindness. This quality is termed *chesed she-bi-gevurah* (“kindness-in-severity”). An obvious example of it is found in the disciplinary action of the parent chastising the child.

The other emotional qualities, too, are not to operate in their pristine states, but must combine with one or more of the others, according to prevailing circumstances, or the needs of the situation. The initial combinations of the emotional qualities with each other result in 7×7 , that is 49, affections or dispositions.

The three intellect-powers together with the seven emotional qualities are said to correspond to the *Ten Supernal Sefirot* whereby G-d manifests Himself in Creation.¹⁷ In fact, just as the human soul descended from its Divine origins, so are its ten powers descended from the ten Divine Attributes. For it is a basic principle in Chabad, as in Kabbalah in general, that all phenomena in the temporal world have their “source” and origin in the eternal order.

In addition to these ten powers, the soul is said to possess three auxiliary instruments as outlets for its creativity. These are *thought*, *speech* and *action*. They are termed “garments” of the soul, being external to it. Thought is the instrument of the intellect. It is more closely related to the soul and enjoys a greater unity with it than the other two.¹⁸ It is continuous in its action, being constantly fed by an endless flow from the infinite capacity of the soul’s intellect.

Speech and action are more properly the auxiliaries of the emotions, since the latter necessarily exist in terms of an external object and must be communicated.

In thought itself there are said to be three categories, corresponding to the three faculties of the intellect, *chochmah*, *binah* and *da'at*, mentioned above. In the first, the thought is in its pure form, unarticulated. In the second, the idea receives mental “verbalization.” Here we find the term “letters of thought.” In the third, the thought has fully matured and seeks actual expression.

Having defined this soul as a part of the Divine, it is to be expected that all its powers would be oriented toward G-d. The nature of this soul is such that by its very essence it knows no commitments save to G-d alone. Its interests and activities are wholly centered

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, beg. chap. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 8

on G-d. Its essential attributes are awe and love of G-d; it desires only obedience to G-d and communion with Him. In the light of the above, Rabbi Schneur Zalman goes on to define the three “garments” of the Divine soul, namely, thought, speech, and action. These, too, are Divine in nature, being the soul’s contemplative, verbal and actual activity centered on the Divine Wisdom and Will which are embodied in the Torah and its precepts. These “garments” are thus the vehicles whereby the Divine soul communes with its Maker.¹⁹

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The Philosophy of Chabad: Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Vol. 2 [Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1973], pp. 25-39

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 4.

Additional Readings Lesson 2

Mind Over Heart?

by Tzvi Freeman

Getting your mind to rule over your heart is a common theme in Jewish teachings. It's also horribly misunderstood.

Most people, when they hear about the mind ruling over the heart, imagine a cold, calculated and stuck-up neurotic. After all, the mind is all those things. Wouldn't we much rather live with the vivacious, freedom-loving heart?

So we have to explain that when the mind is ruling the heart, it does not mean that the mind is at the top of the chain of command. Nobody wants the mind in charge—you'd never get anything done. The mind may be great at solving puzzles, but it's an incompetent idiot when it comes to real life. Rather, the mind is meant to be but a conduit for the soul.

You see, the soul, being beyond the body, has a higher vision. It also has some great ideas to express. But the soul needs to get the body involved in that vision and those ideas. And it knows the only way that can happen is by inspiring the heart.

Problem is, the soul is just too big for that little heart to contain. So when the soul makes a direct-line connection to the heart, the heart is overwhelmed. Sure, it may catch fire and burn wild for a while. But then it's all over and forgotten.

That's where the mind fits in. The mind has to reach up to the soul and catch some of its higher vision. Then it chews on that vision until it becomes real enough that the heart, as well, can relate to it. That's the point we call *Da'at*. Roughly translated as "realization." The point of, "Yeah! It really *is* that way!" That's the point where the heart kicks in, with lasting inspiration. It's the mind that gets the heart to that place.

To make this more real: Let's say you're a musician. You know your inspiration doesn't come from the mind—it comes from somewhere beyond that. But a lot of the time, it doesn't come at all. Your mind has to open up, tune in to something beyond itself. Then the juices flow and you can play with your heart.

But, on the other hand, all the time you are playing, you have to keep that mind in gear. If it slides out of the clutch and the heart takes over alone, the depth of the music is lost. Like jazz musicians say, you have to stay cool. That's what we call "mind over heart."

Okay, let's say you're not a musician. But maybe you like playing football. The same dynamics apply: If your heart is not into it, it just ain't gonna work. But if you let your heart go wild, you're not going to be on the league for too long.

So some people lose the mind and get caught up in the heart. Others forget about the heart and become wrapped up in the mind. Neither way is good. The point is to get the soul to express itself in the heart by reaching through the mind.

Getting this mind-heart thing down is not easy. First of all, during your initial exposure to life—known as childhood—you are basically an emotional animal, with little chance that the mind will have control of anything. Secondly, even once you grow up, the whole world is out to make you "just react" to their stimuli. After all, as long as you have control over your own brain and heart, it's kind of hard to sell you stuff you don't need and get you to work all those extra hours to pay for it. Most of the world feels much better if you leave them the keys to your brain and heart and just take a quiet place in the back seat, thank you.

So reclaiming your brain and heart for yourself is an upstream battle. *Tefillin* is one of those mitzvahs that provides a major boost to your forces. Take a few moments in the midst of the morning rush to put on *tefillin* and say the Shema. Then, during your day, remind yourself about

who's in charge. That you don't have to give in to every whim of the heart. That you're higher than that. That you have a mind and a soul—all your own.

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The Higher Sefirot

by **Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Even-Yisrael)**

All the names of G-d, with which the men of the Middle Ages were so entranced, are really descriptions, or titles, that serve as explanations of the Divine. In terms of the Kabbalah, what is being considered are the various attributes of G-d, and the Sefirot are listed in hierarchical order beginning with His Will, which is identified with Keter. Following are ChaBaD, which are the three attributes of Chochmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding) and Daat (Knowledge). The next three are Chesed (Love, Kindness), Gevurah (Strength, Control) and Tiferet (Beauty, Mercy). And the last are Netzach (Victory), Hod (Splendor), Yesod (Foundation), and Malchut (Kingdom).

Chesed is the act of giving—it is unlimited love and benevolence; Gevurah is the act of taking, restraining, or controlling, according to Divine understanding and by the use of Divine power, so that it results in Tiferet. Tiferet can be Rachamim or Mercy, Divine Pity, or it can be the Beautiful, emerging as a result of controlled and specifically directed abundance. The difference between the giving of Chesed and the giving of Tiferet or Rachamim is that when one gives out of mercy or pity, this is based on the fact that the other needs something that one wishes to provide, whereas Chesed is a giving that has no limit, that is, the limit is proportional to the measure of Chesed. Some may love more, others may love less. In Rachamim or Mercy, the measure is defined by the need, and it is in

this sense that it becomes an act of splendor or beauty, that which is sometimes termed harmony; in certain places it is called truth, and elsewhere it is known as the measure of the Torah. There is an objective quality about it that is not to be found in either Chesed or Gevurah. That is to say, whether one loves or whether one hates, one is hardly objective; the feeling is essentially drawn from within oneself and is relatively independent of the recipient. In contrast, Rachamim or Tiferet has to be based on an objective grasp of the situation; a feeling of compassion is directed toward something in particular. Thus, all the names or descriptions of G-d are Divine attributes, but they point to very specific aspects of reality.

The fact that man cannot get out of himself makes everything he does or thinks an extension of himself. For better or for worse, that is the way man conceives things and ideas. Where there is no physical, sensual basis, we make some picture of its effect on us and we form the world of the other accordingly. Man cannot have a mental grasp of anything except through the limited structure of the human mind. As Ibn Ezra said, the human soul conceives everything according to its own capacities, raising the inferior and lowering that which is above it. Anthropomorphism can function in two directions and can confer on lower creatures as well as on higher creatures all sorts of human qualities. Thus, in certain kinds of animal stories, the beasts and birds are made to feel and talk like people. It is the same kind of error, in a way, as describing the acts of angels or even G-d in a humanly comprehensible fashion. Thus, when one speaks of love, for example, it is considered to be the same kind of things for animals, men, and angels.

To be sure, it is claimed that love is always subjective; there can be no other love but that which one feels oneself. In answer to which, let us presume that Chesed can be conceived theoretically as a certain kind of Divine attribute, a quality of attraction and benevolence that can assume a multitude of forms. But in one's own expression of this love, it is always very limited. Every creature experiences it differently, but it is the same paradigm, the same model.

Are we then bound to our own models? Can we not create new paradigms of experience? According to Baal HaTanya, we cannot, as was stated within a different

context of thought. Thus, let us consider another Sefirah—like Keter (Crown)—the primary sense. It is too high, too abstract. So that we have to translate the concept of Keter as Will, which is something that can be grasped. And then, even though we are fully aware that this translation, or this image we now form in our minds, is not correct, we are unable to free ourselves of it. The ranges of our vocabulary and our thought processes is too restricted, and what is more, the mind always returns to its own private realms of experience. We are limited by the fact that even ideas of vast proportions cannot be expressed except by ourselves. And all we can do is admit that the expression is not completely true, that it is woefully inadequate.

Anyone who needs models or metaphors for his work has often encountered the difficulty of being unable to extricate himself from the model and of going back to the original. The simplified sample has a hold over the mind that the complex source cannot always have. Indeed, everyone clings to a particular model of things, and this often serves an obstacle to the truth of the matter. Of course, without these models it is virtually impossible to solve many problems. Indeed, in all the fields of human knowledge, we have the dilemma of the model that serves as an aid and becomes an obstacle to understanding. It may be likened to the previously discussed relationship between form and content, the inner and the outer, the light and the vessel to contain it. The light cannot exist without a vessel, it cannot manifest without something to reflect it, but when it does appear, one sees the object, the vessel, and not the light itself. The two have become one.

What is being explained here is the need for dependable points of departure. We define things, and our definitions certainly have a meaning. Nevertheless, they can get beyond the grasp of our intelligence. When one goes a little beyond the limits of one's powers of conceptualization, one no longer knows what one is talking about.

At the same time, we do choose one particular model rather than another, and no matter which we choose, the connection with the original concept is maintained. Thus, we make a model of the atom, for example, knowing full well that none of the relations are accurate and that neither the electron, nor any of the other particles,

whether neutron or proton, are solid pieces of matter. Nevertheless, the model itself helps us to understand the atom so that it is possible to work on it. It is not at all a model in the sense of an exact reproduction on a different scale. It is a working model, an abstraction. The important thing is the inner relations between the parts.

In the same way, the human body is often used to express various and metaphorical concepts. Thus, when we say that Chesed and Gevurah may be charted on a diagram of the Sefirot as right and left in terms of function, we do not mean to insinuate that Chesed is like the right hand of G-d or that it has anything to do with the right hand of a man. It is a model of only limited homologous relations that has value only because it enables the mind to grasp certain truths. Thus, too, many of the source incidents of the Halachah, as described in the Scriptures, are really only models. A butting ox, an exposed pit, and the like are models of legal problems or rather of relations between litigants. Unfortunately, too many of those who study Talmud find it hard to extricate themselves from the confines of the model. In this case, as in all instances of being trapped by the metaphor, the model becomes something absurd.

It is the imagination that interferes. One has to learn to function on two levels—one, recognizing that the model helps us to understand something, the other, that it doesn't really express the things itself. This sort of intellectual difficulty is sometimes the chief obstacle in the way of certain cultures that seek to adapt themselves to a scientific approach. They confuse the model with the original object, often as a result of a long tradition of idolatry, of failing to distinguish the instruments of Divinity from Divinity. And the failure to free oneself from the model and to relate to the source is idolatry.

No matter, then, how much one praises G-d, He is still far beyond anything one can say or conceive, whether great or small. As far as created beings are concerned, the first attribute is Wisdom. It is the source. Nevertheless, it is with Daat (Knowledge) that the other attributes are most directly connected, and this is itself derived from Chochmah (Wisdom), so that love, fear, and so on need to "know" an object of their emotions. Which also explains why children are often so angry and cruel—they do not have sufficient connection with Daat (Knowledge) and with Wisdom. Cruelty is, in most instances, a matter

of not being able to grasp the essence of another creature, of not being able to put oneself in the place of another and to imagine his reaction.

The same thing is true of anger. Incidentally, Judaism never looked on children as innocent and pure. They were never considered little angels. On the contrary, they were considered liable to sin and cruelty out of ignorance. Man is not born human; he comes into the world as a wild young creature. As he grows, he may become tame. His wildness as a child is a result of not grasping the existence of the other; it is ignorance, a lack of knowledge, that makes empathy impossible.

Are we hereby accepting the principle of “natural” order, in which the big fish eat the little fish and everyone must fight for himself? To be sure, fish are not burdened with knowledge, whereas man does have some sort of knowledge of the other that is translatable as empathy and that repudiates anger and aggression. Cruelty, we say, is the result of ignorance, and ignorance of the other person, that is, and not an intellectual ignorance. Because a person can be very intelligent and lack knowledge of another person. There is even an expression to describe such a type: “A scholar without Daat,” which is sadly appropriate for many of our intellectuals.

The idea here is that Knowledge and Wisdom have decisive influence over the other attributes. Thus, it follows, for example, that love cannot exist in the abstract. There has to be a certain amount of knowledge or conscious relation to something in order for love to manifest. There can be a great deal of attraction to something or someone, but this is not the same thing. All emotions and the attributes need Chochmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), and Daat (Knowledge) in order to grow.

In fact, the three higher Sefirot, called from their initials, ChaBaD (Chochmah, Binah, and Daat), create the background for the existence of all the other attributes and their various activities. One loves or hates or pities, and this in turn stirs up thought processes that take form in worlds. To be more specific, there are two stages: one is that of the thought before it is expressed in words, and the other, when the thought enters into words and becomes indistinguishable from them.

The relation between thought, speech, and action is fairly dear and one leads mentally to another as, for instance, in giving an instruction. When it is an instruction given to oneself, as in operating according to plan, then the vessel is the body, and speech, or expressed ideas, is the soul. In terms of the holy letters, however, the letters of speech are the instruments, the body, while the letters of thought are the contents, or the soul, of the same thing. Ultimately, as mentioned, thought itself is also physical; it is a part and function of the brain and, therefore, of the body.

Insofar as the emotional attributes are concerned, like love and hate, words are not necessary at first. Only afterward are the emotions expressed in thoughts that act as the source for certain words. These words of thought, which are still far from being spoken, are what are called the letters of thought.

In other words, the “sechel” or conscious intelligence constituting all of the three ChaBaD Sefirot, is the soul of all the other, the emotional, attributes, constituting the seven remaining Sefirot. ChaBaD can even be concentrated in the Sefirah of Wisdom alone as the source, so that wisdom can be considered the soul of all the rest of existence. “Sechel” or “ChaBaD” vivifies the other attributes, the various attributes vivify thought, thought vivifies speech, and speech vivifies action.

Now the essential point here is that there is no difference between the first Sefirah of Wisdom and the last stage of action. Even though, for us humans, the distance between the two is the vastness of the whole spectrum of existence. This is all that we can possibly know, and the two are at the opposite ends. For G-d, however, the difference is of no consequence. What is for us a vast range of the spectrum of existence is for the Divine a mere speck of reality. It is we who have formed a scale of values, and there is no reason why it should bind G-d in any way.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Even-Yisrael) (1937–). Born in Jerusalem, Steinsaltz is considered one of the foremost Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. Praised by Time magazine as a “once-in-a-millennium scholar,” he has been awarded the Israel Prize

for his contributions to Jewish study. He is the founder of the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, a society dedicated to the translation and elucidation of the Talmud.

The Sustaining Utterance. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1989)

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Additional Readings Lesson 3

How Can I Be Happy?

by Aron Moss

Question:

I know that a Jew is supposed to always be joyous, but when I look at myself and my life I see no good reason to be happy. On the contrary, I have plenty of reasons to be miserable. Am I supposed to be able to just switch on happiness at will?

Answer:

Yes, we face some heavy challenges in life, and feelings of despair are understandable. But we can turn our situation around. Happiness is never beyond our reach.

That's because happiness is the natural human state. Just look at a young child. Children don't need to learn strategies for positive living, and they don't need a reason to be happy. They need a reason to be sad. If a child cries, we ask, "What's wrong?" If a child laughs and plays and dances around the room, we don't ask, "What's the big celebration about? Why are you happy?" A child is happy by default; if they aren't happy there must be a reason, like they need to be changed, they are hungry or thirsty or tired, or need attention, or just had a *Bris*. But as long as nothing's wrong, a child is happy for no reason at all.

Somewhere along the line things change. We grow older and become more demanding, harder to please, and we lose this childish contentment. As we become jaded by life's disappointments, we feel that we need a reason to be happy. If you see an adult walking around with a big smile, you ask, "What's wrong with you, why are you smiling?"

The difference is, a child is not self-conscious. They are free to be happy because they are not yet aware of themselves. It is only when we mature and become more self-aware that we also become more self-absorbed. We have worries and concerns, unfulfilled desires and unrealized dreams. None of us can honestly say we have it all, and we can always find reason to be upset. But a child isn't bothered by what he is "missing," so he *does* have it all. The child's lack of self-consciousness leaves her free to enjoy life and be happy.

The more we are concerned with our own happiness, the farther we are away from achieving it. As soon as we forget about what we need and instead focus on what we are needed for—the good we can do for others rather than the good we can get for ourselves—our childlike joy comes flowing back and we are happy.

This is the focus of the joyous holiday of Purim: a time to give gifts to friends, donations to the needy, to say *l'chaim*, loosen our grip on our self and thank G-d for the opportunity to be alive. Even in the darkest times, by becoming mission-focused rather than self-focused, we can access our inner joy.

Happiness is not somewhere out there; it rests within, in that part of us that is forever young and forever giving—our soul.

Rabbi Aron Moss teaches Kabbalah, Talmud, and practical Judaism in Sydney, Australia. He serves as rabbi of the Nefesh Synagogue and authors a popular weekly syndicated article on modern Jewish thought.

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Self-Esteem, Joy, and Enjoying Life

by Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

Living with joy is central to a Torah life. This is emphasized in Deuteronomy (28:47), where the Torah cites the terrible consequences that will befall those who deviate from the Torah because they “did not serve G-d with joy.”

The Baal Shem Tov and the great chassidic masters repeatedly stressed the importance of *simcha* in Jewish living. If one had to encapsule the message of chassidus in one phrase, it would be: “*Simcha is in, despair is out.*”

If we understand *simcha* to be spiritual elation rather than the gratification of all our physical desires, it becomes evident that self-esteem is essential for *simcha*. Spiritual joy is dependent on a feeling that one is worthwhile, that one’s life has a purpose, and that there is significance to one’s existence in the universe.

The far-reaching effects of low self-esteem can be appreciated if we realize that the ultimate in human error and human transgression, *avodah zarah*, had its origin in low self-esteem. The Rambam states that idolatry began to sprout because *people did not believe that they were deserving of Divine attention*. People thought that G-d withdrew from direct involvement with His creation because it was beneath His dignity to associate with such lowly beings. They assumed that G-d had turned over the operation of the world to other powers, which were either the heavenly bodies, natural phenomena, or idols which represented natural forces. They therefore began to worship and seek the favor of these other powers.

The Rambam thus points out that *avodah zarah* is not a denial of the existence of the true G-d, but a *denial of G-d’s involvement with man*, which had its origin in man’s feeling unworthy of G-d’s providence. The essence of Jewishness and the refutation of *avodah zarah* is therefore contingent upon man believing that he is indeed significant and worthy of G-d’s attention.

The entire concept of *mitzvos*, which are Divine commandments to human beings, is contingent upon the assumption that G-d wants us to conduct ourselves in a certain manner. *Mitzvos* are thus inextricably bound to the belief that G-d maintains an interest in man. We pray to G-d and not to any intermediary because we believe that G-d listens and does not withdraw from us because of our infinitesimal nothingness. If there remains any doubt in anyone’s mind that humility and self-abasement are totally distinct from each other, this should set matters straight for once and for all. Self-abasement leads to rejection of G-d and is the basis for *avodah zarah*.

Positive self-esteem is thus essential for our relationship with G-d, for taking G-d into our lives, and for dedicating ourselves to Him and to the doing of His will. We can thus feel that G-d never abandons us, and that even in times of suffering He is with us, as the Psalmist said (91:15), “I am with him (man) in his distress.” Even if we cannot reach the sublime state of accepting suffering with joy, the realization that G-d does not forsake us and that our suffering is never without purpose permits us to experience joy in other phases of our lives.

As we come to accept our relationship to G-d, we can achieve the total dedication to Him, as King Solomon said, “Know Him in all your ways” (Proverbs 3:6). We can relate to G-d not only in the performance of specific *mitzvos*, but also in our “secular” acts. Thus, as we eat to sustain our strength so that we may do the will of G-d, as we sleep to restore our energies, as we work to earn our living to attain the necessities of life, as we recreate to refresh our spirits, in all these we are engaged in striving to fulfill His will, and we can thus find spiritual joy in everything we do.

The Baal Shem Tov once met a cantor in a small community who used to recite the *Al Chet* (Yom Kippur prayer of confession of sins) with a lively tune rather than with the traditional somber melody that befits such a solemn prayer. He asked the cantor to explain this unusual behavior, and the cantor replied, “If a devoted servant of a king is assigned the task of cleaning the palace and removing all the trash, would he not be jubilant in the knowledge that he is beautifying the king’s abode? Man is the palace of G-d, because He resides within each of

us. When I confess my sins and dispose of the objectionable matter that has accumulated within me, and thereby make myself into a more acceptable and suitable place for G-d to dwell, should I not rejoice?"

* * *

Inasmuch as we have defined self-esteem as an awareness of our capabilities, it follows that as we become increasingly aware of our capabilities, the intensity of our joy should increase.

I recall that when I was a medical student, the medical school acquired an electron microscope, capable of magnifying things many thousand-fold. This acquisition brought great excitement, because it would enable a much greater understanding of cellular structure than was heretofore possible. I was told of the similar euphoria experienced by a great violinist when he acquired a Stradivarius violin which would enable him to produce the finest and sweetest musical tones.

The person who feels his life's mission is the performance of the will of G-d will similarly rejoice when he becomes aware of the talents and skills he can put to use in the service of G-d. As his knowledge of Torah increases and he develops new insights and a greater capacity to understand Torah, the revealed aspects of G-dliness, and the ways in which man can enhance his relationship with G-d, he experiences a true elation. Yet since he recognizes these capacities as Divine gifts, he does not lose his humility.

There is yet another important relationship between self-esteem and joy. People who feel themselves to be not only undeserving but also worthless are often haunted by a morbid fear that they do not merit joy, and that any happiness they might experience will be short-lived. They are actually afraid to be happy because they fear that if they are, the object of their joy will be taken from them. Occasions that should result in happiness produce intense anxiety instead. Mothers who feel undeserving of *nachas* (taking pleasure in their children) have expressed the terrifying and persistent fear that if they enjoy their children something will happen to them. Many a young mother with this problem has spoken of her reluctance to go to her baby's crib in the morning for fear she will find the infant dead.

People with this kind of anxiety whose business ventures turn prosperous develop the fear that some unforeseen economic cataclysm will cause them catastrophic losses. These are people who do not permit themselves to enjoy what G-d has given them. As we pointed out earlier, sometimes the anxiety of anticipating disaster may be so severe that the person will actually do something to precipitate the feared loss in order to be free of the tormenting distress of suspense.

The Torah approach can eliminate this terrible anxiety. While it is true that one should not consider himself deserving of reward, for that would mean that he feels he has done something for which he should be rewarded and this constitutes *gahva*, nevertheless, as children of our Father we should know that we are loved, and that a father does provide for his children out of his great love for them, as long as the children do not use the father's gifts in a destructive manner. Although we may not consider ourselves deserving of an earned reward, we should know that we can be beneficiaries of G-d's grace.

Torah states that although the righteous might be justified in asking G-d for the reward they have earned, they ask Him rather for gifts of grace (Rashi, Deuteronomy 3:23). The problem with people who have negative self-images is that because of their self-deprecation they consider themselves to be despised rather than loved by G-d, and hence unworthy even of His grace.

Another way in which a person may justly consider himself to be worthy of Divine gifts without the *gahva* of feeling that he has earned it is by asking for something not by virtue of what he has *done*, but because of what he is *going to do*. Inasmuch as self-esteem as we have defined it is the awareness of one's capacity to perform, there is no *gahva* in the statement and supplication, "True, I have not done anything to be deserving of Your gifts, but I ask for Your bounty so that I may best serve You in the future." Asking for an "advance" because of what one intends to do is not *gahva*.

The person with low self-esteem who does not consider himself capable of doing anything in the future, and is so self-abasing that he does not believe himself to be worthy even of gifts of grace, is left without grounds to

accept joy, and thus lives in morbid fear that his happiness will be taken from him. This can result in anxiety and depression so severe as to interfere with his living a normal and productive life.

Appropriate enjoyment of life is essential for Torah living. The Talmud states that among the questions a person will have to answer on his day of judgment before the heavenly tribunal is, "Did you enjoy My world?" (Jerusalem Talmud Kidushin 4:12).

Joy also has a special relationship to gratitude. People who are recipients of bounty and who do not consider themselves worthy of this in any way cannot feel or express true gratitude. Quite the contrary, they feel guilty for receiving something which they feel they do not deserve, and this guilt results in resentment rather than gratitude toward the giver. This resentment in turn gives rise to additional feelings of guilt, since the person is aware that he should be grateful rather than resentful, and this new guilt in turn generates more resentment, resulting in a destructive vicious cycle.

Let us see how Torah deals with this. A Jew comes into the land of Israel and tills the soil which has been given to him. As the first fruits ripen (*bikurim*), he takes an offering to the sanctuary in Jerusalem.

The Jew then recounts his humble origins, relates his suffering in Egypt and his deliverance from bondage, and states that he is grateful for the land that G-d has given him in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He then places the offering of the first ripened fruits before the altar and is instructed, "And you shall rejoice with all the bounty that G-d has given you" (Deuteronomy 26:11).

Gratitude with joy! Let us see the Torah formula for this.

"I have received this land, not through my own merits, not even because I earned them through suffering (for this would be *gahva*), but because G-d fulfilled His promise to our ancestors. I am a recipient of the bounty which is mine by the grace of G-d and by the virtues of my ancestors, and I am grateful for this. As a child beloved to G-d I can receive this grace, and as a descendant of my ancestors I

am entitled to inherit from them. I do not feel guilty that I have received something which should not be mine, and I can therefore be truly thankful and fully enjoy what I have been given."

Just adjacent to the *mitzvah* of *bikurim*, the Torah provides us with yet another insight to help us accept and enjoy the good in life. Every few years, the Torah states, a person must properly dispose of the obligatory tithes which had not yet been delivered to their designated recipients. When this is done, the person then must testify before G-d that he has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of tithing as commanded, and that he has not violated any of the prohibitions associated with them. "I have obeyed the word of G-d, and I have done all that You have commanded. Look down from Your abode in heaven and bless Your people and the land that You have given us, as You had promised to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 26:15).

A loving father takes pleasure in providing for his children, particularly when he sees that they are doing their utmost to please him. At any rate, as long as the children do not use what he gives them in a manner destructive to themselves or others, he will not withhold his bounty from them.

In my work with people addicted to alcohol or drugs, it is frequently necessary to counsel parents to withhold financial support from their child if the latter is using this to buy alcohol or drugs. We speak of this as "tough love," because out of true love for their child the parents must take harsh measures to avoid enabling his self-destruction.

Although we may not be able to understand precisely how observance of all the *mitzvos* are to our advantage, it is a basic tenet of Jewishness that this is indeed the case. G-d is complete and absolute perfection, and He does not gain or lose by our compliance or non-compliance with His will. Transgression of the Divine prohibitions are to our own detriment.

If we can attest that we have not used G-d's bounty inappropriately and to our own detriment, then we have every right to ask G-d to continue His bounty and bless us with prosperity, if not by virtue of our merit, then in fulfillment of His promise to our ancestors.

There are thus three reasons why a person may feel secure in enjoying the goods of the physical world: 1) as gifts of Divine grace; 2) as “advances” for the merits that one will achieve in the future; and 3) as fulfillment of G-d’s promise to our ancestors.

* * *

“And you shall rejoice with all the bounty that G-d has given you” (Deuteronomy 26:11). Since Torah tells us to rejoice, being happy is a *mitzvah*. The derivative of this is the converse, that depression is a sin.

But how can it be said that to be depressed is sinful? What is a person to do if unpleasant things have happened to him that cause him to be sad? Since reacting to misfortune with sadness is a normal human response, how can a normal reaction be considered sinful?

Here we come to an important clinical as well as ethical-moral distinction. Clinically, there is a distinction between distress or sadness and depression. A person may feel disappointed, disillusioned, dejected, unhappy, or in any other way emotionally distressed, but true depression does not exist unless there is one important clinical characteristic: despair or hopelessness. There can be various intensities of despair, and when despair is very profound, it may lead to death wishes or suicide. However, as long as the person has hope of feeling better and that things will improve, his negative feelings, distressful as they may be, do not constitute what I consider clinically to be a depression. Hope is to joy what despair is to depression.

A Torah-true person, even in the depths of dejection, should find hope in his faith that G-d will never abandon him. King David illuminated this for us: “For You will not abandon Your pious servant to the depths of hell” (Psalms 16:10). Indeed, to save himself from depression, the humble David dared to call himself pious, and felt he was deserving of G-d’s salvation. David continued, “You will teach me a way of life, that I may be satiated with the joy of Your presence” (ibid. 11). If his deeds of the past did not merit the help of G-d, he could ask for help by virtue of his actions in the future. There is always hope. Thus, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav said, “There is no such thing in reality as hopelessness. Despair does not exist.”

We have already noted that the *sitra achra* has extraordinary powers. It can distort our perception of reality. It can delude us and cause us to see things that do not exist.

I have had alcoholic patients who would stop their drinking when they began to hallucinate. Even in their drunken state, when they began to see things that they knew could not exist, they were able to recognize these as hallucinations, and knew that they had drunk too much. I have also had psychotic patients who hallucinated, yet were able to ask for help because they recognized their sensory experiences, vivid as they were, to be unreal. Even under the effects of alcohol or in a state of psychosis, these people were able to recognize unreal experiences as hallucinations.

When Rabbi Nachman said that despair does not exist in reality, he meant to say that if you feel hopeless you should have the presence of mind to recognize that this feeling can have no basis in reality. You should realize that the feeling of despair is a distortion of reality, a hallucination or delusion brought about by the *sitra achra*. Like a pink elephant, despair just does not exist. If you feel despair, this should immediately trigger your awareness that this is a feeling which has no validity, and regardless of how intense and real the despair may feel, it is not to be taken seriously. Since there is no despair, there is always hope, and where there is hope there can be joy.

Just as with the *mitzvah* of *bikurim*, so with all the good that we receive, we can be grateful and we can enjoy it. Whether we are beneficiaries of the grace of G-d or of His promise to our ancestors, or recipients of an advance for things that we will do in the future, we need not fear that our joy will be taken from us. Quite the contrary, just as G-d participates in our suffering, so does He also participate in our joy. Just as a father rejoices when he sees his children happy, so does G-d rejoice in our joy. The knowledge that we have caused G-d to have *simcha* should be invigorating and exalting, stimulating us to ever greater service of G-d.

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD (1930–). Born in Milwaukee, scion of the Chernobyl Chasidic dynasty, he is a well-known expert in the field of substance abuse. Rabbi Twerski has authored more than fifty books on self-help and Judaism, and

has served a pioneering role in heightening awareness on the issues of addiction, spousal abuse, and low self-esteem. He served as medical director of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh and as associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Let Us Make Man: Self-esteem Through Jewishness [Lakewood, NJ: CIS Publishers, 1987], pp. 157–167

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The Pursuit of Happiness

by Carlin Flora

Welcome to the happiness frenzy, now peaking at a Barnes & Noble near you: In 2008 4,000 books were published on happiness, while a mere 50 books on the topic were released in 2000. The most popular class at Harvard University is about positive psychology, and at least 100 other universities offer similar courses. Happiness workshops for the post-collegiate set abound, and each day “life coaches” promising bliss to potential clients hang out their shingles.

In the late 1990s, psychologist Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania exhorted colleagues to scrutinize optimal moods with the same intensity with which they had for so long studied pathologies: We’d never learn about full human functioning unless we knew as much about mental wellness as we do about mental illness. A new generation of psychologists built up a respectable body of research on positive character traits and happiness-boosting practices. At the same time, developments in neuroscience provided new clues to what makes us happy and what that looks like in the brain. Not to be outdone, behavioral economists piled on research subverting the classical premise that people always make rational choices that increase their well-being. We’re lousy at predicting what makes us happy, they found.

It wasn’t enough that an array of academic strands came together, sparking a slew of insights into the sunny side of life. Self-appointed experts jumped on

the happiness bandwagon. A shallow sea of yellow smiley faces, self-help gurus, and purveyors of kitchen-table wisdom have strip-mined the science, extracted a lot of fool’s gold, and stormed the marketplace with guarantees to annihilate your worry, stress, anguish, dejection, and even ennui. Once and for all! All it takes is a little gratitude. Or maybe a lot.

But all is not necessarily well. According to some measures, as a nation we’ve grown sadder and more anxious during the same years that the happiness movement has flourished; perhaps that’s why we’ve eagerly bought up its offerings. It may be that college students sign up for positive psychology lessons in droves because a full 15 percent of them report being clinically depressed.

There are those who see in the happiness brigade a glib and even dispiriting Pollyanna gloss. So it’s not surprising that the happiness movement has unleashed a counterforce, led by a troika of academics. Jerome Wakefield of New York University and Allan Horwitz of Rutgers have penned *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder*, and Wake Forest University’s Eric Wilson has written a defense of melancholy in *Against Happiness*. They observe that our preoccupation with happiness has come at the cost of sadness, an important feeling that we’ve tried to banish from our emotional repertoire.

Horwitz laments that young people who are naturally weepy after breakups are often urged to medicate themselves instead of working through their sadness. Wilson fumes that our obsession with happiness amounts to a “craven disregard” for the melancholic perspective that has given rise to our greatest works of art. “The happy man,” he writes, “is a hollow man.”

Both the happiness and anti-happiness forces actually agree on something important—that we Americans tend to grab superficial quick fixes such as extravagant purchases and fatty foods to subdue any negative feelings that overcome us. Such measures seem to hinge on a belief that constant happiness is somehow our birthright. Indeed, a body of research shows instant indulgences do calm us down—for a few moments. But they leave us poorer, physically unhealthy, and

generally more miserable in the long run—and lacking in the real skills to get us out of our rut.

Happiness is not about smiling all of the time. It's not about eliminating bad moods, or trading your Tolstoy-inspired nuance and ambivalence toward people and situations for cheery pronouncements devoid of critical judgment. While the veritable experts lie in different camps and sometimes challenge one another, over the past decade they've together assembled big chunks of the happiness puzzle.

What is happiness? The most useful definition—and it's one agreed upon by neuroscientists, psychiatrists, behavioral economists, positive psychologists, and Buddhist monks—is more like satisfied or content than “happy” in its strict bursting-with-glee sense. It has depth and deliberation to it. It encompasses living a meaningful life, utilizing your gifts and your time, living with thought and purpose.

It's maximized when you also feel part of a community. And when you confront annoyances and crises with grace. It involves a willingness to learn and stretch and grow, which sometimes involves discomfort. It requires acting on life, not merely taking it in. It's not joy, a temporary exhilaration, or even pleasure, that sensual rush—though a steady supply of those feelings course through those who seize each day.

There has been real progress in understanding happiness and how to get it. Here are the greatest hits, as it were, that jump out from the research.

Some People Are Born Happy

Some lucky souls really are born with brighter outlooks than others; they simply see beauty and opportunity where others hone in on flaws and dangers. But those with a more ominous orientation can alter their outlook, at least to a point. They can learn to internally challenge their fearful thoughts and negative assumptions—“she thinks I'm an idiot,” “I'm going to get fired,” “I'll never be a good mom”—if not eliminate them altogether. Engaging in positive internal dialogue is actually a mark of the mentally healthy.

Getting What You Want Doesn't Bring Lasting Happiness

You think happiness would arrive if you were to win the lottery, or would forever fade away if your home were destroyed in a flood. But human beings are remarkably adaptable. After a variable period of adjustment, we bounce back to our previous level of happiness, no matter what happens to us. (There are some scientifically proven exceptions, notably suffering the unexpected loss of a job or the loss of a spouse. Both events tend to permanently knock people down a notch.)

Our adaptability works in two directions. Because we are so adaptable, points out Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside, we quickly get used to many of the accomplishments we strive for in life, such as landing the big job or getting married. Soon after we reach a milestone, we start to feel that something is missing. We begin coveting another worldly possession or eyeing a social advancement. But such an approach keeps us tethered to the “hedonic treadmill,” where happiness is always just out of reach, one toy or one notch away. It's possible to get off the treadmill entirely, Lyubomirsky says, by focusing on activities that are dynamic, surprising, and attention-absorbing, and thus less likely to bore us than, say, acquiring shiny stuff.

Pain Is a Part of Happiness

Happiness is not your reward for escaping pain. It demands that you confront negative feelings head-on, without letting them overwhelm you. Russ Harris, a medical doctor-cum-counselor and author of *The Happiness Trap*, calls popular conceptions of happiness dangerous because they set people up for a “struggle against reality.” They don't acknowledge that real life is full of disappointments, loss, and inconveniences. “If you're going to live a rich and meaningful life,” Harris says, “you're going to feel a full range of emotions.”

The point isn't to limit that palette of feelings. After all, negative states cue us into what we value and what we need to change: Grief for a loved one proves how much we cherish our relationships. Frustration with several jobs in a row is a sign we're in the wrong career.

Happiness would be meaningless if not for sadness: Without the contrast of darkness, there is no light.

Mindfulness Brings Happiness

Mindfulness, a mental state of relaxed awareness of the present moment, marked by openness and curiosity toward your feelings rather than judgments of them, is a powerful tool for experiencing happiness when practiced regularly. “If you bring mindfulness to bear on negative feelings, they lose their impact. Just let them be there without struggling against them, and you’ll eventually feel less anxiety and depression,” Harris says. Don’t banish your negative feelings, but don’t let them get in the way of your taking productive actions, either.

Happiness Lies in the Chase

Action toward goals other than happiness makes us happy. Though there is a place for vegging out and reading trashy novels, easy pleasures will never light us up the way mastering a new skill or building something from scratch will.

And it’s not crossing the finish line that is most rewarding; it’s anticipating achieving your goal. University of Wisconsin neuroscientist Richard Davidson has found that working hard toward a goal, and making progress to the point of expecting a goal to be realized, doesn’t just activate positive feelings—it also suppresses negative emotions such as fear and depression.

Yes, Money Buys Happiness—At Least Some Money and Some Happiness

Money does buy happiness, but only up to the point where it enables you to live comfortably. Beyond that, more cash doesn’t boost your well-being. But generosity brings true joy, so striking it rich could in fact underwrite your happiness—if you were to give your wealth away.

Happiness Is Relative

Whether or not we are keeping up with the Joneses—a nagging thought known as status anxiety—affects how happy we are. Some are more obsessed with status

than others, but we’re all attuned to how we’re doing in life relative to those around us. To stop status worries from gnawing at your happiness, choose your peer group carefully. Owning the smallest mansion in a gated community could make you feel worse off than buying the biggest bungalow in a less affluent neighborhood.

Options Make Us Miserable

We’re constantly making decisions, ranging from what to eat for dinner each night to whom we should marry, not to mention all those flavors of ice cream. We base many of our decisions on whether we think a particular preference will increase our well-being. Intuitively, we seem convinced that the more choices we have, the better off we’ll ultimately be. But our world of unlimited opportunity imprisons us more than it makes us happy. In what Swarthmore psychologist Barry Schwartz calls “the paradox of choice,” facing many possibilities leaves us stressed out—and less satisfied with whatever we do decide. Having too many choices keeps us wondering about all the opportunities missed.

Happiness Is Other People

Positive psychologist Chris Peterson, a professor at the University of Michigan, says the best piece of advice to come out of his field is to make strong personal relationships your priority. Good relationships are buffers against the damaging effects of all of life’s inevitable letdowns and setbacks.

Do Your Happiness Homework

You can increase positive feelings by incorporating a few proven practices into your routine. Lyubomirsky suggests you express your gratitude toward someone in a letter or in a weekly journal, visualize the best possible future for yourself once a week, and perform acts of kindness for others on a regular basis to lift your mood in the moment and over time. “Becoming happier takes work, but it may be the most rewarding and fun work you’ll ever do,” she says.

Happiness Hinges on Your Time Frame

Feeling happy while you carry out your day-to-day activities may not have much to do with how satisfied you feel in general. Time skews our perceptions of happiness. Parents look back warmly on their children's preschool years, for example. But Daniel Kahneman of Princeton University found that childcare tasks rank very low on the list of what makes people happy, below napping and watching TV. And yet, if you were to step back and evaluate a decade of your life, would a spirited stretch of raising children or a steady stream of dozing off on the couch each day in between soap operas illustrate a "happier" time? Evaluate your well-being at the macro as well as the micro level to get the most accurate picture of your own happiness.

You're Wrong About What Will Make You Happy and You're Wrong About What Made You Happy

Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert discovered a deep truth about happiness: Things are almost never as bad—or as good—as we expect them to be. Your promotion will be quite nice, but it won't be a 24-hour parade. Your breakup will be very hard, but also instructive, and maybe even energizing. We are terrible at predicting our future feelings accurately, especially if our predictions are based on our past experiences. The past exists in our memory, after all, and memory is not a reliable recording device: We recall beginnings and endings far more intensely than those long "middles," whether they're eventful or not. So the horrible beginning of your vacation will lead you astray in deciding the best place to go next year.

Gilbert's take-away advice is to forgo your own mental projections. The best predictor of whether you'll enjoy something is whether someone else enjoyed it. So simply ask your friend who went to Mexico if you, too, should go there on vacation.

Happiness Is Embracing Your Natural Coping Style

Not everyone can put on a happy face. Barbara Held, a professor of psychology at Bowdoin College, for one, rails against "the tyranny of the positive attitude." "Looking on the bright side isn't possible for some

people and is even counterproductive," she insists. "When you put pressure on people to cope in a way that doesn't fit them, it not only doesn't work, it makes them feel like a failure on top of already feeling bad."

The one-size-fits-all approach to managing emotional life is misguided, agrees Julie Norem, author of *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking*. In her research, the Wellesley professor of psychology has shown that the defensive pessimism that anxious people feel can be harnessed to help them get things done, which in turn makes them happier. A naturally pessimistic architect, for example, can set low expectations for an upcoming presentation and review all of the bad outcomes that she's imagining, so that she can prepare carefully and increase her chances of success.

Happiness Is Living Your Values

If you aren't living according to your values, you won't be happy, no matter how much you are achieving. Some people, however, aren't even sure what their values are. If you're one of them, Harris has a great question for you: "Imagine I could wave a magic wand to ensure that you would have the approval and admiration of everyone on the planet, forever. What, in that case, would you choose to do with your life?"

Once you've answered honestly, you can start taking steps toward your ideal vision of yourself. You can tape positive affirmations to your mirror, or you can cut up your advice books and turn them into a papier-mâché project. It doesn't matter, as long as you're living consciously. The state of happiness is not really a state at all. It's an ongoing personal experiment.

Carlin Flora. *Editor and writer for Psychology Today from 2003–2011. She holds degrees from the University of Michigan and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.*

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Additional Readings Lesson 4

Proof

by the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

B”H. 25 Iyar, 5719¹

Mr. Yitzchak Damiel,
Peace and blessing!

I have received your letter, with the enclosed question from the young men and women. Please apologize to them on my behalf for the delayed response. I was especially preoccupied throughout the days and weeks before and after Pesach.

As the question itself cannot be fully dealt with in a letter, I have to limit my response to a number of fundamental points, but I hope that you will be able to add your own explanation to these points in my letter, based on the teachings of our Torah and especially the teachings of Chassidut.

Needless to say, if there are any aspects of my letter which are not sufficiently clear, I am always ready to respond to further inquiries—and even challenges or refutations—which I will endeavor to answer to the best of my ability.

In response to the question:

“Is there a convincing proof for the existence of the Creator that could satisfy us as skeptics beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt?”

At first glance² the question seems simple enough, especially since the concepts are straightforward and the

¹ June 2, 1959

² At this point, we depart from phrase-by-phrase translation, and revert to the translator’s loose rendition of this letter as published in *Fusion: Absolute Standards in a World of Relativity*, Ch. 1. Feldheim Pub., 1990.

terms familiar. But this apparent simplicity is deceptive, and to address the question properly requires clarity of language and careful definition of terms. In particular, what do we mean by “existence” and “proof” of existence? We must start here because these words mean very different things to different people. For example, that which constitutes complete proof for a young child may be totally inadequate for a meticulous scientist, and vice versa.

For instance, some say that for children, existence and proof of existence apply only to tangible objects—“seeing is believing.”

Included in this kind of proof is the general idea of a report. This too is a proof based on perception, except that it is someone else’s perception. Consider, for example, a person born blind and who has never seen the shade of pink called magenta. Does he have convincing proof for the existence of that color? Surely he will rely on the perceptions of others who tell him that there is such a thing as light, that it comes in various colors, and that these colors come in different shades, one of which is magenta. Although magenta is totally beyond anything in his experience, he has absolutely no trouble believing in this entity because he trusts other people’s reported perceptions.

At a more abstract level, another perfectly acceptable kind of proof is reasoning from effect to cause. Everyone acknowledges with complete certainty that everything that happens has a reason and cause for happening. Thus when one sees actions, these themselves are proof of an activating force, even though this is not direct proof and superficially there appears to be room for doubt. A classic example is the existence of electric power. Man is a sentient being; his sense of sight verifies the existence of colors, his sense of hearing verifies the existence of sound, etc. These are considered complete, direct proofs; yet, while we can sense current, man has no faculty to perceive electric potential, or voltage. We only see its effects, such as a

filament glowing or a voltmeter's needle moving, etc. Still, we are certain of our conclusion that there exists some imperceptible force, which we term electricity, which is the reason behind what we do see. This is considered conclusive proof in the same way one proves the existence of magnetism and other forces. Electricity is a prime example because its existence is totally accepted beyond any shadow of a doubt.

The scientist's faith in cause and effect is so intense that he will accept as undisputed fact the existence of an activating force, even if it plainly contradicts rationality. A case in point is the force of gravity. We are so familiar with the idea of gravity from every science book throughout our school years, that no one would dream of questioning it, even though rationally it is far more difficult to accept than electricity. Electricity is only imperceptible when it is still, but when it flows it can be felt and measured. Not so with gravity; no one has ever seen, felt or measured a wave or particle of gravity. Our only proof that the force of gravity exists is that physical bodies move. But how can a force act from afar with no intermediary whatsoever between the masses? With a remote controlled garage door or toy, there is a flow of measurable infrared or radio waves, but with gravity there is nothing but the simple faith that every action has a cause.

At first scientists tried to explain the force of gravity by assuming the existence of a fine mediating substance called ether. But the idea had to be abandoned because the proposed medium would have necessarily had so many contradictory properties that it became even more implausible than the alternative absurdity of remote action without any connection.

Anyone in the exact sciences who wonders whether the existence of the Creator can be reliably proven should consider another "standard" concept, derived from the realm of physics. This idea is so intellectually challenging that after many decades of study, even the experts admit it is beyond their comprehension. Nonetheless it is accepted by all exact scientists as a reality, and it is a proven fact in the eyes of the public. The idea referred to is that matter is nothing but a particular form of energy, and that it is possible to transform matter into energy and energy to matter. Superficially it may be hard to

see what is so difficult about this notion of relativity. However if one takes a moment to consider the degree of similarity between the light now emanating from his bulb, and the shoe on his foot, and then tries to imagine converting one into the other and back again, the problem becomes crystal clear. Everything in our experience leads us to think that matter and energy are as fundamentally different as two things can be. Therefore, to say that they are equivalent does not even sound, say, reasonable-but-difficult; it simply sounds ridiculous.

As with gravity, the only compelling proof for relativity is that we see events that have no apparent explanation and if we accept the theory—they are explained. This is considered a scientific proof and, on this basis alone, relativity is accepted virtually everywhere as conclusively demonstrated beyond the faintest doubt, even though from a strictly rational standpoint, the equivalence of matter and energy is not at all compelling.

People act in accordance with their beliefs, and skeptics are no different. Hence it is reasonable to expect that a skeptic will feel free to use as a basis for action any ideas that are shown to meet his criteria of legitimacy. On this basis, there is not only one, but several proofs for the existence of G-d and, as mentioned, there is no problem if one is forced to say that this existence is not grasped by the senses or the mind, or even if it contradicts rationality. As long as this existence accounts for observed reality and does so better than any other proposition, we have what is usually considered to be conclusive, scientific proof.

In this sense, proving the existence of the Creator is the same as proving anything else, whether in the realm of science or in the context of our daily lives.

Anyone who examines his daily conduct will admit that he doesn't perform a penetrating, thorough analysis assessing the reliability of the information on which he bases his daily activities. If the weather forecast calls for rain, he wears his boots even though he has never met the weatherman or studied meteorology, and furthermore he knows that the weatherman is often wrong. For another example, if Vitamin E is reported to cure baldness, he will take it without knowing for sure how it works or if it works. He'll take it without even knowing

what it is. Rather he accepts the words of others who did look into the matter.

Only where there is some doubt that maybe the “information” was faked or that the observer was affected by internal or external factors, or that he wasn’t sure himself and took someone else’s view, etc . . . Then one would seek additional evidence. And with every increase in the number of observers, and with every type of variation in position, situation and context relative to the observers, the likelihood of deception becomes more remote and the evidence is strengthened in the form of a scientific and convincing proof. On this basis, the individual and society engage in all kinds of activities and projects, with complete trust that their conclusions are true and established.

So too in our case. The giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai was verified, generation after generation, as a fact proven by the presence of 600,000 adult males. If one includes women, children, Levites, men over sixty, etc., there were present millions of individuals, including Egyptian emigrants, who saw the events with their own eyes and experienced Divine communication personally and simultaneously.

This is not a testimony restricted to a single prophet, a dreamer or an elite group. This testimony was transmitted from parent to child, generation after generation, and everyone acknowledges that there was no interruption in the transmission from then until now. Moreover, there have never been less than 600,000 reporters in any generation, people whose characters were dissimilar and who were by no means afraid to disagree on basic issues, as is well documented from Sinai on. Yet, despite all their differences and arguments, and despite their being dispersed throughout the world for millennia, all the versions of the above historical event are similar in every detail. Is there more reliable and precise testimony than this?

There is a second manner of proof which is also based on the premise above—that everything that happens has a cause, that seeing any event or situation is proof positive that some guiding force exists, even if the event was apparently senseless or destructive. This proof is as follows:

Consider any object. Virtually anything that one can imagine is composed of various parts that are arranged and coordinated with remarkable precision. None of the parts has any inherent control over the others and yet we know that the harmonious and unified functioning of the entire system is itself a phenomenon and must be due to some cause. We conclude from this with complete confidence that there is an external power that binds and unifies all the parts. Moreover, the very fact that it binds and unifies the parts proves that it is stronger than they are since it controls them.

For example, if we were to enter a factory where everything was run automatically and we did not see anyone there, we would not doubt the existence and involvement of a great mechanic whose knowledge encompassed all the machinery and component parts and who controlled them – one who was in charge of their functioning among themselves and who maintained the connection between the parts and the control center. On the contrary—the more concealed the hand of man in such a factory, and the more the operations are automated, the more impressed and convinced we are of the mechanic’s remarkable skill.

And if this is the case with a factory, where we are speaking of hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of parts, how much more true is this for natural objects, e.g., a piece of wood or stone, a plant or an animal, and—needless to say—the structure of the human body, as Job states, “From my flesh I will envision . . .”³ This is especially so from the scientific perspective that every object is comprised of billions of atoms, with each atom containing even more minute parts. One would think, at first glance, that chaos would reign and yield incomparable disorder. But instead, we see an amazing orderliness and a marvelous fitting of the smaller parts to the larger, up to the very largest as well as the integration of microcosmic and macrocosmic patterns and processes, etc., etc. It is therefore clear beyond any shadow of a doubt that there exists a “Mechanic” responsible for all this.

One might say that all this is governed according to the “laws of nature”—but I think it is important to emphasize

³ *Iyov* 19:26

that such expressions have no explanatory content, but rather give a convenient summary or description of the existing situation. That is, it is true that natural phenomena are conducted according to definite patterns. But to say that a “Law of Nature” is a being in and of itself without dependence, and that this being rules throughout the cosmos, and that there are thousands of beings like it, according to the number of natural laws, is so absurd that there is not one scientist in the field who would say so. Rather it is the case that such laws are merely convenient, summary expressions for describing a situation, so that one should not be forced to duplicate at every turn a lengthy description of the “simple” facts. But however elegant and sophisticated a law of nature may be, it is clear and obvious that such an expression provides no explanation whatsoever.

Now to the heart of the matter. To put it plainly, everyone has criteria for what can be reliably considered true. If an idea meets those standards, it is fit to be believed and acted upon. If it does not, then it is not suitable for belief or as a basis for action. But one may not adopt certain truth criteria when it is convenient, and then drop them when it is not. Therefore, it is assumed that anyone who is seeking a proof is not merely doing so for the sake of intellectual exercise, but would indeed live by his conclusions.

In this regard it should be noted that the aforementioned proof is much stronger than all those proofs and evidence by which people conduct their daily lives. What simpler illustration is there than the fact that, when retiring at night, one arranges everything for the morning even though there is no logical proof that tomorrow morning the sun will rise yet again and that all natural systems will continue to function as they did yesterday and the day before. It is only that since the world has been working this way for so many days and years, one trusts that these “laws” will also rule tomorrow and the next day.

And on this basis alone, a person strives and troubles himself to prepare his affairs for the following morning, even though he has no logically compelling reason to do so. On the contrary, if chance or random probabilities were running the show, it would be more reasonable to assume that tomorrow will be utterly unpredictable. The conviction that nature will continue to function as it

did today is only logically compelling when it is based on the knowledge that there really is a Master of the world.

Although more could be said on everything that was discussed above and certain points could be explained further, this should suffice and provide enough material for consideration and conclusion. For it is incorrect to maintain that the Creator’s existence requires proof, while His Creation itself exists beyond doubt, because in fact the opposite is true! Recent results of scientific research, regarding the existence of the universe and ways to “describe” it, contradict each other in numerous areas and indeed leave room for major doubts. But the most serious, significant and fundamental scientific doubt is as follows:

Who can establish whether the perceived impression of the eyes, of the ears, or of the brain generally, has any reality outside human sensation or thought? This argument poses an insurmountable challenge to the truth of the world’s existence but in no way applies to the Creator, nor to the functional reality of event causation and universal order. For this, practically speaking, it doesn’t matter whether there exists an independent reality or just the impression of such a reality. The primary consideration of the average person, and according to which he lives his whole life, is that for everything in his world there is a cause which acts, from within or without.

A further note of importance is that often human nature is such that when one is given a simple proof, it is difficult to accept because of its very simplicity. Such irrational rejection is unfortunate because it precludes any effect on personal behavior, while one of the foundations of our faith in the universe’s Creator and Director, as well as the stand at Sinai and the receiving of the Torah and its commandments, is that the quality of a person’s deeds is what matters most.

I will be pleased to hear responses to all the above, and as mentioned in the enclosed letter, I hope they will feel completely free to present their opinions, even if they disagree with what is written above.

With Blessing,

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994). Known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, Rabbi Schneerson escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the United States in June 1941. The towering

Jewish leader of the twentieth century, the Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe's scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than two hundred volumes.

Mind Over Matter: The Lubavitcher Rebbe on Science, Technology, and Medicine, Translated and edited by Arnie Gotfryd [Jerusalem: Shamir, 2003], pp. 1–10

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Faith

by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

For many people, among them those who either regret or boast about their being nonbelievers, the word “Faith,” written with a very capital F, is a very big block. In reality, however, faith is related not only to Great Things; it has to do just as much, if not more, with the myriad of little things that are a part of everybody’s daily life.

There are, obviously, many people who are credulous, and some others who are much less so, but nearly everyone is a believer to some degree. Belief exists even in the most hardheaded, rational nonbelievers. Many of us take pride in our rationality—we think we base our actions and thoughts on accurate knowledge, verified facts, and an orderly sorting and sifting of opinions. The truth, however, is that nobody is a total nonbeliever; all of us accept almost everything on faith.

Faith, in the everyday, common sense of the word, is so ingrained in our lives that we cannot do anything without it. We accept what we are taught in school and what we learn in the street. Most of these things are

not only unverified, they are unverifiable, yet they are still a huge part of our lives. It is practically impossible to do any real checking about most basic things. We do not have the time, the facilities, or the talents to find out for ourselves about most things that we say we know. We accept the facts about the height of Mount Everest—even most of the people who climb it do not bother to double-check the measurements—just as we accept facts about cars and electricity, signing contracts, and walking in the street. We take so much for granted because we have faith—to some degree—in the car dealer and the electrician, and in the normal, even decent, behavior of those people we encounter.

What we perceive as the dichotomy between “matters of faith” and “indisputable facts” has less to do with rationality than with what is socially accepted within our particular society, social group, and historical era. What “everybody knows” is something that we do not feel obligated to prove for ourselves. For the same reason, those things that are not a part of our accepted wisdom are left to the believer.

A microbiologist who did research in Africa used a very bright young local boy to run errands. He once tried to explain his research to the boy, describing the very tiny, invisible microbes that are all over the room, adding that they are liable to make a person ill, or even to kill him. To that, the child, who was educated by missionaries, retorted, “But sir, we Christians surely do not believe in that!” In some places, the existence of devils is an accepted fact, and everyone knows for sure that they exist; in other places, for the same frivolous reasons, no one believes in them. Thus, while our sets of belief are contextual, the underlying nature of faith is the same all around the world.

A crisis of faith, whether personal or general, is the result of cultural changes, both large and small. It is a matter of luck, of course, in what age one is born. There are ages in which faith is à la mode, and ages in which it is not fashionable to be a believer. Cultural fashions change no less than those of clothing. Just as there are fashion designers who set the style for women’s dresses and men’s ties, there are also people who create the intellectual fashion of the times, and decide what people should and should not believe. Yet, while we know who makes the rules

about women’s dresses, we usually do not know who is behind the intellectual fashions.¹

In an age of faith, people do not air their doubts and misgivings; most of them will never even have any doubts, because it is the social norm to believe. In other eras, it is just the opposite: skepticism is fashionable, and everyone joins in, following the admonition of the proverbial modern mother, “Why can’t you be a nonconformist, like everybody else?” Thus, everyone adheres to an idea that seems understandable and reasonable in their period in history; later, people may look back and wonder how they possibly could have held such an absurd belief.

For instance, not so long ago, in “the Red decades” of European and American history, it was commonly thought that everyone of any account was a Communist, or at least a sympathizer—including intellectuals, trendsetters, people who should have known better, and people who should have been far more critical. It was a period in which people were obstinate believers, persisting in their belief and ignoring any evidence to the contrary. Then the fad passed; now, believing in Communism seems out of step with the times. For the same wrong reasons that people once believed, they now have ceased to believe. Nothing intrinsic has changed—only the fashion shifted.

Cultural fashions influence not only opinions about art, morality, and politics, they affect almost every facet of life. Fashion creates things that people buy, wear, use, and hang on the walls, and we are trained not only to buy them, but also to enjoy them. The same law of fashion also changes our outlook and attitude about

¹ In the last thirty years, the Nobel Prize for literature has not had literary significance; it has been a forum for political statements of various sorts. Those who distribute the prizes probably have slide rules to calculate who is the up-and-coming person to get the prize: a man, a woman, black, white, oppressed, more oppressed, even more oppressed. Even in those times when prizes were given for purely literary reasons, the list contained some great writers, alongside others whom nobody remembers. At the time that they received the prize, they were all at the peak of their fame; now, it is difficult to imagine why anyone saw any value in their work, though it may have set the intellectual trends of the day.

matters seem to be merely utilitarian. From furniture to architecture, things are chosen not because it is sensible to do so, but because they are fashionable. Think, for instance, how bizarre and unnatural skyscrapers look. There may be good reasons why they are built in certain places or in certain ways; in others, they make no sense at all. We build huge glass structures in order to let the light in, and then we fill those structures with curtains, to block the light. Since glass buildings have become fashionable, we have glass buildings, even though they are neither useful nor beautiful.

In our times, the cultural rules allow for a certain amount of freedom—although quite limited—in our choice of what we consider to be beautiful. In other periods, society was more decisive. There would not even be disputes about beauty, since there was only one acceptable style, and all other styles were unacceptable. In ancient Egyptian paintings, all the faces are in profile, regardless of the stance of the body. If we did not know better, we would think that the Egyptians just did not know how to draw; they were too primitive. However, their drawings of animals are very realistic—only the human beings look stiff and unnatural. When Egyptian artists were allowed to make natural drawings, they were very good at it. Apparently, certain poses were just a fashion of art, and those poor artists were obligated to depict people according to the convention.

This adherence to fashion can also be found in architecture. There are no arches in ancient Egyptian buildings. It seems strange that people who were quite technologically advanced would not utilize such a functional structure. As it turns out, the Egyptians did know about arches, but they used them for sewage canals; they thought it beneath their dignity to construct dwellings with arches. It was not the fashion, so it did not exist.

Cultural fashion—or, as it has been called, “the spirit of the times”—has such tremendous power that it not only influences philosophy, beauty, and the like; even modern exact sciences are under its rule. In all sciences, including mathematics, there are periods in which certain questions become important and tempting, followed by periods in which these same subjects or methods lie dormant, until a new period comes. For example, the furious growth of physics—especially

atomic and subatomic physics—in the first half of the twentieth century, compared to its development in the second half of this century; the enormous growth of biology, biochemistry, and biophysics in the second half of this century; the recent flourishing—in popular interest, as well as in scientific work—of ecology; the ups and downs of space research; or the changes of interest and development in synthetic geometry versus analytical geometry. Many books have tried to explain these changes, and why they happen in the ways they do. However, all these explanations—regardless of whether they are right or wrong—do not contradict the most obvious fact: the change itself.

The decades or centuries of belief come and go, to be replaced by periods of skepticism or indifference, and then, by a profound change in the attitude toward faith. In an age of faith, it is easy to believe. In fact, in such an age, faith does not even require any belief. In certain times and places, one could not even speak about belief in God; it was a simple, self-evident fact. Not believing in God was a little more bizarre than doubting that the earth is round.

Generally, we accept the dictates of society almost without noticing. We take things for granted, we jump to conclusions, and we accept common knowledge and everyday realities unchallenged. None but the most abstract philosopher would doubt the existence of his own nose. However, when it comes to Faith with a capital F, things become more difficult; many people just cannot accept it.

Our times are clearly different. Our fin de siècle is not an age of Faith. Incidentally, we are not in an age of rationality or skepticism either, but rather in a time of credulity. We do indeed believe, or half-believe, in thousands of things—some of them pure nonsense—but not in Faith, in the capital F sense. There is a Jewish anecdote about two students who went for a walk in the woods, and happened to be in the line of fire of a hunter. When the shots whizzed over their heads, they were frightened and fell down, imagining that they were hit. After some time, one of them raised his head cautiously, saying, “It seems that we are still alive.” To which his friend responded, “And what is the basis for

this assumption?” Surely, most people would not go that far.

The difference between the two levels of faith—faith in conventional wisdom, and faith in God—is not grounded any psychological disparity, but rather in societal norms. When a person says that he is a nonbeliever, it is not a very accurate statement. A real nonbeliever would not get out of bed. If he did get out of bed, he would not take a step, because almost everything that we do depends on hundreds or thousands of beliefs, from believing that the sun will rise tomorrow to believing that salt is still salty.

Organized religions dictate the doctrines of faith that people are to believe; at the same time, they also set out what is heretical, what is not to be believed. When organized religion went out of style, and its nineteenth-century substitute, science, became far less dogmatic and self-assured,² that opened the way for superstition. Especially for the intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals, this was not a mishap, but a rather natural consequence.

A true agnostic is actually open to belief in every possible faith or superstition, because nothing is completely impossible, and there are no prescribed or proscribed beliefs. Thus, he is fair game for every movement, every “ism,” and every possibility. Everything is possible for a person who wants proof, especially negative proof, and who will accept or deny claims based only on proof. In a way, that stance leaves the poor agnostic in a position in which he never fully believes anything, but he half-believes everything, because the possibilities are endless.

Someone came to visit Niels Bohr, one of the greatest physicists of the century. To his great astonishment, the visitor saw a horseshoe hanging on the doorway. After some time, when they had become friendly, he asked, “Professor Bohr, do you believe in horseshoes?” Bohr said, “Absolutely not.” So the visitor asked, “Then why is one hanging in your doorway?” Bohr answered, “People say that it helps even if you do not believe in it.”

² The theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, and chaos theory have contributed a great deal to creating these feelings.

We all know sane, intelligent people who will not go to synagogue or church because there is no proof for the existence of God, but who will talk about vibrations, or who use crystals to heal themselves, who avoid the unlucky number 13, or who consult an astrologer. To be sure, not all intelligent people in our era are prone to all of the New Age superstitions; some people prefer to adhere to slightly older ones, so they firmly believe in *New York Times* headlines, in the wisdom of the theater reviewer, or in psychoanalysis. The fountain of Faith is clearly gushing there.

This abundance of belief, however, does not include faith in God. Even opening oneself to the possibility of faith in God requires an effort. Modern societal norms are almost like a religion, compelling everybody to belong, to acquire, to look a certain way, to act a certain way. Society dictates, “Intelligent people don’t do, or say, or believe in these things.” Remember the expression, “It is un-American to do something like that”?³ In order to extricate oneself from that compelling societal web, a person has to use a fair amount of disbelief, an ability to fight, to move against the stream. It takes learning and choice not to comply.

Although the ability to believe has not diminished, there is a deep mental gap between the things that people believe in, and faith in God. The distinction is not really rational; rather, it is one of perception. Those thousands of things that people normally accept with unquestioning trust are not perceived as requiring faith; they are considered “knowledge,” or “common sense,” while “faith” is required for things that are beyond the accepted norm of the time or society. Faith requires a jump, the proverbial leap of faith. There comes a point at which we have to jump to a conclusion that is not part of accepted knowledge.

This leap of faith is not easy. Faith, in the capital letter sense, is much harder than belief in everyday banalities, because it has so many mental and practical consequences. Many things are accepted without question because they are not considered important enough. For example, if I ask when Alexander the Great lived, people

³ Or the older and more enduring “un-English,” which would kill an idea or action in the heyday of the British Empire.

who remember history will give me the dates. Nobody doubts the existence of Alexander the Great. Why not?

The actual proof is, in fact, quite scanty: some stories in books, and some antiquities that have been identified as belonging to the era of Alexander the Great. There is circumstantial evidence that may support a belief in the existence of Alexander the Great, but it is surely not plain as the nose on my face.

Why is it, then, that people have no problem having faith in the existence of Alexander the Great? The reason is very simple: what do they care? If Alexander the Great did not exist, but rather was invented by somebody, so what? He is just one more figure in the world that is not entirely true. The existence or nonexistence of Alexander the Great has no real consequence in our lives. In the same way, we accept facts about the area of the Pacific Ocean, or about the wives of a sultan. These beliefs have no consequences, so it does not matter much whether we believe them or not.

Other beliefs are very demanding. Real Faith in important matters has consequences in one’s life; it affects one’s worldview and behavior, what one sees as right or wrong, one’s values in life. This is not simple, unimportant knowledge that one can take or leave at will. If God exists, there are obviously vast implications. As long as people do not know what they believe, or are hazy about their beliefs (which is the way most people are), they can do whatever they want without thinking too much. People avoid thinking; it is easier that way.

Accepting a tenet of faith is not difficult; the hard part is accepting the attendant consequences. There are certain facts that we do not know from our own experience, but they are certainties. When a person becomes aware of them, that changes his life. Take, for example, mortality. We do not know about mortality from first-hand experience; we know about it from other people, but they do not count. We are alive, and we do not acknowledge our own mortality. When we become aware of this fact—whether at the age of two or at the age of sixty-two—then of course life is affected. Plans change, expectations change, priorities change. The belief that death exists is not, in itself, startling;

accepting it, and coping with the implications, is always important and may sometimes be painful.

The second difficulty in making the leap of faith is that it is indeed a leap. One must be willing to decide to make the jump, and people do not make that leap unless they are compelled to do so. The compulsion is usually an inner drive triggered by questions that will not go away. Some people have philosophical-existential questions; Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* use two different styles to deal with the same question, "What is real existence?" The prophet Isaiah (40:26) starts out from an entirely different point of departure, saying, "Lift up your eyes to Heaven and see who created these: He who brings out the starry host and calls each one by name."

However, these big questions—about existence, and about who created the universe and is responsible for the order of the world—are compelling for just a few. Most people, especially city dwellers, never see the stars. They have hardly any interest in lifting up their eyes, and when they do, what they see is lighted billboards. The questions which bring most people to Faith are, in the very simplest words, "What is the meaning of all this? What is the purpose?" These are questions that, basically, do not have answers—unless one makes the leap of faith. Each of us asks our own question in our own way, at our own time. Sometimes, questions are asked in a moment of crisis, but often, in the midst of ordinary life, a person will say to himself, "I have a busy life; I do things, I run from place to place, I live, I eat, I go through the motions, but where am I running to? What is the meaning and purpose of all this?" Then the search for an answer begins.

Walking through life is like wandering in a labyrinth, constantly probing and searching for the opening, the answer to that riddle. It is depressing enough when we feel that we are not getting anywhere, but the deepest despair is when one knows that the labyrinth has no way out, that one will wander aimlessly from corridor to corridor until death. We do not always think about meaning and purpose, but when this question does come to awareness, it becomes a haunting, gnawing pain. We want a response to our deep existential questions, and we want a nontrivial answer. We have

trivial, temporary answers—too many of them. "I am here to make money" and "I am here to devour as many hamburgers as possible" may be purposes, but they are not fulfilling ones.

The very concept of purpose is essentially a religious statement, and the quest for purpose is a spiritual journey. This may be an unpleasant revelation for some people, who vehemently claim that they are atheists or agnostics, that they do not believe in anything. Even people who see themselves as living in a labyrinth without an opening can nevertheless see life as a very dignified existence—an adventure filled with danger, challenge, and beauty, with opportunity to love, to pursue justice, to raise a family, and to care for others in the world. The grandeur and the challenge of that kind of existence do not seem trivial at all, even for people who believe that when they die, that is the end of it. That sense of the beauty, the grandeur, and the adventure give meaning and purpose to life. Without using God's name, that person is really a very believing person, with a deep faith that there is transcendental meaning in living the adventure of life in a dignified way.

That is the essence of faith. It is deep belief in things that cannot be proved. I cannot prove beauty, dignity, honesty, or integrity, yet I may live a life filled with all these things. A person who has nontrivial answers to these questions of purpose and meaning is, in one way or another, speaking about God—even if, for some inexplicable reason, he does not want to call it that. The atheist who is living a dignified, ethical, and spiritual life is an unconscious believer. If he were not fighting it so hard, he would realize that he has a formulation for his Faith, and if he put it in slightly different words, and arranged it slightly differently, it might almost be a well-organized religion. A rose, by any name, is still a rose; likewise God, by any name, is still God.

People may say that any question about purpose is an unscientific question.⁴ That is indeed so. Science deals with only one part, one kind of pertinent human

⁴To be precise, this is true in regard to contemporary science; however, for many generations, scientists did deal with this problem, and some teleological trends appear every now and then in recent times as well.

question; by its very definition, it does not, and cannot, address others. Scientific questions, mathematical questions, legal questions, and shoemaking questions each address different aspects of reality. The fact that our Faith questions cannot be answered with scientific, mathematical, legal, or shoemaking answers does not mean that they are irrelevant, unimportant, or not compelling. When someone falls in love, the question “Does he/she love me?” becomes a very important, all-consuming question, which one may ponder for hours, for days. It is not a scientific question, but it is a very important question for the people involved. In the same way, the question “What is the meaning of my running, my rushing, of all the small things and big things that I do?” is an important question.

Questions of Faith are not philosophical, sociological, or psychological; they are intensely personal. Everyone has to find his or her own way of dealing with them. The point at which a person is ready for a change, for a jump, is when that person becomes aware of the existence of the question. Once we become aware of the questions, this awareness pushes us toward the brink at which we have to leap. To put it in a parable, if you find yourself stranded in a place with ditches all around and no bridges, you must jump—or you will die in your little place. That jump becomes a necessity, not because people tell you or ask you to jump, but because there you are, in position. When one comes to that point, one can say, “I must make a choice: to jump or not to jump.” Is it a matter of free will? Of course, we always have free choice. We do not always deserve great credit for what we do with our free will, but at some point, we do make choices.

This point of choice, the leap of faith, is made in a variety of ways. For some people, the moment of the leap to faith is an overwhelming, unforgettable experience; William James describes many such conversion experiences. Many more people, however, never have an epiphany, but they still have faith. In the real life of both sinners and saints, faith is not always such a tremendous, overpowering emotional experience. Some people do not even know that they made the leap; they just take a step without even noticing, and then they find themselves on the other side. Only if they are introspective can they, perhaps, pinpoint the moment of change by retracing their personal history.

There are also quite a number of unconscious believers: very deep believers who just do not like the language, the way in which faith is commonly expressed. It is much easier for people in certain circumstances, or within a given social group, to give faith another name. They are not always Marranos (converts under coercion); nobody is forcing them to believe one way or another, but they are unconscious of their faith. They live their lives without knowing that they belong to the “flock of the believers,” because they do not define themselves as such.

For some of these unconscious believers, the realization “I have faith, I have always had faith, perhaps I have never ceased believing since I was two years old” comes as a shock. They are not accustomed to the idea, and therefore they feel that there is something wrong with them. Nevertheless, although they may be going against the grain of society, they are acknowledging a part of themselves that is a very natural aspect of existence.

In many cases, it is also a matter of probing. There may be more believers outside the houses of prayer than inside them. Some people with very deep Faith either do not take to organized prayer, or do not agree with any particular theology, so they never participate in religious groups or become members of an organized religion. With all that, Faith is neither remote nor absolute. Rather, to quote a Biblical passage: “It is not in Heaven Neither is it beyond the sea, but it is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:12–14).

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Even-Yisrael) (1937–). Born in Jerusalem, Steinsaltz is considered one of the foremost Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. Praised by *Time* magazine as a “once-in-a-millennium scholar,” he has been awarded the Israel Prize for his contributions to Jewish study. He is the founder of the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, a society dedicated to the translation and elucidation of the Talmud.

Simple Words: Thinking About What Really Matters in Life [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001], pp. 68–84

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Where Change Begins

by Gordon B. Zacks

In 1969, I was the Chairman of the Young Leadership Cabinet of the national United Jewish Appeal. As such, I was invited to deliver the keynote address to the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds Annual Conference, being held that year in November in Boston. The theme was “Youth Looks at the Future of the American Jewish Community.” I spent six months preparing for this talk. Usually, I speak extemporaneously with at most a one-page outline. This time—because of its importance—I elected to read the entire speech.

In it, I thanked my parents’ generation for supporting the creation of the state of Israel and rescuing survivors from the Holocaust. In its aftermath, two million Jews had been delivered through their efforts from lands of oppression and resettled to lands of freedom. Nonetheless, I pointed out that we faced a disaster in the field of Jewish education. We ran the risk of losing more Jews through assimilation than we had saved through affirmation. We needed to address the failure of our Jewish educational system to inspire many young Jews to continue to be Jewish. I recommended that we create a national Jewish research and development venture capital fund to invest risk capital in innovative approaches to make Jewish education relevant to young people and to create an Institute for Jewish Life that would manage the process.

To fund this Institute, I proposed that the Jewish community endow the Institute with \$100 million of State of Israel bonds for a period of ten years. The purchasers would receive a tax deduction. At the end of ten years, they would get their principal back. The Institute would get the use of the interest. Annually it would provide about \$6 million in revenue. We would have ten years in which to evaluate the results. If the concept didn’t produce worthwhile results, that would be the end of the Institute. Ultimately the idea was adopted in an abbreviated form with funding of \$3.5 million. In this truncated version, it failed in its mission and was eventually closed. Still, it stimulated a lot of discussion about Jewish education, and placed it right behind rescue as a priority for the American Jewish community.

In December 1969, I received a call from a man named Leibel Alevsky. He was a rabbi with the Lubavitch movement in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. He said the Rebbe wanted to meet me. Given the tone of the phone call, I thought I was being invited for a royal audience. I immediately said yes to a date in January, but I didn’t even know who the Rebbe was! My rabbi gave me some background and urged me to go ahead with the meeting. On the appointed day in January, Alevsky and I were finishing dinner in his home at 11:15 at night. We got a call that the Rebbe would see me now. I walked with Alevsky to a modest building to find 300 people—from around the world—each waiting at the Rebbe’s headquarters, the *Chabad* Center, in the middle of the night for an audience with the Rebbe!

Later I learned that the Rebbe held these audiences three times each week, lasting from sundown often until the middle of the night.

I went in alone to see the Rebbe. In his office, illuminated by a single ceiling light, books were stacked from the floor to the ceiling. He was a slight man with translucent skin and absolutely clear whites of his eyes—the sclera encircling his sparkling blue irises, his beard outlining an impish grin. The Rebbe was sixty-seven at the time. He looked at me in such a penetrating way that I felt like I was being x-rayed.

“Mr. Zacks, I have read your speech,” he began, “and it’s clear you have taken good care of your mind. I can look at you, and it’s clear you have taken good care of your body. *What* have you done to take care of your soul?”

No small talk about how I was or if I had a pleasant trip. I was stunned.

“The Jewish house is on fire,” he continued. “We have an emergency, and this is not the time to experiment with new ways to put out the fire. Instead, you call the proven and tested fire department. *We are* that fire department. *We*—the Lubavitch—don’t have drugs or intermarriage problems with our children or kids opting out of Judaism. Our tradition works, and our children are being educated. We have a worldwide outreach program that contacts and impacts non-observant Jews and saves souls. Give us the \$100 million, and we

will spend it to correct the problems that you are concerned about.”

“Rebbe,” I asked after pausing for a moment, “what if the house is on fire, but people have forgotten your telephone number?” “G-d will provide,” he answered me.

“There are millions of Jews whose houses are on fire,” I said to him. “Most of them are Jews who will not call you, either because they have lost your number or *they* won’t accept the lifestyle compromises you expect. They’re still worthy of saving in their own way, and they are entitled to a quality Jewish education that makes Judaism relevant to their lives. That’s why we need this Institute.”

“Do you believe in revelation, Mr. Zacks?” he asked me next.

“I believe in G-d and I believe he inspires... but I don’t believe he writes,” I answered.

“You mean, Mr. Zacks, that there is this vast structure G-d has created of plants, animals, food chains, stars, and planets. And, that the only creature in all of creation that doesn’t understand how to fit in and live their life purposefully is the human?”

I told him yes.

“What about the complexity of the human body? What about the jewel of the human cell? How does the body ingest food and renew itself with absolute consistency?”

I had no answer.

“Why, Mr. Zacks, is the nose always where the nose belongs? Why are the eyes always on the face for generation after generation?”

I could only shrug my shoulders, but my respect for him deepened by the moment.

“And, how can you account for the brain and the mind? How do they steer this remarkable system in a purposeful and precise way? And, what about how we fit into

the earth’s ecosystem, where we inhale the oxygen that plants so wonderfully manufacture for us? Could this all be accidental?”

How could I answer him?

“And, beyond what happens on earth. What about all the heavenly bodies in the sky that seem to follow such a perfect order and don’t collide with each other? Is man the only creature on the planet earth without guidelines for living its life? Should man ignore the Torah given to us by G-d as a roadmap to guide us? This is the missing link which connects us to the complexity of Nature!”

So it went. Comment after comment. More times than not, I could not begin to answer his points.

He quoted Kazantzakis’ book *Zorba the Greek* to me during our conversation. “Do you remember the young man talking with Zorba on the beach, when Zorba asks what the purpose of life is? The young fellow admits he doesn’t know. And Zorba comments, ‘Well, all those damned books you read—what good are they? Why do you read them?’ Zorba’s friend says he doesn’t know. Zorba can see his friend doesn’t have an answer to the most fundamental question. That’s the trouble with you. ‘A man’s head is like a grocer,’ Zorba says, ‘it keeps accounts.... The head’s a careful little shopkeeper; it never risks all it has, always keeps something in reserve. It never breaks the string.’ Wise men and grocers *weigh* everything. They can never cut the cord and be free. Your problem, Mr. Zacks, is that you are trying to find G-d’s map through your head. You are unlikely to find it that way. You have to *experience* before you can truly feel and then be free to learn. Let me send a teacher to live with you for a year and teach you how to *be* Jewish. You will unleash a whole new dimension to your life. If you really want to change the world, change yourself! It’s like dropping a stone into a pool of water and watching the concentric circles radiate to the shore. You will influence all the people around you, and they will influence others in turn. That’s how you bring about improvement in the world.”

“Rebbe, I’m not ready to do that,” I told him. I remained firm despite the incredibly woven tapestry of the universe he presented to me.

“What do you have to lose?” he asked, “One year of your life? What if I’m right? It could gain you an eternity if I’m right, but only cost you one year if I’m wrong.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said as we wrapped up our hour-and-a-half conversation. The normal audience with the Rebbe was thirty seconds to a minute. Three hundred people were still waiting to come in at one in the morning.

The Rebbe took people the way they were. His ultimate goal was to bring you to the ways of Jewish life, but his means were not confrontational and demanding. You could literally feel his warmth and love in addition to the power of his vast intellect. Once he established the *Chabad* Center at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, I don’t think he ever left it. Yet he was totally wired into the events of the world. I sensed this in my first meeting with the Rebbe. He radiated compassion, love, and respect for others—a servant leader totally committed to serving G-d through helping others.

The Rebbe wrote me letters encouraging me to devote myself to Jewish education. Over a series of years, I received five letters from him saying that he wanted to send his representative to me to spend a year teaching me how to be Jewish. I responded to each of them and declined.

Beginning in 1986, the Rebbe had a receiving line on Sunday in which he passed out a dollar bill to be given by the recipient as *tzedakah* to charity. His reasoning: “When two people meet, something good should result for a third.” People waited in line for as long as four hours to be greeted by him and receive his blessing and the dollar bill. The Rebbe was eighty-four when he started doing this. An older woman in the line asked him how he could manage to perform this demanding task. “Every soul is a diamond,” he answered. “Can one grow tired of counting diamonds?”

In 1987, my youngest daughter, Kim, had just returned from Israel and she wanted to participate in the custom

of Sunday Dollars. I said fine I would take her. I neither called nor told anyone who I was when we arrived. I stood in line with her. It had been seventeen years since I had seen the Rebbe and ten years since he wrote me his last letter. When it was our turn to speak with the Rebbe, he looked at me and asked “What are you doing for Jewish education?” His eyes had the same penetrating look that had scanned me seventeen years earlier and asked, “*What* are you doing to take care of your soul, Mr. Zacks?” It was as though I had just walked back into his office. In truth, hundreds of thousands of people had filed past him over those years.

“You are amazing!” I exclaimed to him.

“What has that to do with saving Jewish lives? What are you **doing** for Jewish education?” he retorted. He may not have gotten exactly what he wanted from me, but the Rebbe surely taught me the power of changing yourself to influence others. He wanted to enlist me as *his* fundraiser for Jewish education. While I certainly considered his invitation, I declined it. Still he may have been the most charismatic man I ever met. He had an incredible aura to him, partly because he was such a combination of charisma *and* pragmatism. This man came out of the scientific community to return to the religious life. Every Israeli prime minister and Israeli chief of staff found his way to the Rebbe’s doorstep when they came to the United States. The most amazing thing? The Rebbe saw himself as perfecting G-d’s will. He had no power in the sense that a police commissioner, a general, or a tax collector does. He had no one enforcing his decisions. What he *did* have was the authority of his holiness, which caused others to connect to him. It wasn’t his title that gave the Rebbe authority. It was his presence and his profound grasp of bringing the principles of the Torah to life in himself and in others. The Rebbe didn’t declare himself a leader. His overpowering presence inspired those around him to declare him their leader and to revere him. Through earning respect and trust, people endowed him with leadership.

About ten years after I first met the Rebbe, I attended a dinner in Cleveland at the home of Leibel Alevsky. At the table with us was the man the Rebbe sent to the Soviet Union to save Jews. When the Rebbe sent

him on this mission, he didn't give him a plan or give him money! This was during the Stalin era. The anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist mentality of the Soviets may have been at its very worst. The Rebbe's designate went to the Soviet Union, lived and worked by his wits, and figured out how he could smuggle Jews out to Poland by train. He succeeded. At the same time, he was smuggling *in* prayer books, religious articles, and calendars for those still in the Soviet Union. And, he set up secret schools to teach Hebrew. The Lubavitchers are incredibly resourceful people, whose outreach is one-on-one.

The Lubavitchers are the essence of true believers. As I traveled abroad, I first noted their presence in Morocco. They ran schools for kids in the ghetto. That may sound noble, but not earth-shattering until you understand the kind of "social security system" that prevailed in Morocco at the time. Children *were* the system. At birth, many infants—Arabs and Jews both—were maimed and deformed by their parents so the kids could beg more effectively! The Lubavitchers *bought* the children from their parents for one more *dirham* than the market value of the child begging on the street for a year, and then they gave the children an education.

You could see the evidence of the Rebbe's positive work all over the world in places like the Soviet Union, Morocco, and Iran. How did these devout Lubavitchers get there? The Rebbe would simply say, "Go to Morocco and save souls." They didn't get a dime or an ounce of organizational help. They saved thousands and thousands of Jews physically, and they spiritually changed many more. The conviction they are doing G-d's work carries them forward. Their passion brings them to college campuses all over the United States. They will send out a representative wearing *payos* and a black frock coat and open up a *Chabad* house on campuses like University of California at Berkeley. They get kids off narcotics and give them a spiritual jolt instead of a buzz on drugs. "Get high on G-d!" they preach. Their individual missions are great illustrations of the power of one. The Rebbe's passion for saving Jewish souls lives through them.

Unlike every other Jewish figure in this book, the Rebbe was not a Zionist. Though very supportive of the state of Israel and its defense forces, he felt that redemption would only be ushered in by the Messiah. He also drove

home the point that a commitment to the state of Israel does not exempt us from fulfilling age-old Judaic commandments. In fact, it should actually elicit more loyalty to the Torah. The Rebbe was completely devoted to fulfilling G-d's will.

The essence of the Rebbe's teaching is celebration of G-d. The *Chabad* radiate a wonderful joy of life that is a reverberation of the Rebbe's spirit. I wish I could believe the way they do, with their absolute confidence in their answer. Their sheer love in celebrating the Jewish traditions with singing and dancing is unmatched. Nothing equals the celebration of a Shabbat with a Chabadnik. The food is homemade, delicious—though not necessarily healthy for your arteries—but it's only the beginning of the positive energy that flows in each Shabbat from celebrating the birthday of the world!

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Defining Moments: Stories of Character, Courage, and Leadership [New York: Beaufort Books, 2006], pp. 137–148

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Additional Readings Lesson 5

The Ultimate Mitzvah— Loving Your Fellow Jew

by Rabbi Manis Friedman

The emotion of love has been the subject of poets and romantics for centuries. We need not enter into any analysis of that topic, but, as it relates to loving a fellow Jew, some kind of specific definition is obviously necessary.

There are 613 mitzvos in the Torah. One is to feel the hunger of the poor, and therefore to give charity. Another is to feel the discomfort of a stranger, and therefore to show him hospitality. Not to be cruel, even to an animal, is another mitzvah. These commandments, though differing in their details are basically all expressions of concern, compassion and love. But the commandment of “Ahavas Yisroel”—to love your fellow Jew—seems to imply something beyond the above mentioned mitzvos. Because all of those are commandments relating to a specific act. What does the commandment to love a fellow Jew add to the commandments to be kind, generous, and compassionate? It adds the emphasis of loving EVERY Jew, and that the love itself is a mitzvah.

The Alter Rebbe, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, said that to love another person means to find something in the other person that is similar to something in oneself. There are those parts of our lives and our existence that give us our individuality. These are the things that make each person different from another. And there are times when we must focus on our particular responsibility, our particular message in life. But the mitzvah of loving your fellow means being able to focus on those things that, rather than separating us, actually make us one. Once we discover that one thing which is universal to us all, we are in a position to love our fellow.

“A Jew who sins and violates his Jewishness remains a Jew,” says the Torah. A Jew is not created out of virtue. One doesn’t become a Jew by doing mitzvos or good deeds. Faults, sins and misconduct do not stop one from being a Jew. A Jew remains a Jew no matter what. And, on the other hand, no matter how much good a Jew does, he remains a Jew (and not an angel). We see then that the state of being Jewish precedes any choices we are going to make. Long before we decide to put on *tefillin*, keep kosher, keep Shabbos or go to the *mikvah*, we are already Jewish. No matter what decisions we come to later in life, our Jewishness doesn’t change, and it is not diminished.

What all Jews have in common is the part of G-d that He breathes into each person, the *neshama* (soul). Appreciating one’s *neshama* allows a person to open himself up to every *neshama* in the world; this appreciation is a giant step toward loving every Jew. Because G-d has placed a part of Himself in every Jew, we are capable of loving every Jew. That which makes one person Jewish is exactly the same as that which makes every other Jew Jewish. If one loves that part of himself, then for the same reason he can love every other Jew. That is enough to make one person’s heart miss a beat because of something that is happening to another.

The Alter Rebbe wrote that one’s view of another person depends on how we see ourselves. If what is emphasized makes one different—namely, the human, physical condition—then one is incapable of loving. Not only can’t he love every Jew, he can’t love anybody. Because the most important thing to him is what makes him different, that which separates him from everybody. Focusing on differences separates people. The only way to be capable of loving is by making unimportant those things that make one different and separate. What must be primary is that which is shared with everybody else—the *neshama*, the soul.

In a similar vein:

Chassidus teaches that when a person has a problem in his spiritual growth and development, he should discuss it with someone else. He and the other person sit together and discuss a G-dly problem, so there are two G-dly souls against one animal soul (the animating force of the body) —the cause of the problem. At first glance this is difficult to comprehend. If you have two people, and therefore two G-dly souls, shouldn't you also have two animal souls? How can we possibly assert that the G-dly souls outnumber the animal?

However, when two G-dly souls get together they cooperate on a project. Two animal souls do not cooperate. It's against their nature to cooperate. An animal soul means a selfish soul. A selfish soul may want to sin, but it has no interest in helping anybody else sin. It gets no pleasure from anybody else's sins. Therefore, one animal soul will not join another animal soul in its sinfulness. But, a G-dly soul is naturally concerned and sympathetic to another G-dly soul. That is the nature of G-dly souls. So if one's animal being, human being, ego, is most important, then this person is separated from everybody else in the world. Nobody shares ego concerns, and if those are the things that are important to the person, then he's all alone. Or, as the Alter Rebbe said, he is incapable of loving—unless it's for an ulterior motive. If, on the other hand, what is important is one's Jewishness, that feeling opens the person up to every other Jew. When the soul which we all have in common, is emphasized, then we become one people, and it's literally possible to love every Jew.

How do we go about loving every Jew? In practical terms it means seeing through the differences that seem to separate one Jew from another. One can see beyond differences in culture and language. When two Jews meet in an airport, some place in the middle of Europe, and one doesn't speak Hebrew while the other doesn't speak English, still there's a feeling of kinship even though there's no way to communicate. One thing which often does confuse us, and sets up a barrier between Jews, is degrees of observance. The person who considers himself perfectly righteous and holy might feel that he has nothing in common with one whom he considers to be a sinful person. The sinful

person, or the unlearned person, might feel that he has nothing in common with the scholarly saint.

This difference between Jews is one that the Baal Shem Tov came to dispel in his teachings. The Baal Shem Tov taught two things. First, love your fellow Jew even if you've never seen him. You don't have to share any experiences, you don't have to share anything at all beyond the fact that you're Jewish. That in itself should be enough to create a bridge and a bond between one Jew and another.

The second teaching is that you have to love the wicked along with the righteous. Since we love a Jew because he's Jewish, not because he's righteous, then we love the Jew who is wicked, as well. The Baal Shem Tov said that "Love your fellow Jew as you love yourself," means to love the righteous and the wicked. The Alter Rebbe explained this concept further by saying that when the Baal Shem Tov said "the righteous and the wicked," he didn't mean that you certainly love the righteous, but you should also love the wicked along with the righteous. What he meant was that you love a Jew, period. You love your fellow Jew, and that's all that needs to be said.

In practical terms, it means that you must relate to every Jew regardless of his behavior, personality, standing in society. But is that love? There is a connection that a fellow Jew feels for another Jew regardless of how the other person behaves. And no matter how strongly you disagree with the other's behavior, you cannot dismiss that other person, because he's your fellow Jew. To illustrate the point, you find that people who dress in the orthodox style, who happen to venture outside of their community, make other people very uncomfortable. But many people dress in very strange ways. You see Arabs of different religious orders in Israel who dress outlandishly. And yet, they walk up and down the streets of Jerusalem, and nobody pays any attention. But, should a Jew dressed in Chassidic garb, with a fur hat and long silk coat walk into a non-religious section, he gets angry stares. Why? Because he's dressed funny! Why is his dress any more funny or strange than the dress of the Arab *muhla*. It's not. It's just that the Arab is a stranger, and therefore he can dress however he wants.

When a Jew dresses strangely then every Jew cares. Even though a fellow Jew doesn't eat the same food or even act and believe the same, yet, if he dresses differently it makes us uncomfortable. Because he's a fellow Jew and Jews are not strangers to each other. The true bedrock of loving a fellow Jew is that one Jew cannot disassociate himself from another, no matter how much he would like to.

A story in the Gemara about the great sage Hillel will help clarify the above point. A man came to Hillel and said that he wanted to be taught the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel summed it all up for him by saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary."

Hillel's statement doesn't appear anywhere in the Torah or Scriptures. The commentaries say that basically Hillel was referring to the mitzvah of "loving your fellow Jew as much as you love yourself." But, if that's the mitzvah he was referring to, why didn't he just say it? Why did Hillel make up this original statement? If a person is impatient, and needs to be told something quickly, then what is said should be something definitive. Hillel gave the man a very vague answer, which needed a great deal of thought before being put into practice.

The Tzemach Tzedek, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, explained that what Hillel was really saying was very clearly defined and practical. A person can admit his own faults, and see them very clearly, and even talk about them publicly. Yet, if another person would point out those weaknesses, the first person would be insulted and very hurt. Why can one honestly admit to a fault within himself, yet that same person becomes offended when it is pointed out to him?

The difference is that when one sees his own faults it is within a certain context. Having assured himself of being a worthwhile creature, a person can proceed to search out his faults. Even talking about them to others doesn't do any damage. But when somebody else sees the faults, it's not necessarily within that framework of already knowing that the person is a worthwhile human being. We are concerned that any personality flaw suggests total insignificance. We fear criticism only because we're afraid it might lead to rejection. Were it not for

that, we would be very comfortable hearing and accepting criticism. We can't honestly deny every criticism we hear; they're all true to some degree. It doesn't do any damage to the ego to admit that we're not the smartest or the prettiest, or the strongest or most talented. That which hurts, that which is hateful, is to have our faults pointed out by someone who is not necessarily convinced that we are worthwhile human beings.

When Hillel said to this man, "What is hateful to you, don't do to others," he was being very specific. He was talking about that thing which is hateful. Not "whatever" is hateful, but *that* which is hateful to you do not do to others. "That thing" is seeing another person's fault, without first recognizing his worth. That's what we hate and what we shouldn't do to others.

What Hillel was doing for this man was summing up all of the Torah in one mitzvah, the mitzvah of "loving a fellow Jew as much as you love yourself." Since the man was very impatient, and seemingly not very ambitious, if Hillel had told him "love your fellow Jew as much as you love yourself," he would have thought it was impossible, too demanding. So Hillel translated it for him into practical terms.

You can't measure the amount you love yourself. In self-love, before you see your own faults you already know that you are important, significant. No matter what your body and human personality turn out to be, your *neshama* is already valuable. And with that knowledge and security you can look at your faults and not be hurt. That's how you love yourself: you consider yourself worthwhile despite your faults; you must know that your fellow Jew is worthwhile, too. No matter how the other Jew behaves, there is something very valuable about this person—the very fact that he is a Jew.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once said, that when talking to another Jew, you have to realize that every Jew is an only child to G-d, the King of Kings. Therefore, when you talk to another Jew, you have to keep in mind whose child this is, even if he doesn't behave like the child of the King of Kings, you have to remember who his Father is.

G-d created the world very carefully and thoughtfully. Everything we see and hear is of meaning to us. If G-d allows us to see the faults of another person, He is showing an opportunity to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. When we see another person's faults, our first reaction has to be, "What are we being told?" Seeing the other person's faults can mean that he will not improve his behavior unless we help him, because that's the way G-d set it up. Because, if G-d is letting you see this fault, it must be your job to help him fix it. The second possibility is that the fault is in you, and you're seeing it reflected in the other person. A fault in another person should elicit the reaction, "What's that got to do with me? Why do I need to see this?" The other person's fault offers us the opportunity to improve, to show us something in ourselves that we are not seeing. Therefore, we are indebted to the other person even if his fault consists of hurting us. This person is the messenger through whom this enlightenment is coming and there is no need to be hateful.

The ultimate part in love of a fellow Jew is that every Jew has a Divine soul, and regardless of how he behaves, that soul remains. Where do we see the evidence of this G-dly soul? Love of a fellow Jew, taken to its fullest expression, is the ability to discover evidence, signs of the presence of a Divine soul, even in a person who does not, at first glance, seem to have any soul at all.

In pursuing the mitzvah of loving your fellow Jew, we start with the awareness that every Jew is a little piece of G-d, and that if that piece of G-d is not evident in the person's life, then it is your job to reveal it. To help that person discover his own G-dliness. Bringing ourselves together, being able to see past the externals and faults, to be aware of the *neshama* of a Jew, is what heals the wound of Exile, and brings *Moshiach*.

Rabbi Manis Friedman (1946–) is a renowned author, counselor, lecturer, and philosopher. More than 150,000 copies of his thought-provoking and entertaining video and audio tapes have been sold. He is the author of *Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore?* and the founder and dean of *Bais Chana Institute of Jewish Studies in Minnesota*.

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Credo: Better Is a World Built on Love, Not Darwinian Struggle

by Rabbi Dr. Lord Jonathan Sacks

The word "credo," in Hebrew *ani ma'amin*, means "I believe," and it sometimes helps to spell out what we believe, why we do what we do, and why we are what we are. This, briefly, is my credo. I believe that life has a meaning, that neither we nor the universe are here by sheer happenstance. The search for meaning is definitive of the human condition, for we are the only life forms yet known in all the vast universe capable of asking the question "why?"

From this, something momentous follows. The meaning of any system lies outside the system. The meaning of chess—why people play it, and why some devote their lives to it—is not to be found in the rules of chess. They tell us how the game works, not why it is played. The meaning of a credit card is not to be found in its physical properties, the plastic of which it is made and the markings it carries. The internal workings of any system do not explain the place the system holds in human lives.

If, then, the meaning of a system lies outside the system, then the meaning of the universe lies outside the universe. That is the revolution of Abrahamic monotheism. Monotheism is not about the mere mathematical reduction of many gods to One. It is the leap of transcendence that for the first time conceives of a reality beyond the universe. This alone has the power to redeem life from tragedy and meaninglessness.

Since we are creatures of the universe, that meaning will always be imperfectly understood. At best we have intimations. Yet history has given us those rare souls whose inner ear was attuned to a deeper music: the prophets and patriarchs, sages and saints who heard the call of the beyond—within that is the voice of God in the human heart.

If the universe was brought into being by One beyond the universe, then it was created by a being who desires to bring things into being. The simplest way of

expressing this is: God created the universe in love. For it is love that seeks to bring new life into being. It is love that makes space for the other. God's love made space for the universe and for that astonishing sequence of events that produced us.

If so, then each of us is here because of God's love. That fact transforms the human condition, rescuing it from ultimate solitude. We are not alone. We exist because someone wanted us to be, someone who believes in us even when we lose belief in ourselves, who knows our fears and hears our prayers, giving us strength when we falter and lifting us when we fall.

And just as God creates in love so he asks us to create in love. The Abrahamic monotheisms are the only systems to place love at the heart of the moral life. There are other codes of ethics: every civilization has them, whether they are secular or religious. All civilizations have something like the golden rule: treat others as you would wish to be treated. Many of them have forms of justice: treat equals equally. But only a vision that sees the world as God's work of love, makes love the highest value. Love God with all your heart, soul and might. Love your neighbour as yourself. Love the stranger for you know what it feels like to be a stranger.

And yes, there is another way of seeing the world and our place within it. The universe came into being for no reason, and one day for no reason it will cease to be. There is nothing special about humanity: we are mere primates with a gift for language. There is nothing special about any of us. We are born, we live, we die, and it is as if we had never been. Our ideals are illusions; our hopes mere dreams. We have no souls, only brains; no freedom, only the hardwiring of our genes. And the biggest illusion of them all is love, the smoke-screen created by humans to hide the fact that we are here to reproduce.

I know which I prefer. Better is a world built on love than on the Darwinian struggle to survive. Greater the mind that lifts its eyes beyond the visible horizon than one that refuses to believe anything that cannot be measured, mapped and scientifically explained.

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks (1948–). Born in London, he is the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. He attended Cambridge University and received his doctorate from King's College, London. A prolific and influential author, his books include *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* and *The Dignity of Difference*. Recipient of the Jerusalem Prize in 1995 for his contributions to enhancing Jewish life in the Diaspora, he was knighted in 2005.

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The Dynamics of Prayer

by **Rabbi Dr. Jacob Immanuel Schochet**

Principle of Unity

"To love G-d, your G-d, with all your heart' (Deuteronomy 11:13); which is the service of the heart? It is prayer."

This terse definition of prayer as the "service of the heart," quite adequately covers its meaning. The heart is the central organ which controls the blood-circulation, the very flow of life. On the metaphysical level, the heart is also the medium through which humanness expresses itself. In the heart are ignited the sparks of human feelings and passion. From it flicker the flames of human desires and caprices, and through its manifestations we perceive man's character and personality.

From the heart springs life to all limbs, for from it flows the stream of blood to all the limbs, to the very end of the body, and from the same heart stem the ascending and conjoining aspirations of the soul to its source in G-d.² Little wonder, then, that G-d says to man: "Give Me your heart. For when your heart is Mine, then I know that you are Mine!"³

This, then, is the general idea of prayer: the service of man's heart. It means a complete, unconditional

¹ *Sifre*, Ekav, par. 41; *Ta'anit* 2a.

² R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 7d.

³ *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 1:8. *Zohar* II:93b, and III:160a. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 106b.

surrender of the self to G-d: becoming so bound up and united with G-d that one perceives only the Divine aspect in everything. Prayer is the direct, undisturbed communication with G-d, the channel bringing us to the reality of unison with the true Essence of all.⁴

This definition is actually implied in the Hebrew term for prayer: *tefilah*. The word *tefilah* is derived from a root-word that means to join together, to unite.⁵ *Tefilah* sets out to join and unite man and G-d, creature and Creator, to permeate the former with the radiance of the Latter. This is accomplished only when *tefilah* is the true service of the heart: with proper devotion and concentration; involving the totality of man—every part of the mind, absorbing all thoughts and feelings. If the mind does not fully partake, the bond is loose and incomplete. Man remains exposed to the danger of extraneous thoughts intruding and interfering. That kind of prayer is like a roofless—thus insecure—courtyard: defenseless against any downpours of harmful rains.⁶

Total involvement is the first and foremost condition for prayer. It is the meaning of “to love G-d and to serve Him with *all* the heart,” with all one’s being; to surrender oneself completely, to dissolve in the unity of the bond with thoughts or desires for nothing else. In the metaphorical terminology of the Kabbalah and Chassidism, therefore, this proper form of prayer is spoken of as a *zivug*, a figurative state of marital union, the offspring of which is new conceptions, new love and reverence for G-d. These effects result from consciousness of the Divine, in each person on his or her own level, corresponding to the individual efforts in prayer.⁷

⁴ See Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* III:51.

⁵ See Onkelos, Rashi, Rashbam, and Seforno, on Genesis 30:8. Rashi on Numbers 19:15. *Torah Or*, Terumah, p. 79d; and *Siddur im Dach*, Sha’ar Hatefilah, p. 22c. See R. Menachem M. Schneerson of Lubavitch, *Likutei Sichot*, vol. I, Pekudey, sect. VIII; and *idem*, glossary note on *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5709, p. 79.

⁶ R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 8c. See also *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 1c.

⁷ *Likutei Torah*, Beshalach, p. 2d; *ibid.*, Bamidbar, p. 5d. See also R. Chaim Vital, *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha’ar Hatefilah, ch. 7; and *Shulchan Aruch Arizal*, Kavanat Hatefilah:1.

Daily Schedule

The consciousness and awareness of all-permeating Divinity, and the consequent love and reverence born therefrom, are not to be restricted to the hours of communion alone. The moments of Torah and *tefilah* should generate a state of mind and feeling that lasts continuously, throughout the rest of the day, even when involved with physical and material pursuits, even while attending to our bodily needs, even when in the midst of an association with people. It is the state of mind which the Song on the relation between man and G-d poetically describes in the words of “I sleep, but my heart is awake; the voice of my Beloved knocks” (Song 5 :2).⁸

For this very reason there are set times for *tefilah*, distributed over the span of the day. One prayer will thus generate that feeling and state of mind until the time of the next prayer.⁹ The prayer of *shacharit* is the first thing in the morning, to exert its influence over all our thoughts and deeds of the day; and the prayer of *arvit*

⁸ *Moreh Nevuchim* III:51.—In this context there is a parable of the Baal Shem Tov: A great, merciful king proclaimed that whoever has any needs should but come and ask, and it shall be granted to him. Some asked for silver and gold, others for high positions. One wise man, however, requested permission to address the king three times each day. The king was pleased that this man preferred speaking to the king to any riches. Thus he decreed that when this wise man wishes to enter the king’s innermost chambers to address him, he should be led by way of the king’s treasures to take whatever he desires, without restraint. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 97.

Another version: A king decreed that whoever submits a request will have it answered. Now one man, who longs and desires to commune with the king at all times, had a dilemma: submitting a specific request will gain him his wish, but then he will no longer have an excuse to commune with the king. Thus he prefers not to obtain material needs in order to retain an excuse to appear before the king time and again. This is the meaning of, “A prayer for the poor, when he enwraps himself and pours out his prayer before G-d” (Psalms 102:1): the poor prays to be able to present his petition before G-d. *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim*, Tetze (*Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, par. 125). Cf. *Yoma* 76b. (See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. IX, p. 271f., for an explanation of the parable.)

⁹ *Kuzary* III:5. See *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 4:1, where the daily prayers are said to parallel the evident changes of daybreak, sunset and nightfall.

is the first thing in the evening, to hold and keep us through the night.¹⁰ No less important is the prayer of *minchah*, in the afternoon. It is recited in the midst of our activities, at the height of our mundane entanglements, at a moment when thoughts of the sublime appear altogether incongruous to our self-centered interests. Just then, at the very point of possible detachment, we need to strengthen our bonds. We are told to interrupt whatever we are doing, and we are called upon to remember and acknowledge that there is a higher purpose to everything, that there is “Justice and a Judge” on whom everything depends.¹¹

Prayer thus demonstrates man’s awareness of his dependence on his Creator, man’s gratitude and appreciation.¹² For prayer is to remind us continually of G-d,¹³ to teach and remind us that G-d takes notice of us and our ways.¹⁴ All that is the union and conjunction implied by the word *tefilah*.

This resolves the problem of the continuous repetition of daily prayers. As the Midrash puts it: on the human level, the more we ask and borrow from someone, the less he will like us, and, in fact, he will tend to ignore or repulse us. This is not the case, however, with G-d: the more we approach Him, and the more we press our prayers upon Him, the more He rejoices, and He accepts us at all times. (*Midrash Tehilim* 4:3 and 55:6) For every time that we approach G-d, we demonstrate our consciousness of His existence and sovereignty, as well as our total dependence on G-d; R. Mosheh of Tarani (Mabit), *Bet Elokim*, Sha’ar Hatefilah, ch. 2.

See below, sect. IX–X, additional reasons for the frequency of daily prayers.

¹⁰ See *Sefer Hachinuch*, par. 420.

¹¹ *Netivot olam*, Avodah, ch. 3. R. Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, *Sefer Hamaamarim-Kuntreisim*, vol. I, p. 412; and *idem*, *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5700, p. 150. See *Zohar* 1:72a. Cf. R. Shmuel of Lubavitch (*Maharash*), *Tarat Shmuel*—5627, p. 58, for another aspect in the significance of the *minchah*-prayer.

See *Tikunei Zohar* 50:86a that the acronym of “*Se’u marom eyneichem*—(Lift up your eyes on high [and see who has created these]—Isaiah 40:26)—שׁ מׁעׁ— is also an acronym for *shacharit*, *minchah* and *arvit*!

¹² See Ramban, Commentary on Exodus 13:16. *Kuzary* III: 17.

¹³ *Moreh Nevuchim* III:44.

¹⁴ See R. Bachya ibn Pakuda, *Chovot Halevovot*, Cheshbon Hanefesh, ch.3:mode 18; *Moreh Nevuchim* III:36; R. Chasdai Crescas, *Or Hashem* III:2, Klal 1:1; *Ikkarim* IV: 16 and 18; R.

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Isaac Arama, *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Tzav: sha’ar 58; *Bet Elokim*, Sha’ar Hatefilah, ch. 2; and *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 3—that prayer is an affirmation of the principles of existence of G-d; sovereignty of G-d; omnipotence of G-d; Divine Providence; man’s total dependence on G-d; and the possibility of evoking Divine grace and compassion even if not deserved (cf. *Tanchuma*, Vayera:1; *Midrash Tehilim* 4:5; R. Yehudah Hachassid, *Sefer Chassidim*, par. 130). Prayer thus gives the lie to heresies of atheism and deism, and to the fatalism expressed in Job 21:14 (“What is the Almighty that we should serve Him, and what good does it do if we pray to Him?”).

In this context it is explained why prayer (the *amidah*) requires that the feet must be kept together and level, and that the hands be folded over the heart (*Berachot* 10b; *Shabbat* 10a; *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 95): in this position one is like bound up, unable to do anything, helpless and defenseless on his own, thus altogether dependent on G-d. R. Shlomoh ibn Aderet (Rashba) on *Berachot* 10b; *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 5. See also *Bet Elokim*, Sha’ar Hatefilah, ch. 7.

A Blanket Trust

by **Howard Schultz**

When I was in Israel, I went to Mea Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox area within Jerusalem. Along with a group of businessmen I was with, I had the opportunity to have an audience with Rabbi [Nosson Tzvi] Finkel, the head of a yeshiva there [Mir Yeshiva]. I had never heard of him and didn't know anything about him. We went into his study and waited ten to fifteen minutes for him. Finally, the doors opened.

What we did not know was that Rabbi Finkel was severely afflicted with Parkinson's disease. He sat down at the head of the table, and, naturally, our inclination was to look away. We didn't want to embarrass him.

We were all looking away, and we heard this big bang on the table: "Gentlemen, look at me, and look at me right now." Now his speech affliction was worse than his physical shaking. It was really hard to listen to him and watch him. He said, "I have only a few minutes for you because I know you're all busy American businessmen." You know, just a little dig there.

Then he asked, "Who can tell me what the lesson of the Holocaust is?" He called on one guy, who didn't know what to do—it was like being called on in the fifth grade without the answer. And the guy says something benign like, "We will never, ever forget." And the rabbi completely dismisses him. I felt terrible for the guy until I realized the rabbi was getting ready to call on someone else. All of us were sort of under the table, looking away—you know, please, not me. He did not call me. I was sweating. He called on another guy, who had such a fantastic answer: "We will never, ever again be a victim or bystander."

The rabbi said, "You guys just don't get it. Okay, gentlemen, let me tell you the essence of the human spirit.

"As you know, during the Holocaust, the people were transported in the worst possible, inhumane way by railcar. They thought they were going to a work camp. We all know they were going to a death camp.

"After hours and hours in this inhumane corral with no light, no bathroom, cold, they arrived at the camps. The doors were swung wide open, and they were blinded by the light. Men were separated from women, mothers from daughters, fathers from sons. They went off to the bunkers to sleep.

"As they went into the area to sleep, only one person was given a blanket for every six. The person who received the blanket, when he went to bed, had to decide, 'Am I going to push the blanket to the five other people who did not get one, or am I going to pull it toward myself to stay warm?'"

And Rabbi Finkel says, "It was during this defining moment that we learned the power of the human spirit, because we pushed the blanket to five others."

And with that, he stood up and said, "Take your blanket. Take it back to America and push it to five other people."

Howard Schultz (1952–). Chairman and CEO of Starbucks, the largest coffeehouse chain in the world, and former owner of the Seattle Supersonics.

Hermes Magazine, Spring 2001, 16–19

Additional Readings

Plato's Error: God Dwells in the Gulf Between Your Dreams and Your Reality

by Rabbi Y. Y. Jacobson

Question: Did your life, your marriage, your career, your family, work out the way you dreamt it would be?

The story is told of a famous child psychologist who spent many hours constructing a new driveway at his home. Just after he smoothed the surface of the freshly poured concrete, his small children chased a ball across the driveway, leaving deep footprints. The man yelled after them with a torrent of angry words. His shocked wife said, "You're a psychologist who's supposed to love children."

The fuming man shouted, "I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!"

A Vision of Duality

Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece (428–347 B.C.E.), was driven by the search for truth. How, in this world of chance and change, can we arrive at knowledge that is beyond chance and change? His answer was that reality is not the chaotic profusion of things we see, feel and touch; the thousands of different kinds of chairs, houses or trees. The truth of reality lies in what is common to each: the ideal **form** of a chair, house or tree.

Plato argued that the substantive reality around us is only a reflection of a higher truth. Truth, he believed, is the abstraction; ideas are more real than things. Things are particular; truth is universal. The Greek philosopher developed a vision of two worlds: a world of unchanging ideas and a world of changing physical objects.

For example, a particular tree, with a branch or two missing, possibly alive, possibly dead, and with the initials of two hikers carved into its bark, is distinct from the abstract form of Tree-ness. Tree-ness is the ideal that each of us holds in our mind which allows us to identify the imperfect reflections of trees all around us.¹

It is hard to describe how deeply this idea of Plato impacted Western thought and civilization. For one, it taught that truth can be found only in universalism, not in the particulars of reality. The more universal a culture is the closer to truth it comes. Truth is abstract, perfect, uniform.

In addition, Plato's vision embraced duality, conferring truth upon the perfect, spiritual ideal universe and corruption and falsehood upon the flawed, physical and concrete universe.

It is equally difficult to exaggerate how deeply the Chassidic tradition of Judaism dismissed this seemingly compelling idea. To be sure, Jewish mysticism discusses in great detail how each physical existence originates in the pristine world of the spirit, where it can be encountered in a far more wholesome and complete manner. In the Midrashic literature, the two realities are known as the "heavenly Jerusalem" vs. the "earthly Jerusalem"—the latter is frail, vulnerable and destructible, while the former is eternal. Still, the teachings of Chasidism have dismissed Plato's conclusions, in which he shunned the physical in favor of the spiritual, ignored the particular in favor of the universal, scorned at the concrete in favor of the abstract.

Our sages knew how to compress profound philosophical ideas in concise and seemingly simple phrases. "G-d promised that He would not enter into the heavenly Jerusalem until he did not enter into the earthly

¹ See Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, for a detailed explanation of this idea of Plato and its impact on Western thought.

Jerusalem.”² This was the Rabbis’ way of dismissing the dramatic conclusion of Platonic Idealism.

In this essay we will explore the ramifications of these two conflicting world views within the psychological arena of human existence.

Two Lives

Richard Nixon was reported to have once explained why the American people were infatuated with Kennedy and filled with animosity toward Nixon. “When they gaze at Kennedy,” he reportedly said, “they see what they’d love to be; when they look at me, they see who they are.”

Most of us own two lives—the life of our dreams and the life of our reality, the life we wished for and the life we ended up with.

Many people can speak about, at least, two marriages: the marriages they dreamt of having, and the marriages they ended up with.

This is true concerning most issues in life—children, careers, relationships, psychological serenity and physical health. As innocent children, idealistic youngsters and newlyweds flying high, we harbor a particular vision of what life, romance, family and success might be like.

Then we grow up and we are called to the task of translating this magical vision into a concrete reality. We are confronted with the challenge of constructing lives of wholesomeness and happiness in a world of stress, anxiety, pain and disillusionment. Many of us grow frustrated and downtrodden by the broken and flawed realities we must confront. We yearn to escape to Plato’s idealistic world, where all flawed objects are transformed into perfect ideas.

Preserving a Letter

There is something very intriguing about this week’s Torah portion (Pekudei).

² Talmud, Taanis 5a. Zohar, Vayikra 15b.

Anybody even slightly familiar with the Bible is aware of its unique conciseness. Complete sagas, rich, complex and profound, are often depicted in a few short biblical verses. Each word in the Bible literally contains layers upon layers of interpretation.

For the sages and rabbis over the past 3,000 years, it was clear that there is nary a superfluous word or letter in the Bible, and large sections of the Talmud are based on this premise. If a verse is lyrically repetitive, if two words are used where one would suffice or a longer word is used when a shorter word would suffice, there is a message here, a new concept, another law.³

It is thus astonishing to observe that two entire sections in the Torah are seemingly superfluous!

These are the final two sections of the book of Exodus—Vayakhel and Pekudei⁴—telling the story of how the Jewish people constructed the portable Tabernacle (Mishkan) that would accompany them during their 40-year journey in the desert.

In the previous sections of this book, Terumah and Tetzaveh⁵, the Torah gives a detailed account of G-d’s instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the Sanctuary. With meticulous description, G-d lays out to Moses every detail of the Tabernacle—every piece of furniture, item, article and vessel that should become part of the Sanctuary. Nothing is left out, from the Holy Ark, the Candelabra and the Altar to the pillars, wall panels, curtains, ropes, bars, hooks and pegs, all specified with their exact shapes and dimensions. In these portions, G-d also presents Moses with the exact instructions of how to weave the priestly garments—down to the last tassel—worn by those who would perform the service in the Sanctuary.

Then, a few chapters later in Vayakhel and Pekudei, in the story of how the Jewish people carried out these

³ The Chumash (“Five Books of Moses”) contains 79,976 words and 304,805 letters. The Talmud states that Rabbi Akiva would derive “mounds upon mounds of laws from the serif of a letter” in Torah (Menachos 29b).

⁴ Exodus, chapters 35–40.

⁵ Exodus, chapters 25–30.

instructions, the previous two portions are repeated almost verbatim. The Torah records, once again, every nook and cranny of the Sanctuary and tells of the actual building, carving and weaving of every pillar, wall-panel, peg, hook, bar, tapestry, piece of furniture and vessel that comprised the Sanctuary. For a second time, we are informed of every decorative form and artistic design sculpted in each article of the Tabernacle and every single shape, design and dimension of each and every article.⁶

Now, a single sentence, something like “The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses,” would have spared the Torah more than a thousand words! Why the need for hundreds of sentences that are purely repetitive of facts that have been stated earlier?

One of the worst mistakes a speaker or writer can make is to be repetitive. “You made your point,” the crowd says to itself. “Time to move on.” This is true in regard to anybody who speaks or writes. How much more so, concerning the Torah, a divine document well known for its extraordinary briefness. Yet, in this instance, the Torah apparently shows not even the slightest attempt to avoid repeating itself hundreds of times!

Two Sanctuaries

The truth of the matter is that the Torah is not repeating itself at all; it is discussing two distinct sanctuaries: a heavenly model and a terrestrial edifice.

The first two portions outline the structure and composition of the Sanctuary as it was transmitted from G-d to Moses. This was a conceptual, celestial Tabernacle; it was a heavenly blueprint, a divine map for a home to be built in the future.

⁶ This redundancy is reflected very clearly in the most basic and fundamental commentary to the Bible, written by Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. From among all the 53 Torah portions, these two portions have the newest explanations of Rashi on them. Why? Rashi makes it clear in the beginning of Vayakhel: “I have already explained the contribution to the Tabernacle and its construction in the verses where their commands were presented.” No need to repeat that which has been stated already.

In His instructions to Moses on how to construct the Sanctuary, G-d says⁷, “You shall erect the Tabernacle according to its laws, as you have been shown on the mountain.” In other words, on the summit of Mount Sinai Moses was shown an image, a vision, of the home in which G-d desired to dwell. This image was, obviously, ethereal and sublime; it was a home created in heaven, by G-d himself and presented to one of the most spiritual men in history, Moses.

Plato would describe it as “the ideal tabernacle,” the one that can be conceived only in our minds.

In contrast to this first celestial Sanctuary come the last two portions of Exodus, in which Moses descends from the glory of Sinai and presents the people of Israel with a mission of fashioning a physical home for G-d in a sandy desert. Here the Jewish people are called upon to translate a transcendental vision of a spiritual home into a physical structure comprised of mundane cedar and gold, which are, by their very definition, limited and flawed.

This second Sanctuary that the Jews built may have resembled, in every detail, the spiritual model described several chapters earlier, but in its very essence it was a completely different Sanctuary. One was “built” by an infinite and absolute G-d; the other by mortals of flesh and blood. One consisted entirely of nebulous spirit, the other of gross matter. One was designed in heaven, the other on earth. One was perfect, the other was flawed.

In our personal lives these two Sanctuaries reflect the two lives most of us must deal with throughout our years. Each of us owns his or her heavenly “Sanctuary,” envisioned atop a summit of spiritual and psychological serenity and representing a vision and dream for a life and marriage aglow with love, passion and endless joy. This is the ideal home, the ideal family, the ideal marriage. Then we have our earthly Sanctuary, a life often filled with trials, challenges, battles and setbacks, and yet one in which we attempt to create a space for G-d amidst a tumultuous heart and a stressful life.

⁷ Exodus 26:30. Cf. Exodus 25:40; 27:8.

G-d's Choice

Astonishingly, at the end of this week's portion, we are told⁸ that it was only in the second Sanctuary that the divine presence came to reside. He wished to express His truth and eternity within the physical abode created by mortal and fragmented human beings on barren soil, not in the spiritual Sanctuary atop Mount Sinai.⁹

In which one of these two did G-d choose to dwell? In the latter!

If the Bible had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, just leaving it at "The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses," we might have entertained the notion that our Sanctuary below is valuable insofar as it resembles the Sanctuary above. The primary Sanctuary, we may have thought, is the perfect one designed by G-d in the spiritual realms and that the beauty of the earthly abode depends on how much it is capable of mirroring the heavenly abode.

It is this notion, the Platonic notion if you will, that the Torah was attempting to banish by repeating the entire Sanctuary story a second time. G-d did not desire a duplication of the spiritual Sanctuary on earth. The value of the earthly abode was not in how much it mirrored its heavenly twin. The Bible is, in its own inimitable fashion, teaching us that G-d wished for a second, distinct Sanctuary, one that would mirror the design of the spiritual one but would remain distinct and unique in its purpose; to fashion a dwelling place for the divine in a coarse universe, to light a candle of truth in a world of lies, to search for the spark of truth in a broken heart. It is in this struggle-filled abode where G-d allows Himself to be found!

So if the Torah had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, it would have saved itself hundreds of sentences but robbed us of perhaps its most powerful message: that man, in living his or her ordinary, flawed

⁸ Exodus 40:34-38.

⁹ "G-d desired a dwelling in the lowly realms" (Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 16); "This is what man is all about, this is the purpose of his creation and of the creation of all worlds, supernal and ephemeral" (Tanya, chapter 36).

and fragmented day-to-day life permeated with the morality and spirituality of the Torah and its mitzvos, can create heaven on earth.

"You Were Never As Beautiful"

A story:¹⁰

A young Chassidic boy and girl from Krakow were engaged and deeply in love when the transports to Auschwitz began. Their entire families were decimated and they both assumed that their life's partner-to-be was also dead.

One night, close to the end of the war, the groom saw his bride standing on the women's side of the fence. When the Russians came and liberated them, they met, and went for a stroll. They entered a vacant home, where they spent, for the first time in years, some moments together.

Suddenly, the young woman came upon a mirror and saw herself for the first time in years. A dazzling beauty had turned into a skeleton. She had no hair, her face was full of scars, her teeth were knocked out and she was thin as a rail.

She cried out to him, "Woe, what has become of me? I look like the Angel of Death himself! Would you still marry such an ugly person?"

"You never looked more beautiful to me than right at this moment," was his response.

Two Types of Beauty

Which beauty was this young man referring to? It was not the external attractive beauty of a healthy and shapely body. It was the internal, sacred and deep beauty emerging from human dignity and courage, from a spirit who faced the devil himself and still chose to live and love.

Perhaps this is why G-d chose the second, and not the first, Sanctuary as His abode. On the surface, the

¹⁰ I once read this story; I do not know its original source.

Sanctuary in heaven is far more beautiful and perfect than the Sanctuary on earth. The truth is, however, that a beauty and depth exist in our attempt to introduce a spark of idealism in a spiritual wasteland that a palace built in heaven can never duplicate.

When G-d sees a physical human being, filled with struggle and anxiety, stretching out his hand to help a person in need or engaging in a mitzvah, G-d turns to the billions of angels filling the heavens, and says: “Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than that?”¹¹

(This essay is based on an address delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5718, March 15, 1958¹²).

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Life Is a Double-Decker Cave

by Yanki Tauber

Two people went exploring and reached a swamp. The first was a man of means; he radioed for a helicopter, and five minutes later was on the other side, the crease in the pants of his safari suit intact. He even took some photographs while he was flying over (he was a man with an avid interest in the sciences), which made a modest but significant contribution to the field of swamp study.

The second person struggled across on foot. He got stuck. He got lost. He fended off poisonous snakes and other creatures too vile to mention. Twenty years later he emerged, calloused, begrimed, with a pronounced limp and the stink of the swamp in his skin. He went on to write the two national bestsellers, *Surviving in a Swamp Environment* and *The Unknown Treasures of the Swamp*. He directed both of the movie adaptations, and became the world’s foremost consultant for environmentalist groups and road-building companies. He established an international corporation which mined swamps for high-grade diamonds, whose presence was indicated by a certain type of slime on the surface—a technique he perfected based on his experiences.

One of the most famous pieces of real estate on earth is the Cave of Machpelah (also known as the “Cave of the Patriarchs”) in Hebron. As recounted in chapter 23 of Genesis, Abraham purchased the cave and surrounding field as a burial place for his wife, Sarah, making it the first plot of land in the Holy Land to become the legal possession of the Jewish people.

Machpelah means “doubled” in Hebrew, and two reasons are given for this name. One reason is that four prestigious couples are buried there: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah. The second reason given by the commentaries is that it had two chambers one above the other, “like a house with a loft above it.”

Paradoxically, the Torah section (Parshah) that opens with the account of Sarah’s death and burial is called

¹¹ See Midrash Rabah on the verse Hayosheves Baganim (Song of Songs).

¹² Likkutei Sichot, vol. I, pp. 195–198.

Chayei Sarah, “The Life of Sarah.” Indeed, the Kabbalistic work *Midrash Hane’elam* interprets the very verse describing Sarah’s passing—*And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan* (Genesis 23:2)—as an allusion to the soul’s journey through physical life.¹ And the chassidic masters explain that life is a double-decker cave—“a house with a loft above it.”

Some arrive at the journey endowed with resources: a lofty soul, a refined character, a genius mind. These are the *tzaddikim* (perfectly righteous), who take the helicopter ride over the swamp of life. They do much good, enriching our knowledge and inspiring us with their bird’s-eye view of reality.

Then there are the sorry slobs who get stuck, who get lost, who get begrimed and beslimed in their journey through the swamp. These are the *baalei teshuvah* (masters of return), who emerge from their decades of wandering and misadventure with knowledge, skills and profits that far exceed those of their loftier brethren.

Life is a double-decker cave. If you ended up on the upper story, consider yourself lucky. If you find yourself on the lower level, consider yourself luckier.

Rabbi Yanki Tauber (1965–). Content editor for *chabad.org*, writer, and lecturer, he is the author of *Once Upon a Hasid*, *Beyond the Letter of the Law*, and *The Inside Story*.

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¹ In this approach, *Sarah* (“Princess”) alludes to the soul; *Kiryat Arba* (“Town of Four”) are the four elements comprising the physical body; *Hebron* (“attachment”) is the fusion of matter and spirit that is life; *Canaan* (“commerce”) refers to the soul’s “investment” into physical life for the sake of gleaning spiritual “profit” from the experience.

Twins

by Yanki Tauber

And it came to pass at the time that she gave birth, that, behold, there were twins in her womb. . . . And [the firstborn’s] name was called Peretz. Afterward came forth his brother . . . and his name was called Zerach.

—Genesis 38:27–30

[Here it says,] “at the time that she gave birth”; in Rebecca’s case it says, “and her days to give birth were fulfilled.” For there it was a fulfilled term of pregnancy, while here it was unfulfilled.

[Here, the word] “twins” is written in its full spelling; there it is written in a deficient spelling. For [in Rebecca’s case] one of them was wicked, while here both were righteous.

—Rashi, *ibid.*

Among the numerous births recounted in the book of Genesis, two are of twins: the birth of Isaac’s and Rebecca’s twins, Jacob and Esau; and the birth of Peretz and Zerach, twin sons of Tamar and Judah.

While certain similarities mark the two births,¹ there are also some significant differences, both in the circumstances surrounding the two pregnancies as well as in the characters of the two sets of twins they produced.

Isaac and Rebecca were married for twenty childless years; they prayed for children, each evoking the righteousness of the other in their appeal to G-d.² Their sacred union produced two very different sons: Jacob

¹ Both births involved a struggle between the twins as to which one would be the firstborn. Jacob was born with “his hand grasping the heel of Esau” (Genesis 25:26; Jacob later contrived to purchase the birthright from Esau and to receive the blessing Isaac intended for his firstborn). In the case of Peretz and Zerach, the Torah relates how Zerach’s hand was the first to emerge from the womb but was retracted when that twin yielded to Peretz’s aggressive efforts to be born first (*ibid.*, 38:27–30).

² Genesis 25:21; Midrash Rabbah on verse.

grew to become a gentle scholar; Esau, a crass and con-
niving materialist.³

Tamar's twins were conceived in far less exalted circum-
stances. Tamar was originally married to Judah's eldest
son, Er. Upon Er's untimely death, she was given in levi-
rate marriage⁴ to his younger brother, Onan; but Onan,
too, died childless. When Tamar realized that Judah had
no intention of marrying her to his third son, Shelah,
she disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced Judah
himself. When her pregnancy became apparent, Tamar
was almost put to death, on Judah's orders, for harlotry;
it was only when she produced certain personal effects
which Judah had left with her as collateral against his
payment to her that Judah realized that the "prostitute"
with whom he had cohabited was his former daugh-
ter-in-law and the twins in her womb were fathered
by himself.⁵

Yet unlike the mixed progeny of Isaac and Rebecca's
marriage, the twin sons born out of this morally dubi-
ous union were both righteous men. Indeed, all kings of
Israel, from David to Moshiach, are the issue of Tamar's
pregnancy.⁶

The inverse differences between these two pregnan-
cies and births are alluded to in the verses that describe
them. Regarding Rebecca's pregnancy, the Torah says,
"Her days to give birth were fulfilled; and, behold, there
were twins in her womb"; with Tamar, the Torah writes:
"At the time that she gave birth, behold, there were
twins in her womb." Our sages, noting the different
phraseology, explain that Rebecca's was a "fulfilled"

pregnancy of nine full months, while Tamar gave birth
after an "unfulfilled" pregnancy of only seven months.⁷

Our sages also note that the Hebrew word for
"twins," *te'omim*, is spelled differently in the two
accounts. In the Holy Tongue, many words can be writ-
ten in either a "full" spelling or a "deficient" spelling
(i.e., lacking one or more letters). In the account of
Peretz and Zerach's birth, the word *te'omim* appears
in its full spelling; but in the account of Jacob and
Esau's birth, it appears in deficient form, lacking the
letters *aleph* and *yud*. This, explain the commentaries,
alludes to the fact that Tamar's twins "were both righ-
teous, while in [Rebecca's] case, one was righteous and
the other wicked."⁸

In other words, the "fulfilled" pregnancy of Rebecca
produced a "deficient" set of twins, while Tamar's
"deficient" pregnancy produced a "full" and perfect
progeny.

Seeds of Evil?

But was Rebecca's indeed a perfect pregnancy? The
Midrash seems to imply that the wicked half of her
progeny was already asserting his evil nature while still
in the womb.

The Torah relates that "The children struggled within
her."⁹ The Midrash explains: "Whenever she would pass
a house of prayer or house of study, Jacob would strug-
gle to come out . . . and when she passed a house of
idolatry, Esau would struggle to come out."¹⁰ Rebecca,
puzzled by the contrary strivings being exhibited by her
offspring, "sought the counsel of G-d" and was told:
"There are two nations in your womb; two peoples will
separate from your innards."¹¹

There are, however, other Midrashic accounts that
describe Esau and Jacob sharing a righteous child-

³ Genesis 25:27.

⁴ The principle of levirate marriage (*yibbum*) is set down in
Deuteronomy 25:5-6: "If brothers dwell together, and one
of them should die childless, the dead man's wife shall not
marry out of the family to a stranger; her husband's brother
shall cohabit with her and take her as her as his wife in
yibbum. And the firstborn to which she shall give birth shall
succeed in the name of the dead brother, so that his name
not be wiped out in Israel..."

⁵ Genesis 38:6-26.

⁶ See Ruth 4:18-22.

⁷ Rashi on Genesis 25:24 and 38:27.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Genesis 25:22.

¹⁰ Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 63:6.

¹¹ Genesis 25:22-23.

hood in the holy environment of their parents' home and under the tutelage of their saintly grandfather, Abraham, and that "only later did Esau ruin himself with his deeds."¹² This supports our initial conception of an impeccable conception, pregnancy and birth, followed by a "deficient" progeny that is attributable solely to the fact that Esau, by his own free will, chose to follow a path of evil.

But a similar contradiction is also to be found in our Sages' remarks regarding G-d's creation of the world. On the one hand, we have the Midrashic statement that "The world was created fulfilled"—i.e., fully matured and lacking nothing.¹³ Yet the perfect world which G-d created contains the potential for imperfection, even evil. Indeed, this potential is an integral part of its perfection. The Midrash, citing the verse, "And G-d looked upon all that He made and, behold, it was very good," comments: "'Behold it was very good'—this is the good inclination; 'and behold it was very good'—this is the inclination for evil . . . 'behold it was very good'—this is good fortune; 'and behold it was very good'—this is suffering . . . 'behold it was very good'—this is paradise; 'and behold it was very good'—this is hell . . . 'behold it was very good'—this is the angel of life; 'and behold it was very good'—this is the angel of death...."¹⁴

The Two Delicacies

A fundamental principle of the Jewish faith is that, "Freedom of choice has been granted to every man: if he desires to turn himself to a path of good and be a righteous person, the option is in his hands; if he desires to turn himself to a path of evil and be a wicked person, the option is in his hands."¹⁵ Yet we observe that certain people are more susceptible to evil than others. The Talmud describes the prototypical victim of evil, Job, protesting to G-d: "Master of the universe! You have created righteous people, and you have created wicked people!"¹⁶

¹² Zohar I, 138b; Yalkut Shimon, Joshua 23.

¹³ Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 14:7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9:9–12; cf. ibid., Kohelet 3:15: "'Good'—this is the good inclination; 'very good'—this is the inclination for evil."

¹⁵ Mishneh Torah, *Laws of Repentance* 5:1.

¹⁶ Talmud, Bava Batra 16a.

In his Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that G-d indeed created "righteous people" and "wicked people." "Righteous people" (*tzaddikim*) are individuals who, by nature, abhor evil and desire only good, either because they have been born that way or because they have transformed their negative drives into positive ones. "Wicked people," on the other hand, are those individuals who are destined "not to be wicked in actuality, G-d forbid, but that the doings of the wicked should approach them, in their minds and thoughts alone, so that they must constantly battle to avert their minds from them and suppress the evil; for they would not be able to annihilate it completely—as can only be achieved by the righteous."¹⁷

For G-d desires both these types of human being in His world. "Just like in physical foods, for example, there exist two types of delicacies: sweet and luscious foods, and sharp or sour foods which have been spiced and garnished so that they are made into delicacies which gratify the soul," so, too, "there are two kinds of gratification before G-d: one, from the complete annihilation of evil . . . by the righteous; the second, when evil is subdued while it is still at its strongest and most powerful . . . through the efforts of the intermediate man."¹⁸

This is the deeper significance of the "two nations" which Rebecca was told dwelled in her womb. The gravitation to evil exhibited by one of her twins was not a deficiency—it was the potential for the "second delicacy" craved by G-d. It was only later, when Esau chose to surrender to his evil inclination rather than battle it, that the duality of forces she birthed became a "deficient" set of twins.

As they existed within Rebecca, however, Jacob and Esau constituted a "full" pregnancy, containing both

¹⁷ Tanya, ch. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid. The "intermediate man" (*beinoni*) is Rabbi Schneur Zalman's term for the so-called "wicked person" who, though his actual behavior is in full conformity with the divine will, must constantly struggle against his own animal nature and evil inclination. The state of *beinoni* is thus an intermediate state between the *tzaddik*, who has uprooted and transformed his negative traits, and the *rasha*, the actually wicked individual.

of the two fundamental potentials that G-d implanted in His creation: the delight of utter goodness, and the distinct pleasure and sense of achievement that comes only from the struggle with adversity.¹⁹

Based on the Rebbe's talks on Shabbat Toledot, 5744 (1983), and on other occasions.²²

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Tamar's pregnancy and delivery describe the reverse process: how negative circumstances and actions can be sublimated so that the original perfection, from which every potential in existence stems, is restored. Indeed, when the potential for evil, suffering, hell and death becomes actual, the opportunity exists for an even deeper perfection to be achieved, when these are vanquished and transformed into good.

The Ascent to Mount Zion

Hence the paradox of our existence: perfection begets imperfection (as in Rebecca's pregnancy), for nothing can be said to be truly perfect unless it possesses the potential for struggle, which means that it must be vulnerable to imperfection. And imperfection gives birth to perfection (as in Tamar's pregnancy) when that vulnerability is exploited to reap the rewards of struggle and to attain the perfect twinship of pristine goodness and vanquished evil.

The whole of history is the noble and painful progress toward the resolution of this paradox when, in the age of Moshiach, "the saviors (descendants of Tamar) shall ascend the mountain of Zion to judge the mountain of (Rebecca's) Esau,"²⁰ uniting the vulnerabilities that are born out of the perfection of G-d's creation with the perfection that is born out of the vulnerabilities of the human condition.²¹

¹⁹ See *The Inside Story* (VHH, 1997), pp. 48–56.

²⁰ Obadiah 1:21; see Rashi on Genesis 33:14.

²¹ Cf. Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 12:5: "The word *toldot* ("chronicles") appears everywhere in the Torah in a deficient spelling, except in two instances: 'These are the chronicles of Peretz' (Ruth 4:18), and ['These are the chronicles of the heaven and the earth upon their creation' (Genesis 2:1)]. Why are all the others lacking [the letter *vav*]? . . . Because of the six (*vav*) things taken from Adam [in wake of his sin]: his radiance, his life, his stature, the fruit of the earth, the fruit of the trees, and the luminaries. . . . These shall be restored only with the coming of [Moshiach] the descendant of Peretz."

²² Likkutei Sichot, vol. XXX, pp. 110–115, *et al.*