

# THE CORONA BIBLE

## **Coronavirus and Faith in Troubled Times**

Rabbi Tzvi Fishman

May the Master of the Universe be with our aspirations  
and guard our feet from stumbling; and may the prayer  
of the beloved Psalmist be fulfilled by our endeavor,  
*‘Teach me, O God, Your ways, and I shall walk in Your  
truth.’*

All rights reserved. Copyright 2020 by Tzvi Fishman

Contact: Shoshana Street Productions, 19 Shoshana  
Street, Jerusalem, Israel

E-mail: [shoshanastreetproductions@gmail.com](mailto:shoshanastreetproductions@gmail.com)

Thanks to Rabbi David Samson, a mentor along the way, whose teachings contributed immensely to this book.

## APPROBATION

Rosh Chodesh Nisan, 5780

I strongly recommend this book on Faith and Trust by Rabbi Tzvi Fishman. I have known him for several decades. He is a person with the reverence of Heaven, a learned student of the Torah, as well as possessing a great literary talent and abundant faith. This guide, based on the teachings of our Sages, will certainly inspire readers with the love and reverence of God, the Master of the Universe, whose mercy never ends.

With blessings,

Shlomo Aviner

Rosh Yeshiva, Ateret Yerushalayim, Old City, Jerusalem

## Introduction

### **IN THE BEGINNING...**

To date, the end of March, 2020, the Coronavirus has neither a vaccine nor healing medicine. Very often, in a healthy person, the illness subsides like a bout of flu, while in other cases, it can prove fatal. All sorts of health measures must be taken, but, at the moment, humanity is relatively helpless to fight off the invisible and fast-spreading danger. Thus, for individuals and for mankind, a path to strength, and to overcoming worry, lies in forming a living connection with God.

The word “corona” is associated with the word “crown” and “kingship.” From a spiritual point of view, the Creator of All Things has sent the Coronavirus to the world to make us realize our vulnerability, and to draw our attention to Him. The Bible assures us that the Lord is patient, but, having sent the Plague of Coronavirus down to Earth, it seems that His patience is wearing thin. It seems that God wants us to recognize that He is the King. He wants us to separate ourselves from the vanities of life, from false gods, and transgression, and to adopt a moral way of living. Via a miniscule germ, shaped like a crown, God has filled hearts with panic and

fright, wiped out private fortunes, destroyed economies and mighty businesses, and brought countries to their knees. Yet, the epidemic in the air is not a punishment, but rather a helpful guidepost, like a traffic sign, to stop our reckless driving, and to point us in the proper direction. Step number one is to forge a new, active, living connection to God.

## SECRET OF FAITH AND HAPPINESS

The Bible commences by telling us, *“In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth.”*

The first secret of faith and happiness is to make God a part of our lives.

It sounds very prosaic, but, in practice, it turns out to be a daily challenge. God created the world in a way that He keeps Himself camouflaged. In Hebrew, the word for world is *“olam.”* The word *“olam”* is based on the Hebrew word for “hidden.” God hides Himself in the world, in order to give man freedom to choose between good and evil. If God were to perform obvious miracles every day, everyone would automatically believe in His existence, taking away man’s free choice and the great reward a person receives for believing in the Creator. By

keeping Himself incognito, “behind the curtains” of life, God grants mankind freedom of belief and action, and the subsequent responsibility of conducting his life in a way most productive to himself and to the world around him.

We learn this basic foundation of life from the very beginning of the Bible, in the story of Adam and Eve. Its simple message is clear, teaching us that the Creator of Heaven and Earth placed man in the world in order to recognize his Kingship, follow His bidding, and thus enjoy a joyful, strife-free life in the Garden of Eden.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve failed the first test of faith which God sent their way, and mankind has been struggling ever since to return to the Garden.

The tips for happier living which you will discover in this book are based on the wisdom of the Bible, on the teachings of the ancient Sages of the Mishna and the Talmud, on secrets of the Kabbalah, and on the writings of Torah Sages throughout history, presented in a simple fashion that all people can readily understand. Many of the understandings have been gleaned from the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, including excerpts from a previous book called, “The Art of T’shuva,” which I wrote with Rabbi David Samson.

Like everything else in life, these teachings have many levels, each deeper and more detailed than the next. We will content ourselves with the basic levels, leaving deeper exploration to those select souls whose natures are geared for the long course of learning and self-perfection required to navigate through the mystical worlds where the secrets of existence abound.

The Talmud records that four ancient Sages entered the “Hidden Orchard” to discover the secrets of Torah. One died, one went insane, and one abandoned his faith. Only Rabbi Akiva returned unharmed. Rabbi Akiva is known for his many great teachings. Two of them stand out amongst the rest: “Love your neighbor as yourself – this is a great principle of Torah,” and, “Everything that God does is for the best.” These two simple messages are foolproof remedies for better living, and for overcoming the Coronavirus, as we shall discover, God willing, in the following chapters.

The many self-help books on psychology and personal improvement which line bookstore shelves contain a plethora of useful insights and constructive advice. After all, man is influenced by a wide gamut of factors dating back even before his conception, through his time in the womb, through his childhood years, and the life

passages which follow. The Kabbalah reveals that in addition to all of the fashionable theories and cures, on a far deeper level, there is a spiritual phenomenon of wondrous beauty, like a butterfly enclosed in a cocoon, waiting to soar free. This is the light and healing wonder of returning to our Source, and the Source of all existence, in order to achieve true personal harmony and peace.

Surely, spiritual matters require attention and study. Can it be that we learn everything else about life, devouring books on all subjects - history, psychology, science, financial planning, healthy living, home repair, and the like, while ignoring our spiritual essence and our connection to God?

In truth, this book doesn't contain any startling revelations of which people aren't already aware. After all, the religions of the world, in their many differing forms, have explored the spiritual dimension of life since the beginnings of time. Abraham appeared on the stage of world history to shatter the myth of idolatry and to teach mankind about the Oneness of God. Amidst thunder and lightning, the tenants of Monotheism were broadcast to the world with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Founded on the Divine principles of



Judaism, religious such as Christianity and Islam branched off in directions of their own. Until recent times, the Bible was the most-widely read book in the world. While Harry Potter may have since toppled the Holy Scriptures in international sales, the world has already been inoculated with the spiritual teachings of the Bible. But, precisely because these teachings are so familiar to people, they are very often taken for granted and even forgotten in the rush and bustle of modern living.

In his book of spiritual improvement, *Path of the Righteous*, the famous Italian Kabbalist of the eighteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, writes:

“I have composed this study, not to teach people things they do not already know, but rather to remind them of matters already evident to them. But to the extent that these spiritual truths are well known and familiar to everyone, the forgetfulness surrounding them is great. The failure to delve into these issues stems from their being so obvious to all, to the point where people don’t feel a need to review them or explore them in depth. Therefore, people who cherish this discipline of study, and who embrace the healthy lifestyle that evolves from it, are considered to be dull-witted in the eyes of the

worldly. Although the foundations of spirituality exist in every man's heart, as his genetic inheritance from the time of Creation, if an individual doesn't concern himself with them, he will come to ignore them, owing to their seeming simplicity, and to the many factors in life which draw a person away from them. How then will this wisdom enter a person's consciousness if he or she doesn't seek it out and study its many branches? What will he answer when he meets his Creator? How can he expect to refine unhealthy character traits, overcome the tribulations of life, and discover true happiness if he doesn't recognize and study the spiritual foundations upon which human existence is based?"

Likewise, in writing this book, I don't pretend to present any startling revelations, for even the innermost secrets of life are known to us in our souls. Rather, the book is intended to remind readers of things forgotten, or of matters never learned, in hopes of inspiring people to attain happier, more enriching lives, especially in the time of crisis that we are facing.

## Chapter One

### **THE TREASURE UNDER THE BRIDGE**

Once Upon a Time, there was a simple peasant who dreamed that there was a great treasure hidden under a bridge in Vienna. Excited, he awoke from his sleep, certain that this was no ordinary dream. Immediately, he set out on the long journey. The going wasn't easy, but because his resolve was firm, he arrived at his destination - the very same bridge which he had seen in his dream.

He stood by the bank of the river, trying to decide what to do. He was afraid to search during the day because he feared that the pedestrians walking over the bridge would see him searching for the treasure.

A policeman passed by and inquired sternly, "What are you doing here, standing here so long by this bridge?"

The simple peasant was taken aback by the intimidating figure of the policeman. He decided that it would be best to tell him the truth, with the hope that the officer would help

him find the treasure which they could then share. So the peasant told the angry-looking policeman about his dream.

The officer laughed. "Foolish peasant," he scoffed. "Why bother with dreams? I too had a dream. I dreamed there was a treasure hidden in the basement of a peasant's home...."

The peasant listened in wonder as the police officer described the peasant's very own cottage, the color of the fence, the type of tiles on the roof, and the name of village where he lived!

"Not for a minute did I contemplate traveling to this faraway place to search after this imaginary treasure," the officer declared with a laugh.

As fast as he could, the peasant hurried back to his home and began digging in his cellar. Sure enough, after digging and digging, he discovered the treasure!

"Now I know that the treasure was with me all along!" he exclaimed in great joy. "But in order to discover it, I had to journey to Vienna."

## THE TREASURE WITHIN

This is an ancient story which can be found in the Jerusalem Talmud, written over two-thousand years ago. In more modern times, the famous Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, told it to his students. In relocating the bridge to Vienna, Rabbi Nachman modified the story a bit to set the tale in his era, some two-hundred years ago, but the simple fable is timeless in its meaning, addressing each and every one of us today.

The simple peasant represents everyone. Obviously, something was troubling him in his life. This is clear from his dream. In the course of a night, people often have many dreams. The Talmud teaches that while most dreams are void of meaning, dreams which stand out in one's memory often contain secrets of our unconscious. Psychiatrists say the same. Often, dreams can reveal inner states, suppressed longings, worries and fears. Perhaps, in dreaming about a treasure, the poor peasant was expressing his worries over his livelihood. Financial insecurity can trigger severe anxiety and psychic unrest. But because Rebbe Nachman, a renowned Kabbalist, is using this tale as a metaphor, and because his main

focus is on spiritual matters, the story is not merely dealing with the tribulations of making a living.

After telling the simple tale to his students, he said, “The same is true with everyone. Everyone has a treasure within himself. But in order to discover the treasure, a person must journey to the sage who can show him the way to uncover the treasure.”

Being a Hasidic Master famous for his passionate devotion to God, it is clear that for Rebbe Nachman, the greatest treasure in life is a person’s connection to God. The story is coming to teach us that this exalted treasure isn’t something removed and distant from us. Rather, we all have a connection to God within us, in our very own souls. However, in order to discover this deep and often hidden treasure, we have to search for the right person who can help us reveal the Divine Light which shines like a gem in our innermost being.

Obviously, if a person is not in touch with his innermost self, he or she cannot be truly happy or at ease. Material possessions and superficial pleasures may grant a person passing joy, but a person who is not truly himself suffers from an inner spiritual emptiness which cannot be filled by all of the material treasures in the world. The soul belongs to the spiritual realm, and thus physical

delights give it no nourishment. A person who is not connected to God cannot be truly happy because a fundamental essence of his existence is missing. Even if he has all of the money that a person could wish for, in one way or another, his life will be accompanied by troubles, or by a relentless feeling of angst that something is missing. The Corona epidemic has made this all too clear. Many wealthy people have had fortunes wiped out. Without the financial support they relied on to provide for their needs, and to keep their egos strong, they fall into depression, fear, and despair. Never having paid attention to the treasure of their soul, they don't know now where to find it.

In his book, *Path of the Righteous*, Rabbi Chaim Luzzatto describes this phenomenon with a metaphor:

“To what is this analogous? To the case of a simple citizen who married a princess. If he gave her all good things that the world contained, it would mean nothing to her since she is the daughter of the king. The same is true of the soul. If you were to bring it all of the pleasures of the world, they would mean nothing to it because of its pertaining to the higher spheres.”

The soul is the Divinely-empowered battery which allows us to keep living. The Sage of the Talmud teach

that the soul joins the body at birth, and leaves it upon death. A scientist might say, "Nonsense. There is no proof that a soul exists." You can't see it or weigh it - how can such a thing generate the power that sustains life? You can't see or weigh God, yet such a being exists all the same. The famed psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, claimed that God did not exist. God was an imaginary creation of primitive man, he insisted, to help him cope with his primal fears in a hostile world filled with powerful forces of nature – no more than a voodoo-like charm, or totem pole, to give mankind a feeling that something or someone was in control. Nonetheless, in the Bible, the basis of Western civilization, God begins the book and the entire Creation. He creates man, and gives him a soul. *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul."*

In Jewish tradition, when a person awakens from sleep in the morning, the first thing he or she does is to thank God for the renewal of the soul by saying: "I render thanks to You, everlasting King, who has mercifully restored my soul within me; great is Your faithfulness."

When a person sleeps during the night, it is as if he were dead. He lays unconscious. What keeps him breathing?



He doesn't remind himself to breathe. What keeps his lungs and heart working? He doesn't order them to work. What sustains his life? Nature? What is Nature? Where does it live? In the North Pole with Santa Claus? In the Caribbean? On a mountain in Tibet? You can say that God operates the world through a Divine Fiat called Nature, but Nature doesn't have any power in and of itself. What then keeps the heart beating? The answer is the soul, the invisible generator which the Creator has planted within man, what the Bible calls, "the breath of life."

Once again in Jewish tradition, to emphasize the gratitude a person should feel for each morning's renewed gift of life, he or she says: "My God, the soul which You have placed within me is pure. You have created it; You have formed it; You have breathed it into me. You preserve it within me; You will take it from me, and restore it to me in the Hereafter. So long as my soul is within me, I offer thanks to You, Lord my God and God of my fathers, Master of All Creatures, Lord of All Souls. Blessed are you, O Lord, who restores the souls to the dead.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, we hear a lot about WHO. Who is WHO? Yes, the World Health Organization.

But the real WHO, the WHO in charge of the world itself and the invisible germ that has come to waken all of our souls to the Truth of His Presence, or take them away from us, WHO is the Holy One Blessed Be He, Creator of Heaven and Earth, the God of the Bible who is still very much with us today.

Needless to say, people who believe in God and who make Him a part of their life, also experience suffering and trials. But a person with true faith in God knows that whatever befalls him is orchestrated by his Creator for his ultimate good. This faith and knowledge is life's greatest treasure and the key to true happiness. In his stories, Rebbe Nachman stresses this point again and again.

Rebbe Nachman said that the stories he told were universal, and that their messages applied to everyone. As the Bible records, all of mankind was created in "*the image of God*." All people have the ability and inner longing to connect with their Maker. Thus it is no coincidence that religions are found in every place and in every nation. Man feels a basic, innate, instinctive bond with his Creator. While many psychologists, philosophers, and scientists, have postulated theories denying the existence of a Creator, and the possibility of

forging a living connection with Him, the overwhelming majority of people on Earth believe in a God that hears their prayers, sees their doings, and plays an active role in directing their lives. Rebbe Nachman's story teaches that this primal connection to the Divine is not something that we need to search for in Heaven. It is within each and every one of us, in our hearts and souls, as much a part of our genes as the color of our hair and eyes. But while this Divine Attachment is available to all of us, it is hidden in the "basement" of our souls, and we need guidance and instruction in order to recognize it. Just as a flower needs water in order to grow, our spiritual natures need to be "watered" in order to develop the great spiritual powers which lie dormant in our beings. In order to activate the spiritual core of our existence and make the connection with God a living part of our lives, we need to find the sage, or Rabbi, or teacher, or counselor, or parent, or friend, who can help us discover this great hidden treasure. A story like Rebbe Nachman's, or a book like this one, can also be the "guide" we need to help illuminate our way.

In the most general sense, all people have "treasures" within them. Some people are very kind, others are very creative; some people excel in sports, while others have keen intellectual skills. Some people have the inner

artistic treasures, while others have the treasure of being good listeners and friends. All people have the treasure of a Divine soul, much more powerful than a smartphone, which can unite them, not only with the world, but with the Master of the Universe, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

One of the most frustrating situations in life is when a person can't "find himself." Everyone around him seems to be doing what they want to do, and being who they are, while he or she feels trapped in a false identity, as if they were dressed in a straitjacket, playing out this role or that, in order to win the approval of others. Not being who you are can lead to serious depression and melancholy. When a person's inner self is stymied and not able to express itself freely, whether because its existence is unknown, or because parental or societal pressures don't allow it to reach the light of day, a person can fall into patterns of painful withdrawal, anger, and self-hatred. When people aren't themselves, they harbor life-ruining feelings of anxiety and a lack of self-worth. When people are not in touch with themselves, or if they don't have the confidence and sense of self-worth to be who they are, they often play out roles to please others, or to "fit in" with the crowd, to keep up with the times and be just as cool, or sexy, or

daring as everyone else. These people are always seeking to “find the treasure in Vienna,” rather than within themselves. But because they aren’t “at home” with themselves, an ever-present unhappiness festers inside, giving them no happiness or rest.

This is why the secret of the treasure is so very important, and why God sends viruses like Corona, and other hardships, to help us discover the treasure of our souls. When a person realizes that he has a treasure within himself in his connection with God, then he or she immediately finds comfort. Since God is like a kind father looking after us at all times, the person searches for the good in every situation, rather than focusing on the bad. As King David says, *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”* God looks after us and provides for our needs. He makes sure that a person doesn’t lack anything he needs to fulfill his mission in life. If God wants a person to be a star musician, then God will give him the talents and opportunities which he needs to attain his goal. But if being a star musician would be detrimental for a person, let’s say by bringing him to conceit to the point where he arrogantly forgets that his talent is a gift from God and not a product of his own greatness, then his failure to become a renowned musician is really for his own good. As we will learn from

another story in this book, everything which God does is for a person's best interest. When a person understands this, he can be happy in all situations, in all times, knowing that whatever transpires in his life is from Heaven, even epidemics like Corona, and that God cares for him, and for mankind, like a shepherd and loving father, looking out for our good at all times. You ask, "What good can there possibly be in a devastating plague like Corona?" The answer is in bring mankind back to the Source and to a better way of living – and to the recognition that God is the Master of our lives, and not we ourselves.

The point is that a person is not alone. Our souls always connect us to God. For this reason, the level of material success in this world, or how famous an individual may be, are not the ultimate criteria in determining the value of our lives. When we die and return our souls to our Maker, the important thing is not whether we were famous violinists, or rich businessmen, or successful athletes, but whether we had a loving relationship with God and endeavored to bestow kindness on others. As the saying goes, you can't take your money, and your villa, and your sports car with you when you leave this world for Heaven. When life is over, all that matters are the good deeds which a person has managed to perform

on Earth, and his or her connection to God. If we discover this through the harsh teacher of Corona, well and good. But if a person only discovers this truth when he reaches the Gates of Heaven and the celestial guard won't let him in, then all of the money that he's left back on earth won't help him. The time to obtain this knowledge is when we are still in this world. This is the treasure under the bridge – the knowledge that the most important thing in life lies in our connection to God.

Unfortunately, many people lack this treasure in their lives. Perhaps no one ever taught them about it. Or perhaps someone tried to inform them, but they didn't listen. Or maybe they met a religious charlatan who turned them off to the truth. Also, with all the excitement and noise of modern living, being connected to God can seem like a bore. Thus, many people spend their lives in darkness, chasing after ephemeral things that have no lasting meaning. They go from high to high, constantly needing more, never able to fill up the void in their souls. In this situation, when someone is blind to the real treasure, or confused and struggling to discover who he really is in this world, following false and unwholesome paths, an out-of-the-ordinary, world-shaking, wake-up call like the Coronavirus comes to strip

us of our illusions and blindness and make us realize that we are not alone on this planet. There is a King who rules the world and our lives! The treasure was with us all of the time in our souls and we didn't know it. Eureka!

But sometimes, even a world-shaking event like Corona doesn't wake us up, and people try to explain it in scientific terms as an aberration of nature, a genetic flaw, an outcome of unhealthy dietary customs in China which created a new virus on the loose, and not as an act of God. In this case, the role of the mentor or guide is crucial to our reaching true understanding and self-discovery, and to the rapturous feeling of fulfilment that comes with making God an integral part of one's life.

## THE MENTOR

Interestingly, in Rebbe Nachman's story, the mentor who leads the peasant to the treasure is not some great rabbi or enlightened guru, but rather an ordinary policeman. This tells us that the key to our search can be found in a friend, an older sibling, a baseball coach, or even in a chance encounter with a person who appears in our life and suddenly expands our horizons. While parents, teachers, counselors, professional



therapists and coaches, in an assortment of disciplines, are available to light up dark periods of our lives, the person who helps us to unlock our personal treasure chest need not be a “shrink.” The seeker who sets off on a journey to “discover the treasure,” is not involved in a “shrinking” process at all. Rather, the seeker who sets out on a quest to find God is expanding the borders of life to the most infinite and transcendental realms.

The Talmud teaches that a prisoner cannot free himself. A person locked up in jail cannot unlock the doors by himself. If he doesn’t have the key, he needs someone from the outside to help him. This holds true for the prisons of our personal worlds. When a person is paralyzed by depression and despair, or stuck in the quagmire of some false or negative mode of behavior, such as an uncontrollable addiction or lust, or a craving for honor and wealth, he or she needs help from someone who can appraise the situation objectively and offer the needed insight and advice. Once again, the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, presents us with a wonderful parable in his book, *Path of the Just*:

“To what can this be compared? To a garden maze, the type to be found in the gardens of kings, which is planted for recreation and pleasure. The shrubs are

arranged in walls so that between the walls are many confusing and interlocking paths, all of them looking the same. The goal of the person walking through this difficult puzzle is to reach the path which leads to the plaza in their midst. Some of the paths are straight, leading to the plaza, while other paths cause one to lose the proper direction and to stray further from the desired destination. The person walking on the paths has no way of discerning whether he is on the true or false path, for all of the paths are alike. He will not reach his goal unless he has complete familiarity and visual knowledge of the paths, due to the fact that he has previously journeyed upon them and previously found his way to the plaza. Otherwise, he will remain stuck in the tiring cul-de-sac. However, if there be another person who commands an elevated position on a platform above the maze, who is able to see all of the paths from his superior vantage, he can distinguish between the correct and false routes. He is able to warn and instruct the seekers in the garden, 'This is the true path – take it!' The walker who is willing to believe him will reach the plaza. But the person who refuses to believe the advice, and who would rather follow after his own eyes, he will surely remain lost and fail to reach the desired goal. A person in the midst of the maze

cannot distinguish between the paths. But those who have already been through the maze and mastered it, and who can clearly see which paths to follow, they can advise the person who is willing to listen. These are the people whom we must trust.”

For everyone who sets off on a journey to discover a treasure, the proper guide, or map, travel manual, or GPS navigator, can lead the traveler to his or her desired destination in the most direct manner, with minimum confusion and discomfort. The secret is that the treasure lies within the seeker himself. One needn't set out on long and exhausting journeys. The treasure is not to be found under a bridge in Vienna, or on a mountaintop in Tibet, but, rather, at home. We are our own treasures. Our Creator gave us exactly what we need to fulfill our task in life. The solution to all of our problems, and the key to our happiness, lies deep down in the “basement” of our souls. The digging may sometimes be tiring, but with the proper guidance and encouragement along the way, the treasure is there for all of us, waiting for us to discover. This discovery is the greatest treasure there is.

## Chapter Two

### **RETURN TO EDEN**

#### RETURN TO THE SOURCE

Dear Reader — if you are looking to be happy, creative, in harmony with God and with the universe, the Kabbalah has the answer — Return to the Source.

When we speak about Returning to the Source, what does this mean? Where have we gone that we need to return? This is a very profound question, and only the beginnings of an answer will be given in this book. The soul, in its essence, belongs to the World of Souls. When it is placed in this world, in a physical body, it naturally longs to go home. For the soul, going home is being reunited with God. One of the great innovations of the Kabbalah is the teaching that this reunion is not limited to the return of the soul to “Heaven” after the death of the body. The Kabbalah teaches that the soul can find union with God in this world. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden metaphorically describes man’s existential plight. In effect, the sum of world history is mankind’s journey to Return to the Garden.

Not only man, but the world itself wants to return to its original state. This yearning is one of the most powerful forces of Creation.

Paradoxically, the Coronavirus epidemic has come to help us get back to the Garden. In addition to having co-written four commentaries with me on the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, Rabbi Samson is the principle of several yeshiva high schools in Jerusalem. When the epidemic broke out and schools were closed in Israel, he continued teaching his students online.

“In our first ‘Zoom’ class, I told the kids that via Corona, the world is being ‘restarted’ by the Master of Heaven and Earth. Life as we knew it until now is being ‘erased’ and ‘deleted.’ In effect, we are waiting for an agonizing download to end, and for a new program to begin. When they asked why God was doing this, I explained that Divine punishment for transgression comes measure-for-measure. From our solitary confinement, we see more and more each day how human society and culture are being destroyed. No one is participating in social encounters. That indicates that today’ social and cultural machinations need to be rectified. Not only are the cultural trappings of mankind being destroyed, the

bars, movie houses, theaters, rock concerts, and the like – also the yeshivas and synagogues have been forced to close. That means that we have to do a major reboot of everything. For instance, the institution of the family has undergone terrible and perverse transformations in our modern era, when everyone raises the banner of ‘doing one’s own thing,’ no matter how egotistical and immoral it may be. Today, a family can be composed of a father and a father, or two mothers, or who knows what else? The Coronavirus has brought the family back together. Even if people are separated by quarantines, hearts are together, with true concern for the wellbeing of others, not just ourselves. Even though people may be technically estranged, we are being reborn and internally changed. In our forced Corona incubation, we have gone back to the natural family. Also, in the bigger picture, in the family of nations, threatened by the world crisis, warring countries have put down their swords. Instead of fighting against each other, they are helping each other. This sudden unity, of the family, and of the world, is a healthy development which the King of the Universe has brought about with His scary invisible bug, an adversary which doesn’t distinguish between boomerang-throwing Aborigines from Australia, dapper-dressed Englishmen from London, or skirted Africans

from Zululand. Covid-19 doesn't care. To it, we are all the same. All in the same ship together."

The Kabbalistic concept of "Returning to the Source" is bound up with the concept of "*T'shuva*." While the Hebrew word *t'shuva* is normally translated as penitence or repentance, it is much more than that. The root of the Hebrew word *t'shuva* means "return."

*T'shuva* is a return to the Source, to one's roots, to one's deepest inner self. The phenomenon of *T'shuva* spreads out over all of the universe, encompassing mankind and all of Creation, bringing harmony and perfection to all of existence. One of the greatest Kabbalists of modern times, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, a master of mysticism and Torah Law, wrote extensively on the subject of *T'shuva*. He states:

"When one forgets the essence of one's soul; when one distracts his mind from seeing the true nature of his own inner life, everything becomes doubtful and confused. The principal Return (*t'shuva*) which immediately lights up the darkness, is for a person to return to himself, to the root of his soul. Then he will immediately return to God, to the Soul of all Souls. And he will continue to stride higher and higher in purity and joy. This is true for an individual, a nation, for all of mankind, and for the

perfection of all existence.”

The drive to Return to the Garden of Eden, and to our spiritual Source, is a great, inner foundation of life. One can readily understand that to reach fulfillment and happiness, a person must be his true self. In modern times, this basic understanding has been corrupted into a “do your own thing” attitude. The Kabbalah advocates a deeper, inner search, far beyond the surface passions and emotions which often lead people to express their every desire and lust. Man, and all of existence, has a deeper, spiritual source. In the depths of this ever-pure realm, our true essence lies. A person who makes the inward journey of returning to Eden comes to encounter his soul and the Creator who gave it. As Rabbi Kook writes:

“It is only through the great truth of returning to oneself that the individual, the nation, the world, all of the worlds, and all of existence, will return to its Maker, to be illuminated by the Light of Life.”

During the Corona crisis, we are not alone in our rooms of solitary confinement – God is with us. It is meant to be a time of reflection. Against our will, our lives have been interrupted, and we have been pulled away from



everything and left stuck in the house. Indeed, this is a gift. A time of inner examination. At time to diverse ourselves of the baggage of the past and make a new beginning. A time to ponder the question, “What are we doing here on Earth? Why have we been created? What is the rhyme and reason of our existence?”

Throughout history, man has been searching to discover the driving force of life. To a capitalist, money makes the world go around. To a romanticist, love is what impassions mankind. Freudians claim that man’s unconscious desires and libido are to blame. Peering into a microscope, a modern physicist declares that atoms and neutrons cause the world to spin. For biologists, the uniting power resides in strands of DNA. A Coronavirus researcher sees the crown-capped bacteria of Covid-19. When the Kabbalist gazes into the inner workings of the soul, the soul of the individual, and the soul of the world, he sees that the force behind all existence is the innate striving to return to its Source. In effect, the desire to return to the Source is the force which pushes all physical and spiritual worlds towards completion. It is only through returning to the Source of his being that each person, and all of mankind, will discover true joy and salvation from the straightjacket of materialism which is suffocating the world today.

## AGE OF ANXIETY

It is no secret that there is great darkness, confusion, and pain in the world. Our generation has been called “the age of anxiety.” People often live out their lives plagued with depression, sickness, and a sense of constant unrest. Psychiatrists, psychologists, humanists, and healers of all types have become the prophets of the moment, proposing dozens of theories to explain man’s existential dilemmas. Whether it is because we suffer from an Oedipus complex, or from primal anxiety at having been separated from the womb, from sexual repression, or from the trauma of death, mankind is beset with neuroses. Vials of anti-depressants and “uppers” can be found in the medicine cabinets of the very best homes. Not to mention the around-the-clock bombardment of work, television, computer games, smartphones, discos, and drugs which people use to blot out the never-ending angst that they feel. Remember Charlie Brown’s friend, Pigpen, who was always surrounded by a cloud of dust? Replace the dust with anxiety and that’s how many of us experience life. People pretend that their life has a solid foundation, when, in fact, they are plagued with an unspecific anxiety that refuses to leave them in peace. The

Coronavirus has come to highlight this anxiety and make everyone aware of the static which accompanies our existence in our alienation from our Creator. True spiritual mentors who are deeply versed in the secrets of Kabbalah understand that the source of this pain and anxiety is not due to external causes alone, such as the traumas of childhood, pressures to conform to behavioral norms, the race for success, and the fear of Corona. The Kabbalist looks beyond medical, social, cultural, psychological, sexual, and family dynamics to shed spiritual light on the world's confusion and pain.

Rabbi Kook asks, "What is the cause of the general melancholy found in the world? The answer is man's alienation from God and the malignant influence of recreant behavior, unrefined character traits, and unholy beliefs on the soul. The soul of a person feels the bitterness which these cause, and it draws back, frightened and depressed."

From the spiritual perspective, anxiety and depression stem from our being estranged from "the Garden," from the Source of our being and existence. Reuniting with the Creator banishes the darkness gripping the soul and transforms depression to joy. Rabbi Kook explains that

every time we distance ourselves from God, whether through our behavior or thoughts, a feeling of anxiety descends on our spiritual make-up, enveloping it with a spiritual impurity which can only be erased by returning to our original pristine state. Man's alienation from God forms a barrier which prevents Divine Light from shining on the soul, casting it into darkness and the darkness and fear of Corona. The remedy is to find our way back to the Garden. To discover true inner joy, every person, and all of Creation, must return to the Source of Existence and forge a living connection to God.

## Chapter Three

### **BODY AND SOUL**

#### DON'T FORGET YOUR SOUL

The *Zohar* is the seminal work upon which the Kabbalah is based. Its holy teachings were written by the legendary Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Because he opposed Rome's conquest of the Land of Israel, Rabbi Shimon had to hide in a cave for twelve years to avoid being imprisoned and killed by the Romans. During those twelve years, Elijah the Prophet would visit the cave and teach Rabbi Shimon the secrets of existence. He writes:

“Woe to the man who says that the Torah comes to teach tales of this world and to speak about ordinary affairs. If that were so, even today, we could create a Bible dealing with ordinary matters that would be far superior. If it comes merely to explain the matters of this world, even the princes of the world have more advanced things to say. If so, we should follow them and compose a Bible from their teachings! But this is not the case. For all the words of the Five Books of Moses are concerned with exalted matters and celestial secrets.

“The stories of the Bible are only her worldly garments, and whoever thinks that this worldly attire is the Bible itself, and not something deeper, will lose his soul. For this reason, David said, *‘Open mine eyes, that I may see the wonders of Your Torah,’* meaning the things that are beneath the Torah’s worldly garment. The fools of the world only see the garment, the worldly narrations. They do not know anything more, nor do they look beneath this outer garment. Those who understand more, do not look just upon the garment, but on the body that is under the garment. The Sages, the servants of the exalted King, those who stood on Mount Sinai, peer down to the soul of the Torah, which is the principle thing of them all, and this is the real Torah. In the future, they are destined to gaze into the soul of the soul.

“So too with a man. When fools see a man in smart-looking clothing, they don’t look any deeper (but rather judge the worth of the man according to his clothes.) However, the pride of the clothes is the body, and the pride of the body is the soul.”

For our purposes, Rabbi Shimon is teaching us a very simple thing. Everyone understands that a person is

more than the clothes he or she wears, the house he lives in, and the kind of car he drives. All of these superficial material matters can help describe the things a person likes, and the image of himself which he chooses to project to the world – but they don't comprise the essential man.

One a deeper level, the nature and personality of a person reveal his character in a far more telling fashion. Whether a person is kind or stingy, happy or irritable, patient or nervous, all of these belong to the more inner world of character traits. In this inner realm, factors of intelligence, emotions, fears, and psychological make-up, all interact. These inner factors are influenced by many things, including genes, upbringing, schooling, social influences, and cultural norms. For instance, a person who is born and raised in America will have different cultural characteristics than a person born and raised in Japan. This is obvious.

Deeper still is the soul. The soul is the spiritual essence of a person, manifested in his relation to God. While most religions talk about the soul, scientists are generally stuck with what they can empirically see and measure. Psychiatry and psychologists recognize

invisible factors which influence a person's disposition and life, but they don't consider themselves doctors of the soul. They focus on a person's emotion and psyche. Thus, people inflicted with a physical illness go to a physician or homeopath for help. People suffering from depression and anxiety seek psychological counseling and medication to counteract their moods. People with spiritual problems seek guidance from a spiritual mentor, or, not recognizing the spiritual aspect of their lives, don't seek any help at all.

Rabbi Shimon teaches that a person is the sum total of both his outer and inner worlds. Elsewhere in the *Zohar*, He explains that man's overall being is composed of his body, psyche, spirit, and soul. Thus, for optimum holistic health and happiness, a person must be aware of his total nature and make sure that all of his worlds are functioning in the most optimum manner.

Throughout the ages, there have been famous writers, philosophers, and men of science who believed in the existence of the soul, and others who did not. We will not elaborate on the debate. For the purposes of this book, the soul is as real as any other facet of a person's being. In fact, the soul is even more real, in its being



eternal, surviving the limited life of the body, in the state of existence known as the “Afterlife.” The Kabbalah describes in picturesque detail the stages of the Afterlife, in its Heavenly stage, its stages of reincarnation, and the ultimate resurrection of the righteous at the period called the “End of Days.” To simplify matters, all we need to know is that an Afterlife exists with levels of reward and punishment, dependent on a person’s behavior during his or her time on Earth.

How can a person discover his or her soul? Turn off the television and computer. Sit quietly and meditate on the silence of your isolation room, detached from the cloud of Corona outside. Remove the Corona application and download the application of God. Feel His love and soothing Presence. Meditate on the Psalms of King David, mankind’s most trustful mentor in the search for G-d. *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Corona, I fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod of Corona and staff of salvation come to comfort me... surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.”* Experience the Presence of God. He has made us, and not we ourselves.

To sum up the matter, we will quote once again from the writings of the Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto:

“In truth, no intelligent individual can believe that the end purpose of man’s creation is his life in this world – for what is the sum total of a person’s life in this ephemeral world? Who can say that he is truly happy and at peace in this world? As Moses said, life spans six, seven, perhaps eight decades to the strong of heart, and much of a person’s life is spent in toil and trouble. How many kinds of sufferings, pains, sicknesses, and burdens – and after them comes death. Even if you could find a person whose life is spent in contentment and peace, he too passes from the world and is gone.”

We learn from this that the things which are often cherished and sought after the most in life – money, pleasure, wealth, power, and fame – are not necessarily the most important elements of our existence, in their lacking eternal value. In a matter of hours, the tiny, invisible Coronavirus germ toppled Wall Street, wiped out personal fortunes, and brought powerful countries impotently to their knees. The wise Solomon summed up man’s existence in this world when he said, “Vanity

of vanity, all is vanity. What profit does a man have from all his labor under the sun?" The great King Solomon, who tasted every pleasure, amassed uncountable wealth, and built himself palaces with harems of wives, teaches that **under the sun**, in our transitory material world, everything is vanity, in its ultimately passing out of existence. But for the soul, in spiritual worlds **above the sun**, life is filled with everlasting meaning.

If a person lives only for his, or her, life in this world, how can he, or she, be truly happy? Because the soul is rooted in higher spiritual realms, it derives no pleasure whatsoever from the delights of this world. This is the meaning of King Solomon's teaching, "*The soul will not be filled.*" If a person's soul were to experience all of the delights of this world, they would be as nothing, since the soul belongs to a far more exalted kingdom.

Therefore, in addition to nurturing one's body, one's mind, and one's emotions throughout the journey of life, the wise person will nurture his soul as well. Exactly what this "soul food" is, we will explore in subsequent chapters. For now, a short interruption to relate how a small, Corona-like experience changed my own life and brought me to faith in God.

## Chapter Four

### **FROM HOLLYWOOD TO THE HOLY LAND**

Before I boarded the t'shuva train, I lived for myself and used my talents to further my own selfish interests. At a young age, I had sold three original screenplays in Hollywood and published my first novel with Dell Publishers in New York. But I wasn't happy. An inner anxiety continued to plague me – very similar to the anxiety the world feels over the Coronavirus today.

I remember sitting on a beach in Santa Monica and saying to myself, "You have to take off your screwed-up, neurotic, American head, and put on the head of King David instead."

I grew up in the "Fifties" in a typical assimilated Jewish family of the time. We lit Hanukah candles and had a Christmas tree so my brother and I wouldn't feel different from the other boys on our block. We ate matzah on Passover, and hid Easter eggs like our non-Jewish neighbors. Hearing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah was a part of our yearly cycle, along with a respectful visit to the temple on Yom Kippur. But while my parents

always fostered a pride in being Jewish, being an America came first.

To me, going to Hebrew school meant having to miss basketball practice and being different from my friends. When bar mitzvah time came around, our Reform temple was under construction, so I conducted my bar mitzvah service in the local Unitarian church. That's right - a church. After that, I had nothing more to do with Judaism for almost two decades. It wasn't a part of my consciousness at all. I harbored some vague pride in being Jewish, but my knowledge of Judaism and Jewish History was nil.

After graduating from the prestigious boarding school, Phillips Andover Academy, I enrolled in the NYU Film School to spend the next four years watching movies. By the time I graduated, I had sold my first screenplay to Hollywood and was about to publish a novel with a big NY publishing house. I loved to write. It was my method of making sense out of a very confusing world and dealing with a constant sense of anxiety and alienation.

To make a long story short, I lived a hippie, bohemian life in Greenwich Village, going to Off-Broadway plays and reading the novels of Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, Philip Roth, Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe, in pursuit

of the Dream of becoming the next GREAT AMERICAN NOVELIST. As the song says, I was Lenny Bruaced, Great Gasbyed, Jim Morissoned, and Playboy Magazined out of my mind.

I shared an apartment with another lost and sensitive Jewish soul who was trying like me to be an "artist." He used to see a shrink once a week and lay on the couch of his office without saying a word, for months on end, at \$500 a pop, to please his father, who didn't understand why his son was so depressed. Tragically, he never found out that his problem was simply trying to be someone he wasn't, just like I was doing, turning our backs on our exquisite souls in order to be just as cool as everyone else.

Like my American ancestors before me, I heeded the call, "Go West, young man," ready to take my place amongst the stars. My first pad was not far from the famous HOLLYWOOD sign, the holiest shrine in LA.

Using a pen name, I sold two more original screenplays that were made into films. I had money, a new and cool apartment by the beach, a sexy sports car, a membership at a health club filled with beautiful California girls - in short the American Dream. In the morning, I used to work out in the weight room with

Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was just starting his movie career. After slimnastics class with Susie, Wendy, Cindy, Sally, and Jane, I'd spend the afternoon stoned at the beach, working on my tan. Nights were spent prowling the discos. When in Rome do as the Romans do. But the truth is that I wasn't happy at all. With each new conquest and success, I felt that something was missing. I thought maybe if I sold a script for more money, or bought a fancier car, then I would be happy. But it didn't help. Each new acquisition left me feeling empty. Now I know the reason for my darkness - even though I was wallowing in physical pleasures, I wasn't giving any nourishment to my soul. Then I became physically ill with something called ulcerative colitis.

I would have to race to the bathroom with a diarrhea attack twenty times a day, and only blood would pour out. It blew my mind completely. Here I was, a good-looking young man, rocketing up the ladder of success in Hollywood, and I had to spend half my day in the bathroom. I had to take large doses of cortisone, which blew up my face like a beach ball. Seeing myself in the mirrors of the health club, I didn't recognize the monster staring back. Try making a pass at a UCLA cheerleader when you have a face like Quasimodo. After a month of

cortisone, the bleeding dried up, but the minute I got off the drug, the bleeding returned, more furious than before. At that time, I hadn't heard about Rabbi Akiva, and I didn't realize that my bleeding was all for the best - a Heavenly wake-up call, so to speak, warning me that I was on a glamorous track to hell. For almost another year, even though I was bleeding my guts out, I kept on living my same immoral Hollywood life.

After two years, when the medicine failed to cure me, I started out on a spiritual quest. I tried everything. Health food, macrobiotics, holistic massage, yoga, I Ching, acupuncture, gestalt, Tarot cards, not to mention a variety of mind-expanding drugs. One day, I was sitting on the beach when a friend asked me, "Why don't you know anything about Judaism?" The question hit me like a sledgehammer. I had studied world history. I had read Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Kant, Voltaire, Nietzsche, and Thoreau. I had studied the sciences, the arts, literature, and had checked out books about Christianity, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and the like. But I knew absolutely nothing about Judaism. During my shrink period, I had read dozens of books about psychology, and I had studied enough Sigmund Freud to know that if you avoid something close to you, that means you have a



psychological block, a deep inner fear which paralyzes you from mastering what you are trying to avoid.

My friend's question blew my mind. The same day I bought a Bible and started to read: *"In the beginning, G-d created the heaven and the earth."* When I read those words, my gaze shot up to the sky. "Oh, no!" I thought. "G-d really exists, and I haven't paid any attention to Him since my bar mitzvah." I kept turning pages as if I were reading the screenplay of an action adventure. I loved it! By the grace of God, I understood with a flash of crystal clear knowledge, with those first head-spinning, sparkling rays of heavenly insight, when G-d enters your life with a thundering ROAR, and lights up your life like the sun, I understood that in order to hear the voice of my long silent soul, to my discover who I really was and find healing for my ailing body and spirit, I would have to chase after G-d with the same passion that I had been chasing after women and fame. In a flash of revelation, I understood that all of the world, with all its lusts and enticements, was merely a mask hiding the presence of God. Indeed, the world, in Shakespeare's words, was a stage. As fake as an MGM studio back-lot of Dodge City. God, I realized, hid Himself behind the curtain of the material world, letting people think they were in charge of show, but when God pulled open the

stage curtains for me, I realized that He was behind everything, pulling the strings, like the director up in the control booth in the movie, "The Truman Show." In a split second of piercing awareness, like when the sea was split for the Jews leaving Egypt, and the sky was opened for everyone one to see the Divine Hand behind Nature and History, I understood that God was everything, and that it was time for me to reboot my life, hit "erase" and restart the system.

I bought a book about the foundations of Judaism, a book of Hasidic philosophy called the "Tanya," and Rebbe Nachman's book, "Advise." Rosh HaShanah was coming, and I read about "*Tashlich*." So on Rosh HaShanah day, I walked down to the Santa Monica Beach and threw my cortisone pills into the Pacific Ocean.

"Please G-d," I begged. "Accept these pills as my sins and please heal me without any more medicine."

Having tried everything else, and I was convinced that my separation from G-d was the source of my problems. But without the medicine, I became sicker and sicker. I started bleeding profusely. Within a short time, I lost twenty pounds. Finally, I had to be hospitalized. They gave me the cortisone intravenously, but the minute I

got out, I stopped taking the pill once again. I figured that by relying on the cortisone, I would never get down to the source of the problem. Once again, I started to bleed. One evening, I became really scared, thinking that if I kept up this insanity, either I would bleed to death, or I would have to have my colon surgically removed. That night I had a dream. I was in a second-hand clothes shop, looking at old clothes when I spotted a door to another room. Curious, I stepped inside. The inner room was filled with books in Hebrew, four walls of bookshelves stacked with holy Jewish texts, like the study hall of a yeshiva. I couldn't read Hebrew at that time, but I was filled with a profound sense of peace and inner calm. I just wanted to stand there and soak in the holiness of the books. But the shop owner appeared and said he wanted to close the store. I begged him to let me stay another five minutes, just to stand there and look at the books. Grudgingly, he agreed. That's when I saw another door to yet another inner room. Venturing forward, I stepped inside. The room was empty except for a huge black box in the center of the floor. It was a giant tefillin, the little black box that Orthodox Jews wear on their head during prayer, but this one looked like some gigantic oversized tefillin in a Woody Allen movie. Gazing at it, my heart swelled with love. Man,

how I wanted that tefillin! Suddenly, I heard a tremendous thunderous VOICE FROM ABOVE, like a Voice from the heights of Mount Sinai, proclaiming, "THIS IS THE ANSWER! YOU HAVE TO ATTACH YOURSELF TO G-D!" I awoke startled. My heart was pounding. The Voice still rang in my ears. It was the clearest, truest, most real experience I had ever had in my life.

The dream made me understand that turning my back on the world and becoming an ascetic wasn't the way. That might be good for the first stage of penitence, and for monks and swamis who live out their lives in delusion, when, in fact, God doesn't want us sitting alone in the Himalayas, separated from mankind and leaving humanity to drop dead from disease and starvation. True spirituality is bringing God into the world at every moment, to sanctify all of existence and raise it to perfection and rectification, a concept called, "World Tikun."

The morning after my dream, I went to an Orthodox shul and asked the Rabbi to show me how to put on tefillin. He happily agreed and told me to say the Shema Yisrael prayer, which I still remembered from Hebrew School. But even though I would return to the synagogue every morning to put on tefillin, I was still bleeding profusely.

Finally, I decided that to stay alive I had to continue taking the cortisone. That very same morning, my uncle phoned, asking if I could drive him to the hospital. He had to have laser surgery on a cataract, so he needed someone to drive him home after the procedure. Since my aunt was a doctor, I asked him if she could write me out a prescription for the cortisone, because I wanted to avoid the tortuous medieval examinations I always had to suffer whenever I went to a gastroenterologist. When I met my uncle later that morning, he handed me the prescription. At the hospital, all during his treatment, I stood outside the operating room and prayed the same mantra over and over, "G-d, please heal my uncle. G-d, please heal my uncle." For forty-five minutes straight. People walked by and gazed at me as if I were nuts. Thank G-d, the laser treatment was a success. When I returned to my apartment, I headed straight to the bathroom, as was my usual custom. But this time, there was no bleeding! The blood had vanished! Disappeared! For the first time in weeks. Without any medicine! The bleeding never came back! A miracle! Even then, at that very moment, I knew that my sickness was over. I felt like God had reached out a metaphorical finger and healed my colitis. I was astounded. Could it be? "Am I hypnotizing myself with all of this religion business?" I

thought. But the bleeding didn't return. No doctor has ever been able to explain it. The cortisone had always taken ten days to turn off the bleeding, and here the bleeding stopped without taking cortisone at all.

I was blown away. How could I continue on with my bohemian life of beaches and Hollywood discos? The next night, after not having bled the whole day, I prayed a heartfelt bedtime prayer. "Dear G-d," I said. "I don't know why You have come into my life and done this great miracle for me. But I am certainly grateful, and I would like to make You happy some way in return. Tell me what You want me to do, and I will do it. When I read the Bible, it seems clear that You want the Jewish People to live in the Land of Israel. So if You want me to go there, give me some kind of sign and I'll go. If You want me to stay here in Hollywood, I'll do that too. Maybe I can write Jewish movies, or get a job at some Jewish newspaper. Just give me a sign from Heaven, and I'll do it."

The very next morning, when I was leaving my apartment, I noticed that I had mail in my mailbox. It turned out to be a large travel brochure. On the cover was a big picture of the Western Wall. The caption read: "JERUSALEM, MY CHOSEN." I got goose pimples all over my body. The very morning after I asked G-d for a sign

whether to go to Israel or not, I found this travel brochure in my mailbox! Never in my life had I ever received any kind of Jewish mail from any kind of Jewish organization or synagogue. Remember, I was totally assimilated. Once again, my head started spinning in circles. "There is a director greater than Steven Spielberg," I thought. Not only had G-d answered my prayer for a sign, He had obviously known in advance that I would make such a request, because He had to arrange that someone would mail me the brochure, so that it would arrive in my mailbox the very morning after my midnight request!

That very day, I purchased a ticket to Israel. I went straight to a yeshiva. In the study hall, surrounded by shelves of holy texts, I experienced the same calm I had felt in my dream of the thrift shop filled with holy books. I've been studying and teaching and writing about Torah and spiritual themes ever since. My colitis and anxiety are gone.

A rainbow of happiness now illuminates my life. I've come home!

## Chapter Five

### **FAITH**

#### THE EXTRA-TERRESTIAL

King Solomon teaches that the body returns to the dust of the earth, while our soul returns to God who gave it. Because man processes a Divine Spirit, he has the potential to be connected to God. This, in effect, is the challenge and goal of human existence, to establish and maintain a connection to our Creator. Enjoying life, making money, raising a family, developing our talents and creativity, all play major roles in life, but if a person focuses on these things alone, he or she misses out on the genuine goal of living. As King David says to God in his Psalms, *“You have instructed me to seek out Your Presence – Your Presence, O God, do I seek.”*

Long ago, in Biblical times, God communicated His will to prophets, and the prophet would tell the people what God expected of them. For the time being, prophecy has ceased, so we cannot declare with any certainty that the Coronavirus epidemic has rained down upon us for this Divine reason or that, but we can say, in a general



fashion that it has come to awaken us and to re-inspire our belief and faith in God.

When Moses first came to the king of Egypt and informed him that the Lord had sent him to free the Jews from bondage in order to serve Him, Pharaoh arrogantly responded, “Who is the Lord that I should listen to Him?” Only after Egypt was stricken with plague after plague, including the firstborn of Pharaoh, did the stubborn ruler concede that the Lord God of Israel was the King of kings. And only after the awe-inspiring miracle of the sea’s splitting did the Jews reach true belief, as the verse testifies: *“Thus did the Lord save Israel that day from the power of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the mighty act which the Lord had performed against the Egyptians, and the people revered the Lord; they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.”*

Like the plagues in Egypt, and the miracle splitting of the sea, the worldwide plague of Covid-19 has come to make us aware of the Lord. Don’t read Corona, read Crown. The crown of the King. Via Corona and the crown-shaped germ it contains, we come to recognize the crown and kingship of the King.

## PEEKABOO

The soul resembles a gyroscope. It is always in motion with a natural pull to return to its Maker. Belonging to the world of the spirit, the soul suffers from a sense of alienation in the physical world. All during its temporary sojourn on Earth, it longs for reunion with God. In the movie “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial,” the little creature from outer space points its long, thin finger towards Heaven and longingly whispers, “Home!” This yearning for Divine Attachment can be the source of great pleasure and security in a person’s life, or the opposite. If a person doesn’t recognize his soul, and grant it the nurturing it needs to survive in this world, the person will be disconnected, not only from God, but also from a major part of his being. When people don’t develop their inherent spiritual essence and nature, they can easily fall into anxiety and depression, and be prone to feelings of frustration, fear, and anger. This gnawing and abstract sense of disconnection, which psychology labels general anxiety, can lead people into many addictions, whether it be drugs or alcohol, dependence on anti-depressants, becoming a workaholic, or exchanging one sexual partner after another.

As we learn from the story of Adam and Eve, man was placed in this world in order for him to recognize His Creator. This is no simple task. As we mentioned, God keeps Himself hidden. It is our job to search for Him and establish a connection. Furthermore, to make the adventure more challenging and meaningful, God has placed many things in the world which can distance a person from his Maker. Our bodies and physical natures are among these deterrents. For example, a person can think that his successes in life result from his own strength and wisdom, forgetting God who gave him these gifts. Also, the passions of the body and the fantasies of the mind can lead people to believe that life's goal lies in the attainment of pleasure. Many other factors and earthly desires can lead people away from the "golden path" where the material and spiritual co-exist in a healthy balance. Man has a good inclination and a bad. These two are old enemies, forever at war. In effect, man has been placed in a raging battlefield, where all of the affairs of this world are trials. The battle rages around him on all sides, luring him down illusionary paths, threatening to draw him away from the true goal of existence. If he is valorous, maintaining his connection with God and walking in His ways, he becomes the true warrior and victor in life, reaping true

inner happiness and eternal reward. When a person comes to recognize his inner spiritual life, and the inner world of his soul, he will long to do things which will draw him closer to God, and will avoid things that distance him from his Maker, just as a man flees from a fire. In this timeworn battle, one of man's most essential weapons is faith.

## THE WORLD TO COME

The Kabbalah teaches that the concept of the World to Come has several different stages. First, in the future messianic era, when the world will reach the level of perfection envisioned by the Prophets of Israel, peace will reign on Earth between nations, represented by the metaphor of the lion and lamb lying side-by-side in harmony. Another understanding of the World to Come is the World of Souls which exists concurrently with our world. This is the eternal life of the soul which continues in the heavenly World of Souls after the death of the body. A third aspect of the World to Come is the far future time when the material world will disappear and souls will live on forever.

A main difference between our present physical world and the physical World to Come, after mankind "Returns

to the Garden,” is that in this world, we do not perceive things as they really are. Reality is distorted by the barriers of material existence, and the Presence of God is not clearly recognized. In the World to Come, reality will no longer be blurred by the curtain of the physical world, God’s Presence will be experienced by everyone, and everyone will understand that everything that happens is good. Nonetheless, it is possible, even in this world, to learn how to see the reality of God and to put our lives in line with God’s plan for existence. Thus, the Coronavirus epidemic can be seen as a freak disaster of nature the is decimating the world, spreading death and panic, or it can be seen as a beneficial wake-up call from the Almighty, designed to draw mankind’s attention to Him, in order to cleanse the world of idolatry and falsehood, and inspire us to adopt a new path to world betterment, happiness, and health.

## YOU GOTTA BELIEVE!

Faith involves many things. Amongst them is the recognition that we have been blessed with a soul, allowing us to communicate with our Creator. It means recognizing that the world has a spiritual core and a Maker. Faith brings this recognition to tangible belief

until the existence of God becomes as real in our lives as our mothers, spouses, and children. The greater a person's faith, the greater his or her connection with God, the more God will appear in his life in a evident manner, providing a sense of happiness and security much greater than all of life's pleasures - or medicines on a pharmacy shelf.

In Hebrew, the word for faith is "*Emumah*." The word encompasses the concepts of belief and faith. Belief defines what we believe in. Faith is a more comprehensive study of belief, expanding our knowledge of the Creator to the furthest possible extent. This includes understanding our relationship to the Master of the Universe, as much as our finite minds are able. In Judaism for example, the famous Rabbi, philosopher, and physician, Maimonides, lists what he calls, "Principles of Faith." Among them are:

God exists. He is perfect and eternal. He is the Creator of All Existence, and all beings depend upon Him for their lives.

God has an absolute Oneness.

God is incorporeal, with no body.

God existed before everything else and created the world from nothing – *ex nihilo*.

God is the only Deity who should be worshipped and praised. Prayers should be directed to God and not to intermediaries.

God is aware of the actions of the beings He created and interacts with them.

We mention these principles to demonstrate that faith is more than a simple belief in God's existence. Rather, the realm of faith encompasses our efforts to understand the workings of God, as limited as that understanding may be, given the confined boundaries of human reasoning, and the fact that God belongs to a totally transcendental realm of existence. Maimonides states that we cannot know exactly who or what God is, but merely describe Him through His actions and manifestations in the world. Coupled with our limited understanding, faith means believing that all of God's actions are good, even though we may not be able to fathom how or why. This mystery is one of mankind's most essential existential dilemmas. Unfortunately, many people become trapped in their ego, and make the error of trusting their own intellect and reasoning. Seeing that evil exists in the world, that viruses rob

people of their loved ones, and that bad things happen to good people, they scorn the belief in an all-benevolent God, and often reject the belief in God completely. Not able to accept the paradoxes involved in religious belief, the non-believer makes himself into his own authority and decision-maker, repeating the mistake of Adam, and casting himself out of the Garden.

All religions have their different tenants of faith. For our purposes, we shall focus on the teachings of the Torah, the Talmud, and on the Sages who explain their inner meanings. It should be noted that both Christianity and Islam draw their foundations from the Torah.

Interestingly, we learn in the *Book of Genesis* that Abraham fathered children from his handmaid Hagar. Sending them off to inhabit the far reaches of the world, Abraham gave them gifts of wisdom that evolved into the religions of the Far East, albeit with considerable distortion from their pure Abrahamic source. The original concept of Monotheism, which Abraham brought to the world, became distorted, and, all too often, when nations adopted corrupted teachings about the value of peace, their quest for power, disguised as religious doctrine, led them to conduct terrible wars, in order to forcefully their beliefs on everyone else. In this book, we will leave the international struggles between



mankind's religions to world headlines, and rather focus on how an individual's faith can lead to a happier and more fulfilling life.

## FAITH MUST BE LEARNED!

Faith is inborn. Since every person is endowed with a soul, God is an essential part of our beings. Children are natural believers. Perhaps this is a reason that so many children loved the movie, "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial." But if faith isn't developed, it can become lost, like a musical talent that a person ignores. Faith has to be learned. How ironic it is that many people are willing to spend dozens of hours learning about the stock market and the ins-and-outs of financial investment; about healthy diets, and how to influence others, while paying mere lip service to the study of faith, the foundation of their life!

How do we go about this invaluable learning? How can a person build faith? There are many people who were never exposed to faith or religious education during their childhood. For others, matters of faith were forced upon them in a dogmatic and superficial style. In many religions, faith is surrounded by dark imagery, somber music, and fear. Rather than leading to happiness, these

distorted paths can lead to lifelong feelings of repression and guilt. Although this book is based on teachings of Jewish Sages through the ages, it is not an advertisement for Judaism. Rather, it is a compact guide to help all people on their personal spiritual odysseys. Whether a pilgrim's spiritual journey takes him or her to Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca, India, or Tibet, to the solitude of a nearby forest, or to a quiet corner at home, this spiritual primer will help keep the person on track in his quest.

Firstly, to attain faith, a person has to want to attain faith. Curiosity isn't enough. We have to be active seekers. According to the effort is the reward. To the extent that we seek nearness to God, He manifests Himself in our lives. In the *Book of Proverbs*, King Solomon states, "*If you seek after it as silver, and search after it as gold, then you will understand what the Lord wants from you.*" God must be searched for like a treasure, with the same energy that people invest in making money and in building a successful career.

Please be forewarned. If God doesn't appear to you immediately and answer your prayers after two days of searching – don't give up! Since God is omniscient, He knows when seekers are sincere. He wants our hearts,

not only our minds, or the mere parrot-like movement of lips. In his Psalms, King David exhorts us to try again and again. *“Hope in the Lord, be strong, let your heart be brave, and hope in the Lord.”* If a prayer is not answered, then pray again... and again. God tests us to see if we are sincere. At first, He may appear in a miraculous fashion in our lives to lighten our darkness and expel our doubts, but then He steps back, like a parent encouraging a toddler to walk on his own, in order to build our faith. Indeed, some people may find that their prayers are never answered to their satisfaction. This may be their test in life – to continue to believe even when God seems far away, and not only when their desires are fulfilled. This is an exalted level of belief, far surpassing a belief based on personal gratification. Belief based on the fulfillment of one’s prayers can fall apart quickly when a person’s wishes aren’t met to his or her satisfaction. So persevere!

Often, during times of tragedy and pain, people begin to search for faith. Suddenly, faced with a serious illness, a debilitating accident, a widespread epidemic, or an unexpected death, the trials of life seem too heavy to bear. Instinctively, sufferers look to God for salvation. During unfortunate times such as these, all of a person’s defenses collapse, his arrogance is humbled, and he

cries out with all of his heart, hoping that the words of the Psalmist will come true for him:

*“The Lord upholds everyone who falls,  
And raises all who are bowed down.  
The eyes of all look hopefully to You,  
And you give them their food in due season.  
You open Your hand,  
And satisfy every living being with favor.  
The Lord is righteous in all his ways,  
And gracious in all His deeds.*

***The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him in truth.***

*He fulfills the desire of those who revere Him;  
He hears their cry and saves them.” (Book of Psalms,  
145: 14-19).*

## REMOTE CONTROL

King David teaches that God not only hears our prayers and acts on our behalf, He is righteous and gracious in all of His ways. In addition, the Psalmist assured us that God is near to us. When we speak about God, we describe Him as dwelling in the Heavens, but He is really everywhere. We are always connected with Him. Especially when we are secluded in our homes until the

plague of Corona passes, just like the Bible's account of the Exodus, when God commanded the Jews to remain in their homes while the Angel of Death passed by their doorways in smiting the Egyptians. All we need to do is turn on the connecting switch. It is a little like a toy car activated by remote control. God is the Guiding Hand, enabling the car to move. A child may not understand the connection, but it is there. The toy car doesn't have any power or life of its own. The same is true with us. So long as God activates the switch, our hearts beat and we breathe, but the moment He decides to cease the current, that's the end of the ballgame. We have absolutely no power to keep our hearts going or to breathe on our own without God's second-by-second consent. Therefore, as long as we are connected, God hears our prayers. But look carefully at King David's words:

*"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him **in truth.**"*

God looks at the heart to see if our supplications are truthful or not. Our sincerity is the key to establishing a connection with Him. Do we really believe in Him, or are we just crying out to save ourselves from trouble? If He

answers our prayers, will we forget all about Him the following day, and return to our usual ways? God knows what will be tomorrow. If He sees that that our supplications are ingenuous, and that we are only turning to Him for our own selfish needs, rather than to establish an ongoing, devoted connection, He can choose not to respond until we prove that we want to form a connection with Him **in truth**. Not just for today, to get out of a jam, but for tomorrow as well.

## THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERD

As we mentioned, faith in God means believing in a God's absolute goodness. This is one of the main themes of the famous Psalm which many people know by heart, Psalm Twenty-Three which begins, "*A Psalm of David: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.*" Like a loving shepherd, God watches over us and provides for our needs. If the sun be too hot, the trustworthy shepherd moves his sheep into the shade. If grazing is scarce, he leads his herd to a place where grass abounds. The question invariably arises, "If God is all good, why is there poverty and famine in the world? Why do people die in car accidents? Why does He allow

Coronaviruses to break out? How can God be all good when children are sometimes born with severe handicaps?” Sages of the Kabbalah and the Talmud discuss this perplexing issue in depth. One answer is that we only see a part of the total picture. We see the here and now, but life is composed of both this world and the next - the World of Souls, where life continues in an incorporeal, spiritual format. Added to this is the secret realm of reincarnation, whereby souls return to this world again and again until they attain complete rectification. In essence, human understanding is very limited. Our rational, reasoning minds operate according to our very finite comprehension of the material world around us, which is bordered by time and space. God belongs to a transcendental realm, as He tells the Prophet Isaiah: *“My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways like My ways, says the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts”* (Isaiah, 55:8-9.)

Because we are unable to grasp God’s workings, we don’t have the answers to many questions. Without the clear teaching of a prophet sent by God Himself, we can’t know why the Coronavirus erupted when it did,

and why it spread fiercely to this place and that, while other locations were less affected. We will expand on this matter when we learn about Trust. For now, it is noteworthy to quote another verse from David's famous Psalm. In his personal life, King David was beset by a never-ending stream of challenges, conflicts, and difficult trials. Enemies threatened his kingship from without, and betrayal and intrigue stalked the corridors of his palace from within. His own sons sought to seize his throne. Again and again in his Psalms, David calls out to God to save him from the affliction encircling him from all sides, yet in Psalm Twenty-Three, he says: *"Only goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever."* Whatever befell King David, whatever seeming hardship God set in his path, he viewed it as a sign of God's goodness and fatherly care. Because his faith in God's benevolence was so complete, he knew that everything was for his ultimate benefit. We will speak about this exalted level of faith in a later chapter when we learn about Nahum Eish Gamzu and Rabbi Akiva. This is the supreme faith we should strive to achieve. Not merely a belief that God exists, but that all of His deeds are kind and benevolent, even though we may not be able to



appreciate the goodness, in light of our limited human understanding and vision.

## HOW TO FIND GOD

Needless to say, it is preferable to form a connection with God in ordinary times, and not wait for disaster to strike. One simple way to do this is to open one's eyes to the miracle of Nature, as King David sings: *"The heavens proclaim the glory of God; the sky declares His handiwork."* Scientists strive to discover empirical explanations for the wonders of nature, but their answers only lead them to more questions. For instance, how does the eye see? After all, if you put an eye on a table, it won't see a thing. The brain makes it work, you say? Then what makes the brain work? If you place a brain on a table, it won't calculate a thing! Connect it to a heart, you say. OK. Put a brain, and an eye, and a heart on a table, connect them together, and still nothing will happen. Without a soul, the human body doesn't work. The soul is man's battery and energy source. When the soul returns to its Maker, the body shuts down. This realization is really quite simple when one is willing to

accept the possibility of a spiritual world that even the most high-powered microscope is unable to see.

Take a look at the precise revolutions and orbits of the planets. What holds them in place? The gravity of the sun, centrifugal force, mathematical formula? Then what keeps the sun in place? More gravity? Where does this gravity come from? From the Big Bang? OK. What caused the Big Bang? Gases? Where did the gases come from? More and more scientists are coming to the conclusion that there must be a Creator behind all of the mysteries of Nature. Mind-blowing? Maybe, but it isn't really big news. This is how Maimonides, who preceded Galileo by three-hundred years, explains the orbits of the planets: "God is the Creator of the world and the entire Earth. He controls the spheres with infinite and unbounded power. This power continues without cessation, bringing about the constant revolving of the spheres. It is impossible for them to revolve without someone causing them to revolve. God, blessed be He, does this, without a hand or any other corporeal means," (*Foundations of the Torah*, 1:5).

King David said it all millenniums ago:

*“The Earth and its entire contents belong to the Lord; the world and its inhabitants. For it is He who founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods,”*  
(Psalms, 24: 1-2).

*“O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all,”* (Psalms 104:24).

*“When I behold Your heavens, the handiwork of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, whose cycles You have ordained; what is man that You are mindful of him?”*  
(Psalms, 8:4-5).

Not only is God the Creator of the Universe, we learn from King David that man can have a living relationship with Him, as he says, *“What is man that You are mindful of him?”*

God didn't merely create the world and abandon it after setting everything in place, as philosophers sometimes theorize. Dating back to the First Day of Creation, as the Book of Genesis describes, God has maintained a dialogue with mankind, continuing to the time of Moses and the Prophets of Israel. While the Story of Creation is known to be a metaphor whose purpose is to teach

moral lessons, rather than being a scientific record of the world's actual birth, certainly the Biblical stories concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, Joshua, Samson, Kings David and Solomon; Isaiah and Jeremiah, all recount actual people and events, proving that God has intimate contact with humans on Earth. While so-called "enlightened thinkers" deny that such a connection exists between Man and God, the overwhelming majority of mankind, since the beginning of time until today, believe that God interacts with man and His Creation.

Throughout the Psalms of King David, we find this great truth repeated again and again. If a man were to be stranded on a deserted island with only one book in his possession, if he wanted to learn how to maintain a connection of God, the *Book of Psalms* is the recommended choice by far:

*"Lord, how many have my enemies become! Many are those who rise up against me. Many say of my soul – there is no help for him in God. But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory, You raise up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from his Holy Mountain," (Psalms, 4:2-5).*

*“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Harken to the voice of my cry, O King, and my God, for to You I pray. You shall hear my voice in the morning...”*  
(Psalms, 5:2-3).

*“Depart from me all you workers of iniquity, for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord receives my prayer,”*  
(Psalms, 6:9-10).

*“They who know Your Name will put their trust in You, for You, Lord, has not forsaken those who seek You,”*  
(Psalms, 9:11).

*“The Lord has heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear,”*  
(Psalms, 10:17).

This is a short sample from the first ten Psalms. There are another 140 Psalms waiting. The point is that God hears our prayers and interacts with man. When this connection is missing, a person can go through life without ever discovering the real reason why he was born.

## DAVID AND GOLIATH

Everyone is familiar with the story of David and Goliath, and how the young shepherd boy fearlessly faced the Philistine giant in a windswept field of Biblical Israel. With his first appearance on the pages of history, David, the *“Sweet singer of Israel,”* master of the lyre and the song, teaches mankind that the Lord indeed listens and saves. Let’s briefly recreate the battle as described in the *First Book of Samuel*. The giant Goliath is an awesome and overpowering warrior, heavily armed and skilled in combat. In contrast, David is too young for the army. He arrives at the front to bring food to his older brothers. Even the mighty Saul, King of Israel, head and shoulders above his frightened soldiers, trembles when he hears the giant mocking the armies of Israel: *“And the Philistine shouted, ‘I defy the armies of Israel this day. Send me a man that we may fight together!’”*

No Israelite soldier dares to rise to the challenge. Terrified, they all back away. Then, unexpectedly, the lad who has come to visit his brothers, calls out, *“Who is this*

*uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"*

From this point on, David is not merely stepping forward to defend the honor of Israel's soldiers, and to save them from conquest at the hands of their enemies. He is coming to remind them, and the world, that God is not an abstract concept relegated to the Heavens, but rather, an active player on Earth. In the not-so-distant past, the Israelites experienced, firsthand, Divine Intervention on Earth during the Ten Plagues in Egypt, in the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. But once the waters returned to their natural order, the Children of Israel had to be reminded by miracles again and again during their wanderings in the wilderness, lest the day-to-day challenges of living caused them to forget that God watches over and provides for man's needs. The masks of the physical world are so thick, and man's vision so shallow, grasping only the things he can see with his eyes and feel with his hands, the moment God retreats behind the Curtain of Nature, people forget that all of nature itself, the wind and the rain, the rising of the sun and the orbiting of the moon, are all following God's orders.

The shepherd lad, David, realizes this. As the giant, pagan Philistine strides forward, repeating his laughing rebuke, the camp of the Israelites, and all of mankind, needs to be reminded again of God's constant Presence. Armored from head to foot, and armed with sword, shield, and spear, the helmeted monster jeers at the boy who steps forward to confront him in battle. The unarmed David faces Goliath with only a slingshot, not because of its effectiveness as a weapon of war, but because David's goal is to proclaim the sovereignty of God over all existence, as he boldly declares, *"This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand... that all the world may know that there is a God in Israel; and all of this gathering will come to know that the Lord saves, not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into our hands."*

David wants everyone to know that the upcoming encounter is not a battle between the weak and the strong. This is not a Biblical "Rocky-like" story of an underdog defeating a champion. What is about to transpire in the windswept plain is a glorification of God, reminding mankind that the world has a Master who interacts with His creation. David wants to show that



muscle and brawn is irrelevant to the outcome of the contest. Superior intelligence is also not a factor. To heighten this point, David rejects the armor and sword which Saul offers him. A pebble alone is to bring the mighty giant crumbling to his knees. Just to make sure that no one harbors any doubt, David re-emphasizes the significance of the world-shaking encounter before he deals the victorious blow, telling the Philistine:

*“You come to fight me with a sword and a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to you in the Name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you taunted. This day, the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will smite you, and sever your head, and will give your carcass to the birds of the sky, and to the wild beasts of the field, that all the world may come to know that there is a God in Israel.”*

Instantly, as the tiny projectile speeds on its way towards the fierce Goliath, everyone is made to see the Divine Intervention at play in David’s stunning victory. No human hand could have directed a pebble so accurately to pierce the narrow strip of Goliath’s forehead left unguarded by his bronze visor and helmet. And even if David were such a skilled marksman, how

could a small stone topple a towering giant if it weren't empowered by some superhuman force?

The two warring camps are as astounded as Goliath himself. In stunned silence, they watch as the monster wobbles and crashes forward to the earth. King Saul stares at the scene in amazement. A roar is heard in the camp of Israel as the dust settles and the Israelites realize that the incredible vision is real. Along with the shouts of triumph are shouts of joy that the God of Israel has not abandoned His People.

Thus, we can learn from the wonders of Nature, from the history of the Children of Israel, and from the deeds of King David and his Psalms, that the Creator of the World interacts with His creations. After his victory over Goliath, when King David led the armies of Israel into battle, a Star of David graced his shield. The triangle pointing upward represents man looking up to God. The triangle pointing downward represents God looking down at man. The place of intersection represents the man's relationship with the Divine. On the simplest level, when a person wants bread or milk, he goes to the grocery store. When he wants a new car, he goes to a car dealer. When a man wants connection with his

Maker, he is invited to go to the Source, to God Himself. While spiritual mentors can offer invaluable guidance, the door to the Palace is open for all pilgrims who wish to meet with the King. The way we do this is through heartfelt prayer – the subject of our next chapter.

## Chapter Six

### **PRAYER FROM THE HEART**

#### LADDER TO GOD

Prayer is our ladder to God. If we want to connect with the Divine Internet, the way to do so is through prayer. There are formal prayers like those found in the prayer books of all religions, and there are personal outpourings of the heart. The Psalms of King David fall somewhere in between. They are often found in standardized prayer books as part of the prayer service, and they also can serve as our guide to individual prayer. King David's Psalms, and the Psalms authored by other Biblical seekers, which are included with his, cover everything under the sun – and above the sun as well. If a person is stumped and doesn't know how to pray, or where to begin, reciting the Psalms of King David is a wonderful elixir by itself, filled with many hidden codes and secrets that find their way to the target like precisely-guided missiles. There are Psalms for health, family welfare, livelihood, comfort in times of trouble, salvation from enemies, penitence, spiritual advancement, closeness to God, and Psalms against depression and despair, to name but a few. In effect,

David did the hard work for us – the hard work of spiritual preparation and cleansing. Even if we only hang on to the tail of his rocket ship, we will travel a long distance toward our goal. But of course, as we learned, according to the effort is the reward. If a person seeks to forge a meaningful connection with God, he has to apply himself to the challenge as diligently as he or she can.

There is another type of prayer known as “*Hitbodedut*” or spontaneous prayer from the heart. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov was perhaps the foremost advocate of this method of Divine Connection, advising his students to find time each day to isolate himself in a forest or field, and pour out his heart to his Maker, on every facet of his existence, pleading for God’s blessing and assistance in all of spheres of his life, concerning his desires and deeds, whether big or small,

Some places are more conducive to prayer than others. For instance, the Land of Israel is known as the Holy Land because of its unique spiritual properties. In the Holy Land, prayers ascend straight to God without having to pass through the static and pollution which surrounds other countries. The Kabbalah teaches that in God’s blueprint for Creation, He established Celestial Angels to be His ambassadors over other lands, while He

Himself rules without their involvement over the Land of Israel. This is the source of the joke which says that people around the globe have to place a long distance call in order to speak with God, while in Israel the call is local. Just as some lands are blessed with gold, or diamonds, or oil; and others with vast water resources, or wildlife, or towering mountains; and yet others with sugar cane or wheat; the Land of Israel was awarded a special dose of holiness. It is the only Holy Land there is. People from all over the world flock to the Wailing Wall to pray because the Divine Presence has never left its ancient stones. King Solomon made a special request of God, asking Him to hear the prayers of all people who come from near or far to the site of the ancient Jerusalem Temple, and to accept their supplications:

*“Hearken to the supplication of Your servant, and of Your people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place... and whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man... give to every man according to his ways, whose heart You know, for only You know the hearts of all the children of men... so that all people of the Earth may know Your Name...”* (First Book of Kings, 8: 28-43).

Of course, God hears prayers from whatever launching pad people chose, wherever it may be on the planet.

While sordid places plagued with foul odors are not considered favorable surroundings for prayer, and while sites of idol worship are to be strictly avoided, when people pray in their homes, or while driving in their cars, God takes notice.

### *HITBODEDUT*

The Hasidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, placed special emphasis on the power of intense, individual prayer. He encouraged his students to cry out to God, and pour out their hearts in supplication, in an open, child-like fashion, speaking to God as if to a best friend, revealing everything in their hearts and minds, asking God for everything they need and for His assistance in every facet of their existence, from the smallest request to the grandest, with raising children, and getting along with one's wife, with succeeding in one's studies, and making a livelihood, with overcoming fears and challenges, begging forgiveness for misdeeds, while singing God's praises, confident that God will answer all heartfelt prayer. Rebbe Nachman called this style of praying, "*Hitbodedut*," which can be loosely translated as free-flowing, meditational prayer. He taught that every person should set aside time each day for a

concentrated, undisturbed bout of *Hitbodedut*, whether for five minutes or an hour, in order to maintain a living and dynamic connection with God. He said that this energetic, “free-style” form of prayer is a seeker’s most powerful secret weapon. So pour out your heart. Ask God for everything.

Understandably, given this unfettered manner of reaching out to God, Rebbe Nachman taught the best place for *Hitbodedut* was in a secluded forest or field. A person who jumps up and down and shouts out to God on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan is likely to end up in Bellevue Hospital for the mentally insane. Fortunately, silent *Hitbodedut* also works. While sitting quietly in a classroom, at a baseball game, or in a doctor’s waiting room, a person can plug into the Divine Internet, carrying on a conversation with God, without anyone paying attention.

Try it! Find a secluded place and pour out your heart to God. Clap your hands, shout out, jump up and down, dance, roll on the ground, burst into tears, and sing out in joy. Serve the Lord with gladness and unbounded glee.

Whatever’s on your mind, let it out. Tell God everything that’s troubling you. Ask Him for everything you need.



He already knows, but it is important to express your feelings in words. Expressing our emotions liberates them from the realm of abstraction and converts them into tangible reality. Don't repress – express! Let go of all inhibitions! By expressing our most inner worlds, our prayers become receptacles to receive the Divine Blessing which they evoke. Buckets of blessing are awaiting us. All we have to do is tug on the proper strings. Many of King David's Psalms originated in this fashion, as he herded his father's sheep over the windswept hills of Biblical Israel. Sometimes he prayed, sometimes he sang, sometimes he played on his flute, or his harp.

### CORONA PRAYER

In Israel, when a person has been infected with Coronavirus, or if he or she has been in contact with a person who has tested positive with the germ, that person must undertake a two-week period of social separation and remain in an isolated, quarantined state, which in Hebrew is called, "bedud." Interestingly, the word "bedud" is the root of the Hebrew word, "hitbodedut," the sincere, highly-emotional, personal prayer we have spoken about, perfect a person in Corona solitude.

To date, the Coronavirus has neither a vaccine nor cure. Very often, in a healthy person, the illness subsides like a strong bout of flu, while in other cases, it can prove fatal. All sorts of health measures must be taken, but, at the moment, humanity is relatively helpless to fight off the invisible and fast-spreading danger. Thus, for individuals and for mankind, a path to salvation is G-d. Even if you aren't fully convinced that God exists and listens to our prayers, you have nothing to lose. The Sages of the Talmud have said that it is fine to reach out to God even if one doesn't really believe, because, if he or she prays, belief in God will come.

For people who would like to give it a try, here is an example prayer that can be modified in any fashion to meet the personal style and expression of the seeker.

### **A Prayer to the King**

Dear God, Creator of the Universe, King of the World, through whose Word all things come into being, the Heavens and Earth, and the Coronavirus as well, which You have sent to awaken the world from its slumber, You have made me, and I now understand that I don't exist by myself, through my own wisdom or strength, and not through blind forces of Nature, but You and only You are my Maker and King.

Dear God, please help me to form a connection with You, a real living connection, let me return to You, and embrace a healthier, moral path of living. Forgive the mistakes of my past, my errors, misjudgments, and sins. Enter my life, let me feel Your Presence, guide me in your Ways, help me to cast aside my illusions and lusts, my feelings of self-grandeur, my preoccupation with myself and endless race after earthy vanity and things that cannot save, things without lasting value and meaning, things that draw me away from You.

Dear God, please hear my prayer. Accept my supplication. Show mercy. I cry out to You in distress!

Please save me from the Coronavirus, save my family and friends, save my country, and save all of the world. You, and only You, are the Creator and Master, The Healer, Provider, every moment, of all of the World and everything in it, including the Coronavirus, which You have sent in Your mercy to bring mankind back to You – the Source of all blessing, wellbeing, good fortune, and peace.

Help me, Father! Help all of us! May this prayer be the start of a new chapter of my life, and a new chapter in the life of the world. Teach me to be grateful for all things, for the air that I breathe, the water I drink, for my eyesight and hearing and ability to think and to speak, with the constant awareness that they don't exist

by themselves, but that they, and all things in my life, are all gifts, moment by moment, from You.

And help me to teach others the Truth of Your existence, and Your moment-by-moment Presence, and Your kindness and love. Just as the Coronavirus spreads and multiplies from person to person, help me to teach others, person by person, in a multiplying fashion, the Truth of your Kingship over the world. Give me the words and the ability to influence others, without embarrassment or worry that they will consider me crazy or “religious” or square. Help me to be Your joyous servant and to use the talents You have given me to spread the truth of your Being and Word, in every way that I can. Please, hear my cry, my gracious Father and King. Come into my life. Heal me. Protect me and the world from all danger, and bring us back to you in love. Enlighten the world to Your everlasting Kingship. May it be Your will. Speedily. Amen.

## DON'T GIVE UP!

As we previously mentioned, if your prayers aren't answered right away, pray again and again. Don't give up. Don't stand with a stopwatch, with your finger on the stopper, setting a time limit for God. Make prayer a part of your day. Some lucky people have their prayers

answered immediately, for reasons that God only knows. The majority of us need training. Obviously, not everyone can ice skate the first time they strap on skates. New things have to be learned. As the common saying teaches, “Practice makes perfect.”

Once again, a look at Psalm Twenty-Three can deepen our understanding. While we will study its message in greater depth in the following chapter, one of its teachings will help us understand an important aspect of prayer.

There are people who pray while keeping one eye half open, peeking up towards Heaven to see if God is about to answer their prayers. These are half-believers. They believe a little, but still harbor doubts. If they are lucky, God may answer half of their prayer, measure for measure. He may answer them, or He may not, depending what is best for their spiritual development, which only He knows. This holds true for everyone. Sometimes, we may think that something we want is beneficial for us, when, in fact, in God’s scale of goodness, receiving our heart’s desire would be a detriment. For example, a songwriter may fervently pray to win a prestigious prize, yet his prayers seem to fall on deaf ears. This could be for several reasons. Perhaps

another writer deserves the prize more than he does. Perhaps he didn't pray hard enough. Or perhaps, winning the prize would be a pitfall for him, seducing him to succumb to feelings of conceit and arrogance, things which distance an individual from God. Thus, King David says: "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.*" This doesn't mean that David will be granted everything for which he prays. Rather, it means that he shall not be in want – he shall not lack anything. If for example, he wants to set out and conquer all of Asia, and God doesn't bring his desires to pass, the wise Psalmist knows that achieving his imperialistic ambitions would not be good for his spiritual development. In a similar fashion, a person may long to win a lot of money in the lottery, but God doesn't answer his prayers, knowing in advance that a sudden windfall of money would make his head spin, leading him on vain and misguided ventures. King David feels secure and happy whether he has what he wants or not, trusting that God, like a caring shepherd, knows what is best for his sheep, keeping them from harm, neither too much sun, nor too much shade; allowing them to rest, but not become lethargic. Therefore, if prayers aren't answered the way we want them to be, we mustn't react with anger or scorn. God isn't a slot machine. If coins don't pour out of

the slot machine when we give its handle a tug, we mustn't give the one-armed bandit a kick. Not winning the jackpot is for our own good, even if we don't understand why.

Through prayer, we establish a two-way connection to God. Eureka! Not only does God exist, He is ready and willing to play an active part in our lives! That is the real jackpot! Suddenly, belief becomes real. Our faith begins to grow. No one turns into King David overnight, ready to take on a powerful Goliath with only a slingshot in hand. Like with all other disciplines and skills, faith grows with time and effort. The more we study about God, the more we pray, the more we experience life knowing that the Almighty is a part of our lives; the more we thank Him for "stepping out from behind the curtain" and revealing Himself to us in all of His power and splendor; the more gratitude we express for all of the kindness and blessing He bestows upon us every moment, for our very lives and each single breath we take - all of these combine to build lasting faith and a life-changing connection to the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Now what? Where does this newborn faith lead us?  
What's the next step on the spiritual ladder? The answer  
is Trust.



## Chapter Seven

### **TRUST**

#### **DON'T WORRY – BE HAPPY!**

Faith leads to trust. This trust is based on the fact that, by establishing a living connection to God, we have placed ourselves under the providence of a King who is totally good. Trust brings a feeling of deep security that everything that happens to us, both the good and the seemingly bad, are for our benefit. When a person has acquired true trust in God, anxiety vanishes. Fear and worry disappear. Just as a child feels secure in the presence of his parents, knowing that his mother and father will protect him, the person who trusts in the Lord knows that a benevolent King is always watching over him, conducting, for his benefit, everything which transpires in his life. The Talmud teaches that even the path of leaf falling to the ground is determined by God – how much more so the life of an individual. In the symphony of life, God is the Grand Conductor. Knowing that the all-powerful Creator of Heaven and Earth looks out for his, or her, wellbeing, people who trust in God are blessed with an outlook of confidence and optimism that accompanies them even throughout the vicissitudes

of life which everyone encounters during his sojourn on Earth. This confidence and optimism can be seen on the person's face, in his eyes, and in his bearing. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook reveals that it even appears in a person's handwriting. Because the believer knows that God is completely good, he knows that even the difficulties and sufferings he experiences all come to cleanse him, refine him, test him, and make him a stronger person, further solidifying his faith and trust in God.

Needless to say, when an invisible adversary like Covid-19 is stalking the Earth, searching for victims, one can almost feel the increase of anxiety in the air. People become uptight, anxious, and afraid. Emergency wards report a sharp rise in anxiety attacks, pseudo heart attacks, migraine headaches, and all of the other unpleasant ailments and pains which anxiety can cause. Many people convince themselves that they are infected with the virus, when, in fact, they are fine. People who are unduly uptight come down with the warning symptoms even though they are perfectly healthy. Doctors warn that out-of-control states of anxiety can actually make a person much more susceptible to the disease. Normally, when a person encounters a threatening situation, the normal fight-or-flight

response releases a burst of adrenaline, accompanied by a boost of energy and strength to deal with the situation in a positive and winning manner. But when anxiety, worry, and fear grips a person in an exaggerated manner, paralysis can ensue. Instead of fighting against the enemy, the frightened person fights against himself. Instead of strengthening defenses, it weakens them. Vulnerability is increased. One small puff of Corona and fellow is finished. In effect, he makes his fears come true. The virus doesn't kill him; his anxiety does. All of this can be avoided with trust and faith in God.

A good way to strengthen our trust, especially in times of uncertainty and trouble, is to recite, again and again, like a mantra, the Twenty-Third Psalm. In addition to reminding us of God's benevolent Providence over our lives, His outstretched hand and loving care, the words of the Psalm have a deep spiritual effect on our souls, soothing anxieties, fears, and doubts. The Psalms don't merely remind us of God's constant Presence and His readiness to help when we call out for aid, they contain actual healing powers, like a soothing balm or medicine, bringing health, hope, and joy to downcast and ailing spirits. In times past, a physician would visit patients at home, bringing along his doctor's bag filled with medicines and salves. Every person can have a "doctor's

bag” of his own by memorizing a few of his favorite Psalms. That way, he has a health kit with him wherever he goes. Anytime he needs an invigorating elixir, all he needs to do is recite a Psalm in order to experience an immediate high. For readers who haven’t yet memorized the Twenty-Third Psalm, here it is:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*

*He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.*

*He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness, for his Name’s sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*

*Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou anointed my head with oil; my cup runs over.*

*Only goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever.*

King David informs us that in times of trouble it is God who restores his soul. The Sages teach that while the messages of the Psalms apply to David in his personal

life, and to his national role as leader of the Israelite Nation, they also apply to every individual, whatever his background, in his own personal life. Even when King David walks through the “*valley of death*,” as during his encounter with Goliath, or during the many fierce battles he fought, he experiences no fear whatsoever because of his absolute trust in God. This doesn’t mean that he was void of emotions, or that he had nerves of steel. Throughout his Psalms and the chapters of his life, he expresses a keen awareness of the danger he faces, along with moments of sadness and deep regret over misdeeds. Nevertheless, he never abandons hope and always turns to God for salvation. He continues his metaphor of a shepherd who uses his staff to catch a sheep by the neck if it should stumble into a rushing river, and to hit another on its rump if it should stray from the flock. So too, the invisible Shepherd of our lives lends His “helping hand” to save us from trouble, and, whenever needed, to give us an educating slap on wrist if we need to be saved from a path of behavior that would lead to disaster if we don’t alter our ways. For example, suppose a teenage is arrested for selling drugs. Of course, it is not pleasant to be interrogated by the police and to spend day after day in a jail cell, but this

unpleasant shock may be just the awakening call the youth needs to hear to abandon his unwholesome ways.

It is interesting to note King David's statement:

*Only goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever.*

In the course of his life, King David experienced many challenges, battles, hardships, dangers, downfalls, punishments, and tragedies, yet he views them all as, "only goodness and mercy." Throughout the vicissitudes of his life, he faced almost endless confrontations and conflicts. As a youth, he was cast aside by his family and sent off to graze sheep alone on the hills of Judea. After he slew Goliath and won the adoration of the public, King Saul became obsessively jealous of him, and hunted him with murderous intent, forcing David to once again flee to the isolation of the wilderness. After becoming King, enemies challenged his rule from without the realm of his kingdom, and enemies within his palace sought to oust him, including his sons. One of his sons died in infancy, and David was stricken with a devastating illness for many years, in Divine punishment for the mistakes that he made – but he viewed it all as goodness and mercy, due to his invincible faith in the benevolence of the Lord, who acts always for our

benefit, sometimes with embraces, other times with blows, to keep us on the path of righteousness, and to educate us, just as a loving father educates a child he loves.

**Admittedly, a constant trust in God's goodness is a high level to attain, and to maintain it throughout the trials of living is no easy task. This is especially true during a pandemic like Corona, an all-encompassing, apocalyptic, Divine Decree which has crippled the entire world, and which raises profound question of "Why?" and "How can it be?" for which there are no simple answers. In a way, this is everyone's test. Will we remain loyal believers and lovers of God, even in difficult times, even during the plague of Corona, or will we give up in anger when things don't go our way? The Creator of the Universe is not impressed by our six-figure salaries or expensive cars – He wants to know how faithful his creations are to Him, so He tests us by putting challenges in our path, not to be malicious, or to show off His power, Heaven forbid, but to strengthen us and raise us higher in our service of Him, by making us prove our love for Him, even when the coals glow under our feet, and the air is festered with poisonous germs. In the same way that a mountain climber is tested and strengthened by the height of the**

mountain he sets out to climb, the trials which God sends our way are intended to bring us closer to Him by cementing our faith. For, as the saying goes, when a man is lowered into his grave, he can't take his wealth and possessions with him – only the good deeds which he has done, and his or her love and faithfulness to the Creator.

## TRUST AND PRAYER

We learned how prayer and our fervent appeals to God for His salvation can be lifelines in times of distress, lighting up feelings of darkness, and bringing us back to the comforting shores of faith and belief during the times we feel threatened and lost. We mentioned that King David teaches: *“The Lord is near to all who call upon Him; to all who call upon Him **in truth**. He fulfills the desire of those whom revere Him; He hears their cry and saves them,”* (Psalm 145).

The Psalms of King David can offer relief and renew our connection to God, even in the darkest of times, bringing healing and salvation from our woes. But our own heartfelt supplications can be powerful connectors as well. You don't have to worry about literary style – just express what you feel. We learned about this type



of prayer, known as “*Hitbodedut*,” in the previous chapter. Here’s another example:

“Dear God – what a mess I’m in. Everything in my life is upside down. My wife gets angry at me all the time. My children don’t speak with me. I’ve lost my job and gambled away all of our money. My parents are getting older and need my help, and I am too involved with myself to even call them once a week on the phone. I know I’ve done a lot of things that I shouldn’t have done, and I’m sorry for that. And I haven’t given you much thought for years. Please, dear God, help me get out of the mess I’ve made out of my life. Help me to find work and to begin a clean slate. Help me to make amends with my wife and my children. Help me to take control of my life and not blame others. Forgive all of my wrongdoings, and help me to make amends to the people I’ve offended. Come into my life and wipe away my darkness and despair. Help me my King and Creator. Help me to please You and the people around me. Help me to give and not only to take. Help me. Let me experience the joy of Your salvation. I will sing Your praises forever. Please, God, have mercy. Hear my call and save me. Amen.”

And don't forget that prayer isn't only for times of distress. Don't be ungrateful. God wants to hear our prayers of thanksgiving and praise as well. Don't be a miser, praying only when help is needed. King David teaches us the equal importance of prayers of thanksgiving when times of misfortune have passed:

I will extol thee, O LORD; for Thou hast lifted me up, and  
hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.

O LORD my God, I cried unto Thee, and Thou hast healed  
me.

O LORD, Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave:  
Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to  
the pit.

Sing unto the LORD, O His devout ones, and give thanks  
to His holy Name.

For His anger endures but a moment; in his favor is life:  
weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the  
morning.

And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.

LORD, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to  
stand strong: Thou didst hide thy face, and I was  
troubled.

I cried to Thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made  
supplication.

What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the  
pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy  
truth?

Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be Thou  
my helper.

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing:  
Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with  
gladness;

To the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and  
not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto  
Thee forever. (Psalm 30)

Furthermore, we learn from King David that it is proper  
to sing God's praises even when things are going well:

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth.

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence  
with singing.

Know that the LORD He is God: it is He who has made us,  
and we belong to Him; we are His people, and the sheep  
of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless His Name.

For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever; and His faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100)

How wonderful it is to sing out in joy to our Maker, not only for all the kindness and good He bestows upon us day after day, but even when our situations seem hopeless, even when our bodies are racked with pain. This is the highest level there is – the supreme test of our love – elevating a person to the zenith of Divine Attachment. It is the level of the saintly Rebbe Akiva who sang the praises of God even when the Romans were raking his flesh with burning combs. Precisely at this most anguishing moment, he proclaimed the cry of exalted love and faith that has echoed throughout the generations of time, *“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord in One!”*

## Chapter Eight

### **EVERYTHING IS FOR THE BEST**

#### RABBI AKIVA

We can learn the full extent of trust from a story about the legendary Rabbi Akiva. Earlier we noted that when four great Torah scholars endeavored to learn the deepest secrets of the Kabbalah, only Rabbi Akiva emerged unharmed. Interestingly, for the first forty years of his life, Rabbi Akiva didn't study Torah at all. When it came to religious matters, he was a complete ignoramus. The Talmud relates that his animosity to Torah scholars was so great, whenever he saw one, he wanted to bite him and break his bones. While he was working as a penniless shepherd for Kalba Savua, one of the richest landowners in Israel, Rabbi Akiva fell in love with the aristocrat's daughter, Rachel. The modest maiden was instantly attracted to the peasant's humility and noble character. Horrified by the match, her father threatened to disown her. Sensing Akiva's potential, and ignoring her father's opposition, she agreed to marry the hard-working peasant, on the condition that he dedicate himself to Torah study. Thus, at the age of forty, the illiterate shepherd sat in a classroom with young

children and learned the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. He progress slowly and soon grew discouraged. One day, while he was grazing sheep, he came across a deep hole in a boulder. "I wonder what caused the hole in the rock," he mused. Just then, a droplet of water dripped down from an overhanging ledge above his head. The droplet fell into the hole in the boulder. Apparently, the slow and steady dripping of water, year after year, had bored the hole in the rock. "If small drops of water, a drop at a time, can make a hole in a large boulder," he reasoned, "then certainly, the words of the Torah can penetrate my thick skull." Applying himself diligently, Rabbi Akiva enrolled in a yeshiva in a faraway village and studied day and night for twelve years without once returning home to visit his wife. Finally, arriving for a visit after his long absence, when he reached the window of his tiny shack, he heard his wife conversing with a neighbor who jeered at her because her husband had abandoned her for so many years. "I would be happy if he were to sit and learn for another twelve years without coming home, if it would help him become a great teacher of Torah," she told her friend. Hearing her words, Rabbi Akiva returned to the yeshiva without even saying hello to his wife. Twelve years later, he returned home accompanied by twenty-four

thousand students. When Rachel heard that the great Rabbi Akiva, the leading Torah scholar in Israel, was approaching the village, she ran out to greet him. Seeing a woman throw herself down at the feet of the holy Sage, a student hurried forward to drag her away. "Leave her be!" Rabbi Akiva called out. "All the Torah I have learned, and all the Torah I have taught you, belong to her."

When the Romans invaded the Land of Israel and conquered the country, razing Jerusalem and the Holy Temple, Rabbi Akiva led the Israelites in a rebellion against the powerful legions of Rome. Seeing the unworldly prowess of the Hebrew warrior, Bar Kochva, the humble Rabbi Akiva joined his ranks and served as his weapons carrier when Bar Kochva led the Jews into battle against the Roman invaders.

The famous story involving trust occurred at this time. One day, on a journey to raise funds for the rebellion, come evening time, Rabbi Akiva approached an Israelite town surrounded by the tall wall. Discovering that the gate was locked, he knocked on its thick wooden door. "The city is closed for the night," he heard a voice call out.

“All I request is lodging and fodder for my donkey,” he explained.

“The gate is closed for the night,” the voice of the guard repeated. “No one is allowed inside until morning. Those are my orders. Now go on your way and be off!”

“Everything God does is for the best,” Rabbi Akiva said to himself with a calm and confident voice, not feeling the least bit perturbed. Leading his donkey, and carrying a lantern, he walked away from the town. His only other possession of worth was a rooster he had taken with him in order to wake up every morning at the rooster’s first crowing so he could pray the dawn prayer. A short distance away from the village, as nightfall arrived, he left the road and found a place to camp in the woods. During the night, when a strong wind blew out the candle in his lantern, he said, “Everything God does is for the best.” In the pitch darkness, a fox devoured his rooster, and a lion killed his donkey. “Everything God does is for the best,” Rabbi Akiva calmly said, not troubled in the least. When he awoke in the morning, he returned to the town and discovered that Romans had plundered it during the night, setting the village afire. Had he spent the night in the village, he himself might have been killed. And if his candle hadn’t been



extinguished, or if his donkey had brayed and his rooster had crowed, his whereabouts in the forest would have been disclosed, casting his life in danger. “Everything God does is for the best,” he affirmed once more, teaching us that even things which are seemingly bad in our eyes have a beneficial purpose in God’s Master Plan for the world, and for every person who seeks out His Presence.

This is also true when the plague of Coronavirus lurks just beyond our doors. This too is for the best. How do I know? Because the Almighty sent it. Because the Creator is ever kind and giving, always looking out for his creations, like a shepherd looks after his sheep, I know that in His love and kindness, He has created this plague to make the world a better place, to force mankind to cast away unworthy and unwholesome habits, and to begin a new chapter of history, when the world returns to God and to living according to His teachings. Adopting the positive outlook of Rabbi Akiva and his steadfast belief that everything is for the best, let me suggest a few examples. Corona has taught us to be more caring for others. It has taught us to appreciate the things that we have. It has taught us patience and compassion, the love of family and friends. In the fate we share with our neighbors, our community, our town and country,

Corona has shattered our egotistical shells and made us feel responsible for others. It has promoted world unity, pulled down national boundaries, and placed mankind in the same storm-threatened boat. And out of our agony, and our sudden realization of the incredible, unsurpassed power of God, it has humbled our arrogant pride and made us realize that neither our power nor wisdom created the world, but that everything in the universe, from the rotation of the planets to the blooming of a flower, and our ability to get out of bed in the morning, all derive from the kindness and power of God.

One of Rabbi Akiva's principle teachers was Rabbi Nahum, better known as *Nahum Ish Gamzu*. While some historians say that he came from the town of Gamzu, others offer another explanation for his name. The word, *Ish*, in Hebrew means "man." *Gamzu* can be translated as, "this is also." Whatever happened in his life, whether good or seemingly bad, he would say, "*Gam zu l'tova*," meaning, "This too is for the good."

A slight difference exists between Rabbi Akiva's expression, "Everything God does is for the best," and the expression of his teacher, "This too is for the good." When Rabbi Akiva was barred from entering the village

to lodge there for the night, he didn't become upset because he trusted that whatever God decreed for him would turn out to be in his best interest. For instance, in a different period of his life, Rabbi Akiva had to journey to Rome on behalf of the Jewish community in Israel. On his way to the port, while walking along the dirt road with a companion, a long thorn entered his foot. Because of the pain, he was unable to continue. "Everything God does is for the best," he said, accepting his fate without anger or remorse. His companion continued on to the port and boarded the ship, which departed without Rabbi Akiva. Sometime later, news arrived that the ship had sunk in a storm at sea, drowning all the passengers. Because of the thorn in his foot, Rabbi Akiva was saved. When the thorn had entered his foot, he hadn't known that his salvation would come from it, but he trusted that God had brought about the inconvenience for his ultimate benefit.

In contrast, his teacher, *Nahum Ish Gamzu*, was won't to say, "This too is for the good," trusting that whatever happened to him was good for him, immediately, at the very moment, not only that it would turn out for his best interest in the future. This level of trust is even higher than Rabbi Akiva's. The point is – in our own lives, when

we understand that everything that comes our way, including Corona, has been orchestrated by God for our benefit, both the good things and the seemingly bad, this awareness elevates our beings and brings us to a state of happiness and calm, along with a greater attachment to the Creator, who renews His acts of Creation each day, not only in sustaining the entire world, but in our own individual lives as well.

#### WHO IS THE RICH MAN?

Today, self-help books, and layman's guides to happy and healthy living, line shelf after shelf in bookstores, but self-help books are not an invention of our age. A guide to productive living called, *The Ethics of the Fathers*, appeared in Talmudic times, written by the leading Sages of the time. Its chapters are filled with pearls of wisdom and sound advice. For instance, Rabbi Ben Zoma teaches: "Who is wise? He who learns from all men. Who is the man of valor? He who conquers his passions. Who is rich? He who is happy with what he has."

The trait of trust leads a person to be content with his lot. As Rabbi Ben Zoma teaches, the true wealthy man is the man who is happy with what he has, trusting that

God provides for all of his needs. An individual who trusts in God isn't filled with an envy of others, nor driven by jealousy and competition. He lives his life calmly, content with what he has. This is similar to King David's assertion, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*" A person with this positive orientation experiences no anxiety or nervousness. He doesn't need to compete with anyone. He doesn't feel that he needs more than what he has. He isn't prone to outbursts of resentment and anger. He lives in peaceful contentment, trusting in God. He doesn't judge himself by the social or material standards of the time. He isn't in a race with his peers to buy the newest smartphone, or drive the sportiest car, or dwell in a mansion with twelve rooms and a swimming pool. He does not need to acquire external possessions, one after the other, in order to feel good about himself. He is happy with what the Lord gives him, and trusts that he needs no more than that.

Another fable-like story of Rebbe Nachman illustrates this theme. It teaches us that happiness doesn't come from fame and riches, but in the simple faith that God provides for all of our needs. Even should hard times come upon us, we can be sure that everything is for the best.

## **A MATTER OF TRUST**

Once Upon a Time, there was a king who said in his heart, "Can it be that anyone has less worries and troubles than I have? For I have all of the good things in the world, and I am a king and rule over the land."

Just to be sure, he went to investigate the matter. He disguised himself as a simple peasant and left his castle at night to stand behind houses in the village to listen to what people were saying. He heard the worries of everyone: one man's business was failing; and in another home, a man needed help from the authorities to deal with his problems; and in other homes, everyone complained about all sorts of troubles and worries.

The king continued on with his investigation and came to a very low shack whose shattered roof had sunk to the ground and whose windows were parallel with the soil. Inside, he saw a man who sat and played a fiddle. He had to listen very hard to hear the sound, but the man was very happy. A platter filled with food and a bottle of wine were on the table in front of him, and he was very happy -

radiant with joy, seemingly without any problems at all.

The disguised king went into the caved-in shack and asked the man how he was doing in life. The fellow said, "Thank God, I can't complain." The king gazed at the wine and food on the table, and noted the joy in the man's expression. The man gave poured the king a goblet of wine and made a toast to the king – without realizing that the king himself was seated at his table!

Later, after having enjoyed some more wine, the tired king lay down to sleep, noting that his host seemed truly happy all the time.

In the morning when the king awoke, his new acquaintance accompanied him outside. "That was a wonderful meal we ate last night – fit for a king. Where do you get the money for a meal like that?"

"I am a handyman," the man replied. "I fix things that are broken. I can't make anything, but I can fix them. I go out in the morning and I search for things to fix. When I have earned five or six gulden, I purchase what I need for my evening meal."

When the king heard this, he said to himself, "I will ruin him. Then we shall see how happy he is!"

The king returned to the palace and issued a decree that if any of his subjects in the kingdom has something broken, he is not allowed to give it to anyone to fix. He must either fix it himself or buy something new.

The next morning, the fixer left his home, looking for things to repair. People informed him that the king had issued a decree that nothing could be given to a repairman to fix. This didn't bode well for his ability to make a living, but he trusted in God.

He walked on a bit and saw a nobleman chopping wood. "Why are your honor chopping the wood by himself?" he inquired. "Isn't it beneath your dignity?"

"Indeed, I tried to find someone to chop the wood for me," the wealthy man replied, "but I couldn't find anyone. I had no choice but to cut it myself."

"Allow me," replied the fixer. "I will cut the wood for you."



The fixer chopped the wood, and the rich man gave him a gulden. Realizing that this was a fine way to earn a day's wages, he found more wood which needed to be cut until he had received six gulden. With the money, he purchased his evening meal. It was a feast, and he was very happy.

Once again that night, the king disguised himself and left the palace. He stood outside the fixer's window to see how he was getting along. He saw that the fellow was enjoying his lavish meal with great happiness. The king knocked on the door, and the fixer invited him inside to share his evening meal. After the feast, he fell asleep like he had previously. Once again in the morning, he asked his simple friend, "Where did you get the money to afford such a wonderful supper?"

"My usual work is to repair broken things," the fixer replied. "But the king enacted a new law forbidding his citizens to give things to repairmen to fix. So I chopped wood for others until I had enough money to buy my evening meal."

After returning to the palace, the king issued another decree forbidden people to hire others to chop wood. When the fixer heard this, he was

annoyed, but he trusted in God. He walked around for a short time until he saw a distinguished-looking man cleaning his stable.

“A person like you shouldn’t have to clean out a stable,” he said.

“I searched near and far, but I couldn’t find anyone to do the work for me. Therefore, I had to do it myself.”

“Allow me,” the fixer replied. “I will do the work for you.”

When the fixer was finished, the owner of the stable gave him two gulden. The fixer cleaned a few more stables until he had earned the six gulden he needed. Buying his evening meal, he happily returned to his shack.

Once again that evening, the king left the palace to see what was new with the fixer, finding him as happy as ever. “How did you get the money to pay for the meal that we ate last night?” he asked the fixer in the morning. After the fixer explained how he had found work which wasn’t against the law, the king returned to his royal court and issued a

new decree that no one could be hired to clean out barns or stables.

When the fixer went off to work, he discovered that the king had declared a new law against hiring a worker to clean out stables. Without another choice, the fixer went to a recruitment office and hired himself out for the kingdom's national guard. Some soldiers are drafted, but others hire themselves out for pay. Before signing up, the fixer made a stipulation with the recruiting officer that he would only join temporarily, and that he would be paid every morning. He immediately put on a uniform and buckled a sword at his side. When evening came, he removed his uniform and bought his evening meal with his day's wages. At home, he enjoyed his feast with great joy.

Once again, the king paid a visit to the fixer, only to find him just as happy as ever. Upon the king's question, the fixer told him the whole story. Back at the palace, the king summoned the recruitment officer and instructed him not to pay any wages that day.

When the fixer reported for duty, he asked the officer for his pay for the day. When the officer

refused to pay him, the fixer said, "But we made an agreement that you would pay me every day."

"True," the officer assented, "but the king decreed that no soldier be paid today."

The fixer pleaded and argued, but his appeals fell on deaf ears. "Tomorrow, I will pay you for two days," the officer told him, "but today, it is impossible to give you your wages."

So the fixer devised a plan. He removed the blade from his sword and replaced it with a wooden blade that he carved, so that no one could tell the difference. He then pawned the sword blade and purchased his evening feast as usual.

The king was again visited the shack and found the fixer completely happy. After the lavish meal, he asked the simple peasant how he was getting along. The fixer related the story of how he had removed the blade of his sword from its handle, and how he had pawned it to buy food for his evening meal. "When I get paid today," he concluded, "I will redeem the blade from the pawn shop at the end of the day and return it to the sword. No one will

know the difference. I can fix anything! The king will not have lost a thing.”

Returning to the palace, the king summoned the recruiting officer. “There is a criminal who needs to be executed,” the king told him. “Call the fixer whom you recruited for the national guard, and give him the order to cut off the criminal’s head with his sword.”

The officer did what the king requested. In the meantime, the king gathered the officials of his court and told them that he wanted them to see the fine joke he had prepared, explaining that a soldier had replaced the blade of his sword with a wooden substitute, and that he was about to teach him a lesson.

When the fixer came to the palace court, he fell on the ground before the king, whom he didn’t recognize as his nightly visitor. “Your majesty,” he pleaded in apprehension. “Why did you send for me?”

“I want you to cut off the head of a criminal.”

The fixer was startled. He begged and he pleaded.  
“Why me? I have never killed a man in my life.  
Please. Find someone else to do it!”

“I am ordering you to carry out the execution,” the king insisted.

“Maybe the case is not certain,” the fixer stammered. “Maybe the criminal does not deserve to die. I have never harmed a soul in my life. How can I kill someone who might be innocent?”

“There is no question whatsoever that the man deserves to die. The verdict was unanimous. And you have been chosen to carry out the sentence and to decapitate him with your sword.”

The fixer realized that he would not be able to change the king’s mind. He gazed up toward Heaven and said, “God Almighty, I have never killed a person in my life. If this man does not deserve to die, let the blade of my sword turn to wood!”

With that, he drew out his sword from its sheath, and everyone saw that the blade was wood. Everyone had a good laugh. The king saw what a

fine man the fixer was, a man of faith. So he let him go in peace.

## A LESSON OF FAITH

The king in this story personifies people who live their lives without any connection to God, and without the joy-giving trust which believers possess in knowing that God takes care of their needs. In the beginning of the story, the king pompously claims that with all of his wealth, fame, and power, he has a life free of worries, yet he secretly worries lest someone may have less worries than he has. Thus, we see that he really does have worries, and that, even though he has all of the “good things” in life, he doesn’t have the greatest treasure of all – happiness. While on the outside, he possesses all of the things people dream about, on the inside, he feels an emptiness and inner unrest. He senses that worldly success, material security, and fame are not everything. Feeling that something is missing in his life, the king sets out on a quest to find the key to true happiness.

Through his encounters with the simple handyman, the fixer, the king discovers that the secret of happiness,

and true fulfillment in life, comes with faith and trust in God.

In contrast to the king, the fixer lives a very simple life. Instead of dwelling in a luxurious castle, he lives in a broken down shack whose roof has collapsed. The unpretentious cabin has sunken almost under the ground. The fixer lives from day to day, working for his daily needs, happy with what he has, trusting in God and not worrying about the future. Each day, when he has earned enough money for his evening meal, he stops working and enjoys his good fortune. He doesn't worry what the next day will bring, and he doesn't trouble himself to put money in the bank. His trust in God is complete.

In contrast to the king who has great honor, riches, and fame, the fixer is humble. He doesn't have grand ambitions. If something goes wrong in his life, or if he encounters a problem, as when the king keeps taking away his means of a livelihood, he doesn't worry or fall into despair. Rather, he adjusts to the situation, and optimistically seeks a solution. He doesn't crave after honor or riches. He simply seeks to have enough money for his nightly meal. The Sages of the Mishna ask, "Who is happy?" They answer: "He who is content with his



lot.” The fixer doesn’t long for the impossible. He lives within his means. In this way, he always manages to achieve his goal of staying happy and serving God with joy, even when faced with a crisis.

Once again, in this story, in the example of the unhappy king, we find the recurring theme that a person can’t free himself from his personal prison (the king’s inner unhappiness and unrest) without the help of a teacher or guide. For him, the day-to-day optimism and faith of the fixer is the encounter he needs to understand what he is missing in life. The example of the fixer, or “role model” as we say today, serves as a mirror for the king to observe himself. Without long speeches, counseling sessions, or therapeutic analysis, the fixer makes the king realize that he feels empty inside because God is not a part of his life. Until his encounter with this simple man of belief, the king thought that he had amassed all of his riches and regal station by himself. His life was so filled with his own ego, there wasn’t room for God. Perhaps he never learned about God. Perhaps he believed that God was merely the opium of the masses. Perhaps, he knew about God in his youth but became so impressed with himself and his achievements and conquests that he forgot to give thanks to the King of all kings, who rules over all of existence.

If a person rests his identity and happiness on material possessions and fleeting matters like honor and fame, if he loses these things, he has nothing. If a fire burns down his house, or if he loses his position of authority and power, he feels shattered. But a person who is humble and content with his lot, like the fixer, if he should lose what he has, he still has his faith in God. For him, his joy in being the son of the King of the Universe is unaffected, since it is not based on external things that can be taken away.

Joy is not only a feeling – it is a commandment of the Torah. We are told in the Psalms to: *“serve Hashem with joy.”* It is not enough to recognize that God exists and that He interacts with our lives, our connection to Him is not to be like a cumbersome burden, with resentment for having to carry a heavy load, but rather, we are called upon to serve God with joy. Being happy is something we have to work at. While some people are gifted with happy natures, for most of us, happiness requires substantial effort to achieve. The first step is realizing that we are not alone on the planet, but that its Creator is actively involved with our lives, literally looking after us like a shepherd. This is a lasting, life encompassing happiness, far more substantial than the short-term pleasures of a tasty meal, exciting movie, or

a journey to some exotic location. While these temporary sources of happiness can be an important part of happy and healthy living, true happiness shouldn't be dependent upon them. The person who trusts in God, and who is blessed with the feeling of deep security that comes with it, doesn't need to watch a movie every night to experience joy. Being shut up in our homes for months on end while the Coronavirus floats invisibly through the streets of our cities and towns can lead to feelings of claustrophobia, helplessness, and depression. But when we remember that just as Covid-19 is invisible to our eyes, yet exists all the same, so too the Maker of Heaven and Earth is invisible, yet He exists all the same. In fact, His Presence is with us in our homes. Shut up in our dwellings during the long weeks and months of Corona, we are not alone. God is with us! The King is visiting our humble abodes! What a joyous thing!

I remember from my youth the magazine called "Reader's Digest." There was a column called, "Laughter is the Best Medicine." Hasidic sages have long taught the importance of serving the Lord with joy. Rebbe Nachman of Breslev lauds the healing properties of merriment, joyous song, and dancing. He is famous for his teaching, "It is a great thing and obligation to be

happy at all times.” Even the medical world has come to value the healing potential of happiness. Today, it is common to see “medical clowns” strolling along hospital corridors, with the mission to keep patients cheerful. Apparently, in addition to elevating a sick person’s spirits and hope for the future, happiness releases healing hormones into the human metabolism which help fight against disease. And the opposite is true as well. Melancholy and depression are often the frontrunners of bouts of bad health and even serious disease. Feelings of anxiety, depression, and despair can shatter the will to live completely. Thus the saying, “Don’t worry. Be Happy!”

It is important to note that the fixer lives his life focused on the present. He doesn’t worry what will be in the future, nor does he dwell on the past. When the king asks him, “Don’t you worry that you won’t have food for the rest of the week?” the fixer answers: “Why should I worry? God will take care of my needs.”

Rabbi Akiva also had trust in Hashem. As we previously noted, he was wont to say, “Everything that God does is for the good.” Perhaps this “mantra” was his way of reminding himself. After all, in addition to one’s celestial soul, a person is composed of flesh and blood. We are

very much a part of the material world around us, with powerful human emotions that can lead us this way and that, until we forget our soul completely. God keeps Himself hidden – behind the curtains, so to speak. It is easy to forget that He is always by our side.

All religions have rituals which are designed to focus the worshipper's attention on the spiritual world beyond his physical senses. In Judaism, the precepts of the Torah keep a person connected to God throughout the day, and at special times throughout the year. For example, there are daily blessings and prayers, the commandment to put on tefillin, to observe kosher dietary laws, and to learn Torah. Every week, the Sabbath allows a person to take a pause in his busy weekday life and remember that it was God, not we human beings, who created the Heaven and Earth. And the Jewish Holidays throughout the year remind people to recall outstanding times in the life of the Israelite Nation when God stepped out from behind the curtains of history to reveal His guiding hand, such as the Exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Another very short parable illustrates the idea that God is always with us, helping us on our journey through life. Once, a man dreamt about his life. He saw himself

walking along a beach with God. But sometimes, during the most difficult periods of his life, looking back, he saw only one set of footprints in the sand. Surprised, he asked God why He had abandoned him during the most difficult times, when he needed Him the most. God answered him, “The times when you saw only one set of footprints were the times that I had to carry you.”

People often ask: “How can it be that everything is for the good, when sometimes bad things happen to people?” When everything goes right for a person, it is easy to have faith. Real faith means continuing to have believe and trust in Hashem, even when things go wrong. Tests of faith, such as the Corona epidemic, can be very difficult. Like with the commandment to be happy, faith is not just a feeling, but something requiring effort and work. When “bad things” happen, these difficult times challenge our faith. When we cling to faith, even at times of adversity, tragedy, and loss, our faith becomes stronger, and our attachment to God is enhanced. When Abraham obeys God’s command to bring his son, Isaac, to Mount Moriah and to offer him as a sacrifice on the altar, this supreme test of faith is what made Abraham the model of faith that mankind has aspired to reach from the beginnings of time.

Not that God capriciously brings “bad things” to pass in order to test people and make their faith stronger. The reasons why God does this thing or that exist on a transcendental plane beyond human knowledge and conception. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. It is not for us to judge God. We only see what is in front of our eyes. God sees the whole picture at a glance, from the beginning of time to the end. According to the secrets of Kabbalah, a young person who suddenly dies in the prime of his or her life may be the reincarnation of a soul which lived hundreds of years previously and who had to return to this world in another life in order to rectify some matter from the past. Not seeing all of the pieces in the mosaic, we have to keep going forward in life, through the ups and the downs, with a firm trust in God and with the belief that everything that the Almighty does, the good and the bad, is for our ultimate benefit.

At the end of Rebbe Nachman’s story, through his encounter with the simple fixer, the king discovers that true and lasting happiness comes, not from fame and riches, but from the simple, joyful trust in God.

## Chapter Nine

### TAMING THE HULK

#### ANGER

When a person has acquired faith and trust during his quest to “Return to the Source,” and has established a living connection with God, he has to be careful not to cause a short circuit. The Talmud cites several things which sever the connection to God. For instance, licentious behavior is the opposite of holiness, causing the Divine Presence to flee from a person. The same is true concerning arrogance. Conceited people are so swelled up with themselves, they don’t have any place for God in their lives. The Prophet, Micah, teaches, *“He has told thee what is good and what the Lord requires of thee – to act justly, love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God,”* (Micah, 6:8.) King David also praises the trait of humility: *“The humble shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in an abundance of peace,”* (Psalms, 37:11.) This doesn’t mean that for a person to have a connection with God he needs to be meek, in its sense of frightened and frail. Not in the least. King David himself was among the humblest of men, but that didn’t stop him from being a brave warrior and powerful



political leader, possessed of many outstanding talents. His great humility came from accrediting all of his talents and achievements to God. He understood that everything he had, and all of his successes, were gifts from his Maker. *"I am a worm, and not a man,"* he said of himself – not because he lacked self-worth, or because he was unaware of his prowess, but because he attributed all of his greatness to God.

Likewise, the Mishna teaches that jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of honor remove a man from the world. Another red light is anger. If a person hopes to maintain a connection to God, he needs to purge the trait of anger from his heart. In the very competitive, pressure-cooker world of Western society, outbursts of anger are as prevalent as sedatives and drugs. Being pent up in the home during a Corona quarantine, having to take care of energetic children 24/7, or being laid off from work, and feeling totally out of control as one's life is threatened on all sides, all of this can lead to impulsive explosions of anger. Even in milder, normal times Before Corona (B.C.), because of outbursts of anger, many people have lost their jobs, and many marriages have been destroyed. To make matters worse, anger is often portrayed in comic books, movies, and television as a positive trait to be emulated. An entire generation of

young people have grown up imbued with this cultural brainwashing. Take the movie, “Rocky,” as an example. “Get angry!” his manager screams at him as he gets pummeled during the fight. As his anger mounts, he is seemingly graced with a superhuman burst of power and energy which sweep him to victory. Bruce Lee is another movie hero whose anger makes him invincible. Not to mention the Hulk!

While there is a place for anger when confronted with terrible injustice and wrongdoing, as when sadist beats up an old man on the street, outbursts of anger over the frustrations of daily living cause terrible damage to the person who gets angry. In fact, the father of modern Kabbalah, Rabbi Isaac Yitzhak Luria, known as the Arizal, considered anger the most pernicious trait of all. This legendary figure, who lived five hundred years ago in the Holy Land, was famous for his Divine Illumination. He knew what people were thinking, and on the screen of their foreheads, he could see a record of their deeds. He knew the language of animals and birds, and the secrets of reincarnation. He traveled around the country and identified the burial places of Prophets and Holy Sages of the past. His teachings illuminating the mystical secrets of Torah shed light on the deepest understandings of God’s Providence over the world.

The Arizal's most devoted student, Rabbi Chaim Vital, writes:

“Concerning anger, my honored teacher, the Arizal, spoke in the strictest manner, more than all other transgressions. He said that other transgressions do not cause a person to lose his holy soul, something which comes about through anger. He explained that when this happens, and the holy soul abandons a person, another soul belonging to a lower animal realm takes its place. For this reason, when a person is angry, all of his wisdom leaves him. This occurs even if the person is exceedingly wise and a master of good deeds. In the hour of his anger, the person's face takes on the appearance of a beast, due to the lower animal soul which he now possesses. His whole being becomes polluted. All spiritual advancement is denied him. It is as if he must begin his spiritual building all over from the start. Only after the most ardent repentance, and the strenuous work of character improvement, will his Divine Image return. Should he get angry again, his Divine soul once again flees from him. This does not transpire upon other transgressions, which don't cause a person to lose his soul. Rather, they blemish a person's spiritual blueprint but can be readily erased with the

proper repentance and rectification. Therefore, a person must distance himself from anger completely.”

In the Holy Zohar, the seminal work of Jewish Mysticism, anger is compared to the worship of idols. This is because when a person gets angry, his or her faith in God disappears. He utterly forgets that God exists. For if he thought about God before his anger erupts, he would remember that everything comes from God, and that all is for the good – so why should he get angry? We will expand on this important understanding in the following chapter.

Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi was a widely respected Kabbalist who passed away just a few years ago. He wrote an essay, which he recommended as a remedy for anger, in order to teach and remind people about the dangers and horrible consequences of getting angry. He advised his students to read it at least once every week, to keep its messages always fresh in their minds and the hearts:

## **REMEDY FOR ANGER**

by the Kabbalist, HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi

You should know, my dear friend, you have arrived into this world in order to rectify character traits that you blemished in your previous reincarnation. And you are obliged to do this work now, as quickly as possible. Only in this manner will you reach the promised Garden of Eden and be united with your Creator in the bonds of love.

It is known the attribute of anger is at the head of the ladder of character traits demanding correction. A human being is the pinnacle of creation, and anger is a most evil sickness that causes him to lose all of the noble things within him.

Rectifying anger is very difficult, requiring many days and nights of strenuous and painstaking work, but all to the good. In the majority of cases, this trait deceives you and has you believing that, "Thank God, I have finally mastered my temper, and thank God, I am not overly stringent with people and don't get angry anymore. On the contrary, I control my emotions and almost resemble an angel.

Nevertheless, if you be tested, then at a moment's notice, over some very small thing, you become angry and pollute your soul with your fury. All of your hard

work comes to naught, and everything you accomplished is lost. In my opinion, your fall was caused by two factors. One is your pride, and the second is a lack of simple faith, for everything that comes about is sent from the Creator of the World, both happiness and sorrow, wisdom and ignorance, a modest livelihood and wealth, everything is from the Blessed One Holy Be He. So why get angry? Why get uptight? Why lose your temper? Why be jealous? Why take revenge? Everything comes about because of God's providence. No one can tell Him what to do or how to act, for everything comes from Him, may He and His Name be blessed, and He is beneficent and good to all.

Therefore, you should know, my dear friend, you are far too precious to act so foolishly, for you resemble the upper spiritual worlds. Your holy being is attached to the highest celestial worlds, even higher than angels. In your body is a holy soul that has been quarried from beneath the Throne of Glory, and you are perpetually connected to our Father in Heaven. Divine illumination and influence descends to you from those exalted regions, to constantly grant you life, goodness, and material blessing.

All of this goodness comes to you so that you may serve the Almighty with an expanded consciousness, with health, contentment, wealth, fruitful marital relations, saintly children, and a long life filled with the reverence of God. With so much goodness, what were you lacking that caused you to get angry?

Therefore, my precious child, be very careful not to get angry, for anger pollutes the soul. In its wake, a person not only loses the connection he had with the person with whom he is angry, but he most certainly causes a severe spiritual disconnection in damaging the channels of Divine blessing, thus bringing darkness over his being, and over all of the elevated spiritual worlds that he carries within his body. And from this comes mental and emotional problems, and serious illnesses like heart attacks, asthma, ulcers, migraines, and other evil things, may God have mercy.

Thus, my cherished friend, please understand the degrading level that a person can be brought to by the evil trait of anger. If you do not stop yourself from getting angry by being patient toward the person who is upsetting you, or by reacting in some positive manner, or by thinking some good thought about him, and about saving yourself, then in a moment of anger, you turn

yourself into the lowest of the lowly creatures in this world. You cause the Holy One Blessed Be He to flee from you, and your holy soul abandons your body, and a soul from the realm of impurity enters in its place, polluting your being. You become vile, like a carcass, for your soul is cast away from you, as if it had died, and everything, everything is lost.

Even if you are wisest of men and an avid doer of good deeds, and even if you devotedly work to rectify your personality traits, all of your efforts are lost, for your soul is replaced by another, and you must do everything you did anew. And all of the good deeds that you did in your life, it is as if they never existed at all.

See, my child, the lowly place where your great anger has brought you. In the world, there is nothing so precious as you are, the pinnacle of this holy creation, yet you have fallen to such a frightening and grievous state. Just the possibility of this should have brought you to tremble in anguish and shock.

Therefore, take the time to ponder just how you came to this situation, to what fathomless depths you have fallen, and to what sorrowful place you have brought your soul and your body when you became angry



without thinking. In the future, take heed! Constantly fix it in your mind to remove this evil obstacle from your life. Constantly, be on guard not to succumb to this ugly trait that separates you from celestial blessing, from happiness and wealth, and from all of the good that our Father in Heaven always seeks to bestow. By guarding yourself from this evil, you will merit all of the blessings that are written in the Torah, and you will be awarded with long life with your family, lasting health, happiness, and great satisfaction in everything that you do. Amen.

## LIFE IN SLOW-MOTION

When a person knows that everything is for the best, he, or she, no longer needs to get angry. Everyone is familiar with the age-old advice on overcoming anger: “Count to ten.” The idea is simple, but it really works. When something unexpected happens that pulls the pin out of a person’s emotional grenade, his blood boils faster than a high-speed coffee percolator, causing his control center to short-circuit. His reason shuts down giving way to an explosion of temper – sometimes over the most trivial matter. But, if he catches himself in time by counting to ten before the chain reaction commences,

he can avoid getting angry and spare himself and his surroundings from the shrapnel of the explosion. While counting, he can take a deep breath and let his screaming nerves relax.

Let's take this simple advice and bring God into the picture. The moment something happens to arouse your anger, immediately think about God. Remember that it isn't your hyper-active kid who is driving you crazy, nor your wife, when she phones you while you are on line at the supermarket after having loaded a cart with the long list of items on the list she prepared. "I forgot to write down ketchup," she says. "Don't come home without buying ketchup." In these instances, immediately think about God and remember that He is testing you, to see if you will get angry, testing your, in order to give you a chance to work on your character traits and to overcome and shatter your trigger reaction of impatience and anger.

In a similar fashion, should a bulging grocery bag burst open, and fruits and vegetables spill out all over the parking lot, turn the scene into slow motion and remember that God sent an angel to tear the bag, so why get angry at the plastic- bag manufacturer, or at the supermarket manager, or at your wife for sending you to

do the shopping when she should have done it herself. It's just another test – and another chance to build your character and to get closer to God when you don't allow anger to pollute your precious soul.

And if you feel like getting angry at God for testing you the whole day long in such a juvenile matter, what good will your anger do? What purpose does it serve to get angry at God. He created the entire Heaven and Earth, and you are a tiny speck in the universe. What good will your anger serve? It will only disturb the harmony of existence and your own inner world. Why bother?

If you send your son to the grocery store with twenty dollars to buy some orange juice, and he loses the money on the way, will your anger return the money? No. But it will distance you from your son, and from God. So before you begin to holler at the boy and beat him on the head, turn your reaction into slow motion, pretend that the King of the Universe is standing beside you (which He is, in an invisible manner), and remember that it doesn't pay to lose your soul over all the vegetable and fruit in the world.

If the little things in life can drive a person out of his mind, how much more so a frightful and seemingly never-ending encounter with Corona. But will getting

angry at God solve anything? Certainly not. It is far more productive, and a lot healthier, to direct one's energy to developing a positive outlook on life, even on Corona. Remember – everything is for the best. Everything that God does is good, even if we don't understand or agree with the game plan. Keep repeating: Everything that God does is good. Everything that God does is good. Everything that God does is good....

Whatever happens in your life, immediately think about God, turn the scene into slow motion before reacting, and remember that everything is for the best – even Corona. If you succeed in doing this, you will become a new person, bounding in enlightenment and joy.

## Chapter Ten

### **RETURN TO EDEN**

#### T'SHUVA

We mentioned that while, without prophecy, we cannot pinpoint the specific reasons why the Almighty has sent the Corona plague to practically stop day-to-day life in all of its facets, we can surmise in a general fashion that He wants us to take an accounting of our lives and recognize His Kingship over the world. This chapter is about putting our lives back in order. Once we realize that the spiritual dimension of life is as real as the

physical, if we truly desire to have a relationship with God, and to put our lives on a more positive and fulfilling track, it behooves us to improve our character traits and behavior. After all, walking into the Palace to meet the King with mud on our shoes is embarrassing to everyone. In the beginning of our spiritual journey, before we realize right from wrong, the guards at the Palace Gate will let us pass, and the King will show us a patient countenance, but if we hope to be permanent visitors, we need to “clean up our act,” as the saying goes. This process is known as penitence. Another common word is repentance, but I shy away from using it, since the term is surrounded by dark, somber images of guilt, “Hunchback of Notre Dame” priests with disapproving faces, confession, and punishment. In actuality, penitence can be fun. In fact, penitence leads a person to the greatest joy in the world – the feeling of being loved and embraced by God.

In Hebrew, penitence is called, “*t’shuva*,” which means to return. When a person undertakes a course of *t’shuva*, he returns to his Source and true being. In the process, he or she peels away level after level of sordid garments and undergoes a thorough cleansing. In truth, it would be easier to skip this chapter completely, and pretend that it wasn’t a necessary step in forming a

healthy, happy, and life-changing relationship with God. But the fact is, for a person serious about making a change for the better, this spiritual “car wash” is a must, even if it hurts a little at the very beginning when a *baal t’shuva* (master of *t’shuva*) begins to scrape off the grime. This passing discomfort is part of the cleansing process, showing that the penitent is sincere. Like a gentle dentist, I will do my best to make this chapter reader friendly, so don’t get scared and run away with your toothache. In a few minutes, you are going to feel a whole lot better!

Generally, penitence is thought of as a religious way of getting one’s life together, by putting one’s life on line with the principles of the religion a person chooses to follow. While this aspect of penitence exists, we are going to discuss *t’shuva* on a more general level, setting specific religious obligations aside. For example, in Judaism, a complete return to the Source means following the 613 precepts of the Torah. Non-Jews are called upon to follow the 7 commandments beholden on Bnei Noach, the Children of Noah. These are not to worship idols; not to curse God; not to murder; not to engage in adultery and sexual immorality; not to steal; not to eat flesh torn from a living animal; as well as the obligation to establish courts of justice. Other religions

have different tenants and demands. Here, we will explore the phenomenon of *t'shuva* in its most universal application, basing our observations on the writings of the greatest Kabbalist of modern times, a master of mysticism and Torah Law in one, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, of blessed memory. Readers who would like a more in-depth exploration of the subject are invited to read the book, "The Art of T'shuva," which I wrote with Rabbi David Samson.

## T'SHUVA MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

The Talmud teaches that *t'shuva* existed before the world was created. In a similar vein, Rabbi Kook writes that the spirit of *t'shuva* hovers over the world and gives it its basic form and the motivation to develop. It is *t'shuva* which gives the world its direction and its inner energy to constantly progress. The desire to refine the world and to embellish it with beauty and splendor all derive from the spirit of *t'shuva*.

*T'shuva* is the Divine, spiritual force in the universe which is constantly propelling all of existence toward perfection. It is the voice of God calling, "Return to Me,



you children of men.” Due to the “separation” from God through transgressions, improper living, or through the act of Creation itself, there is a constant drive in all things to return to a harmony with their Maker. Rabbi Kook writes that, “It is impossible to express this awesomely deep idea.” The force of *t’shuva*, like gravity in the physical world, is built into the inner fabric of life. It stands as the impetus behind all human history, all world development, all endeavor toward social improvement. It is the force which inspires all cultural, artistic, and scientific advancement. Similarly, the yearning of mankind for universal justice and moral perfection is a product of the encompassing, ever-present power of *t’shuva*.

When we speak about attaching one’s life to God, *t’shuva* is not a step of the ladder, but the ladder itself – the never ending drive to be in harmony with the Creator.

On a personal level, when a man sells his house in the country because he wants to improve the quality of his life, he is involved in *t’shuva*. When a family has a fun and relaxing vacation, they are being motivated by forces of *t’shuva*. Though there may be underlying factors of profit and self-interest when a pharmaceutical

company produces a new drug, they too are involved in *t'shuva*, if their product truly helps to benefit the world. Rabbi Kook writes:

*"T'shuva* derives from the yearning of all existence to be better, purer, more fortified and elevated than it is. Hidden within this desire is a life-force capable of overcoming that which limits and weakens existence. The personal *t'shuva* of an individual, and even more so of the community, draws its strength from this source of life which is constantly active with never-ending vigor."

#### NEVER-ENDING T'SHUVA

In his writings, Rabbi Kook illuminates the phenomenon of *t'shuva* in an entirely new fashion. Here we encounter the notion of *t'shuva*, not as personal penitence alone, but as an ever-active force in the world which constantly works to unite all things with God.

"The currents of specific and general *t'shuva* flood along. They resemble waves of flames on the surface of the sun, which break free and ascend in a never-ending struggle, granting life to numerous worlds and numberless creatures. It is impossible to grasp the multitude of colors of this great sun that lights all

worlds, the sun of *t'shuva*, because of their abundance and wondrous speed, because they emanate from the Source of life itself....”

In his poetic style, Rabbi Kook describes *t'shuva* like a sun which sends out constant flames of warming light to the world. Just as God has created the sun as life's principle energy source, so too is *t'shuva* the spiritual energy source of existence. *T'shuva* does not only operate when a person decides to mend his erring ways - *t'shuva* exists all of the time. It exists both within man and all around him, as a personal *t'shuva*, and as a *t'shuva* which comes from Above. Like gravity, or the wind, or the rays of the sun, *t'shuva* is ever present. It is a constant force always at work, bringing the world to completion. One day the force may hit Jonathan; the next day Miriam; one day soon it will uplift the Jewish people as a whole. Its waves flow by us in a continuous stream. Minute by minute, the song of *t'shuva* calls out to us to hurry and join in the flow. This is a Divine Promise which repeatedly appears in the Torah and the Books of the Prophets of Israel. The Coronavirus may very well be one of the Divine reminders which bring it to pass.

*“And you and your children shall return to the LORD your God and obey His voice with all your heart and with all your soul, according to everything I command you today. Then the LORD your God will restore your captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant lands under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the Land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live,”*  
(Deuteronomy, 30:2-6).

## Chapter Eleven

### **RULES OF T'SHUVVA**

#### **DON'T EAT THE APPLE!**

I can hear the groans. Rules! No one likes rules. Rules are boring. Rules are constricting. Like the expression goes, “Rules were made to be broken.”

That may be true in poetry and art, but if your goal is to get close to God, a do-your-own-thing, anything-goes attitude is going to bring you tumbling down and down in the opposite direction.

Ever since the beginning of Creation, in the Garden of Eden, there were rules. Remember the story? Rule Number One – DON'T EAT THE APPLE!

Whether the forbidden fruit was an apple, or fig, or banana, isn't the point. The message of the story is what matters. The Bible doesn't intend to give us a literal day-by-day scientific scenario of how the Creator created the world and everything in it. The main point that the Bible is making is that God created the world and mankind, and He expects us to follow His rules. If we obey, we are rewarded with everything good in the Garden, but if we

rebel by doing things we shouldn't, then punishment awaits us – not merely to punish, for its own sake, but rather to help us, by reminding us to correct our ways in order to get back to the Garden.

Rabbi Kook explains: “The Torah certainly veils the details of the Act of Creation and speaks in allegories and parables, for everyone knows that the stories of Genesis belong to the hidden world of the secrets of Torah, and if all of these stories of the Garden of Eden were taken literally, what secrets would there be? What is most important concerning the Act of Creation is what we learn about the existence of the Creator and the truly moral life which He has chosen for mankind to follow. The basic matter is that everything in the universe, in Heaven and on Earth, is the work of God, and that the means of Creation, whatever they may be, are His doing... It makes no difference for us if there was an actual Garden of Eden or not, or whether life evolved from primitive forms to more complex creatures, culminating in the creation of man. What is important, however, and this is what the Story of Creation comes to inform us regarding Adam's sin and his expulsion from the Garden, is that if man enjoys all of the pleasures and honor of this world, but corrupts his ways, he can lose

everything he has, and bring harm to himself and to his descendants after him for generations to come.”

In concrete terms, if mankind goes astray after the its own whims and passions, and pays only lip service to God, then God, after generations of fatherly patience, waiting for us to get our “act together” on our own, warning us here and there with things like stock market crashes, Aids, and World Wars, can finally unleash the Covid-19 in the world, turn the green light of existence to red, stop everything, and put humanity into solitary confinement where there is nothing to do but pray and return to the Lord. While this may seem like a sci-fi scenario, in Biblical times, it happened again and again. In fact, while you weather out the Corona Storm in your isolated room, to help pass the time, why not read the Old Testament? It’s filled with page-turning stories of powerful personalities, heroes and villains, power-hungry tyrants, powerful passions and lusts, and just as powerful famines and plagues sent from Heaven to return mankind to a better, more moral way of living.

## THE SNAKE MADE ME DO IT!

God gave us the Story of Creation to teach mankind basic foundations of human existence, such as Good and

Evil, and Reward and Punishment. As we previously learned from the teachings of Rabbi Chaim Luzzatto, in the book, “The Path of the Just,” our existence is a lifelong test to see if we will follow God’s will, or rebel and follow our own heart’s desire:

“The Holy Creator, Blessed be He, has put man in a place where the factors which draw him further from the Blessed One are many. These are the earthy desires which, if he is pulled after them, cause him to be drawn further away from the true good. It is seen, then, that man is veritably placed in the midst of a raging battle... If he is valorous, and victorious on all sides, he will be the ‘whole man,’ who will succeed in uniting with his Creator, and he will leave the corridor to enter the palace, to glow in the light of life. To the extent that he has subdued his evil inclination and his desires, and withdrawn from those factors which draw him further from the good, and exerted himself to become united with it, to that extent he will attain and rejoice in the light of life.”

To put things simply – God created Adam and Eve and told them that they could enjoy everything in the Garden, but that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden to them. When they ate



from the tree, they were expelled from the Garden. True, the Snake enticed them. The snake aroused their evil inclination. When they chose to follow the temptations of eating the forbidden fruit, they broke their covenant and connection with God and were cast out from Eden to wander the earth. The moral of the story is simple, told in a clear and straightforward way that even children can understand. If we do good by following the will of God, we are rewarded with all the pleasant things in life in the Garden of Eden. But if we act against the will of God, by following after our own desires, we are punished and cast away from His Presence. Good and Evil; Reward and Punishment. That is the system that God has created. Those are the rules of the game. God created the world and everything in it – including us. He's the boss – not us.

## TWO INCLINATIONS

When Adam was created, he was totally good. Nothing separated him from his Creator. However, when he sinned by tasting the forbidden fruit, the evil inclination entered his heart. Ever since then, Adam's descendants have been engaged in a life-and-death battle. The evil inclination rages in one side of the heart, and the good

inclination, the desire to do good in the world and to be faithful to God, struggles to ward off its aggressive and untiring opponent. Remember the old cartoons where the Devil stands on one shoulder with a pitchfork, urging a person to pursue his desires, and a Good Angel stands on the other shoulder, warning him not to listen? That's the way it is. We can't see the little fellows, but they are present all the same, in our hearts and our minds. All through the day. The real hero in life isn't the rock star or billionaire. It's the person who doesn't give in to his evil inclination and remains steadfast with God.

## MAIMONIDES

The "Game of Life" would be easy if the only test was over eating the forbidden fruit or not. The trouble begins when we discover there are many other do's and don't's. What are they? How can we know? Today, when liberalism, hedonism, and the freedom of the individual have replaced the age-old principles of the Bible in most modern Western societies, almost everything is considered moral. Where sex out of wedlock and homosexuality were once considered shameful transgressions, today a person who speaks out against wanton immorality is considered an enemy of society.

What is right, and what is wrong, is no longer clear. But when we remember that God is the Creator of the World, its Ruler and Judge, suddenly darkness turns to light, confusion to certainty, descent into the valley of the shadow of death into a clear chartered path leading back up the mountain of God.

Certainly, there are many basic do's and don'ts that everyone (generally) agrees upon. Not to steal, not to kill, not to bear false witness, not to have adultery with another man's wife.... All of these transgressions separate a person from God, and to make amends, he or she has to repent in order to renew the attachment to God and get back to the Garden.

Beyond the few no-no's just mentioned, what are these Divine Laws for mankind, and how can a person make amends for transgressing them?

As we mentioned, every religion has its specific tenets. Jews who want to observe all of the precepts of the Torah have 613 commandments to contend with, plus many ordinances decreed by the Rabbinic Sages throughout the generations. In contrast, non-Jews are not required to keep kosher, fast on Yom Kippur, not

drive their cars on the Sabbath, or observe the marital laws of family purity. According to the Torah, non-Jews, known as “Children of Noah,” have seven basic laws which God expects them to follow. They are:

- 1) The prohibition against idol worship.
- 2) The prohibition against blasphemy.
- 3) The prohibition against murder.
- 4) The prohibition against sexual transgression.
- 5) The prohibition against stealing.
- 6) The prohibition against eating the limb of a living animal.
- 7) The commandment to set up courts of justice.

The “Children of Noah” also have to follow basic rules of human decency. For instance, while lying and slandering others are not on the list, it would be impossible to maintain a healthy society if people spoke disparagingly of others without restraint, as King David teaches in the very first Psalm:

*“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scorners.”*

*“Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands (clean of theft) and a pure heart; who has not taken the Name of the Lord in vain, nor sworn deceitfully,” (Psalm 24).*

*“Lord, who shall abide in Your tent? Who shall dwell in His holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and acts justly, and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor,” (Psalm 15).*

The great Jewish Sage, the Rambam, known as Maimonides, codified all of the Jewish Laws in his multi-volume treatise, the “Mishna Torah.” In the section dealing with the Laws of Repentance, he writes:

If a person transgresses any of the precepts of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative prohibition - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and turns back from his sin, he must confess before God, as the Torah states: *“If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed,”* (Numbers, 5:6-6).

This means a verbal confession. How does one confess? He states: "I implore You, God, I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before You by doing this and that (cited each transgression). Behold, I regret and feel ashamed because of my deeds. I promise never to repeat this act again."

These are the principle elements of the prayer of a penitent. Whoever confesses profusely and elaborates on these matters is worthy of praise. The person who seeks to return to God should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again. If a person committed a wrongdoing against another person, confessing his transgression to God is not enough to gain forgiveness – he must obtain the forgiveness of the person he injured, return anything stolen, and pay for any damaged he caused.

*T'shuva* atones for all sins. Even a person who was wicked his whole life and repented in his final moments will not be reminded of any aspect of his wickedness, as the Prophet states, "The wickedness of the evil one will not cause him to stumble on the day he repents his wickedness," (Ezekiel, 33:12).

Who has attained complete *T'shuva*? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned, when he

has the potential to commit the sin again, and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his sincere wish to change his ways, and not because of fear of punishment or a lack of strength.

For example, a person engaged in illicit sexual relations with a woman. Afterwards, they met in privacy, in the same country, while his love for her and physical power still persisted, and nevertheless, he abstained and did not transgress. This is a complete penitent.

If he does not repent until his old age, at a time when he is incapable of doing what he did before, even though this is not a high level of repentance, he is still considered as having returned to God. Even if he transgressed throughout his entire life and repented on the day of his death, and died in repentance, all his sins are forgiven.

But if he commits a transgression with the thought that he will enjoy his wrongdoing then later repent, his *T'shuva* is not accepted.

The point is, if your actions and character traits are not in line with moral living, something which happens at some time or another with every human being on Earth, if you want to escape the darkness of transgression, and

forge a close relationship with God, everyone has the chance to mend his errors and ways and get back on the *t'shuva* train to the light-filled gardens of Eden.

Hopefully, in God's kindness, he will let us discover a vaccine and cure for Coronavirus, and release us from Corona prison. But if we screw up again, and forget about God once more, then God can send Corona II, unleashing an even nastier bug to remind us that He is still here, waiting for us to return.



## Chapter Twelve

### **SUCCESS**

#### THE KEY TO SUCCESS

If our theory is correct that the Corona Plague has come to halt modern civilization from speeding off the track of reckless living, in order to bring mankind to a healthier, God-filled path of existence, then we are called upon to examine modern society to determine where the illness lies. In this chapters, I will draw on the book, “The Art of T’shuva,” which I wrote with Rabbi David Samson, based on the teachings of Rabbi Kook.

It is no secret that Western society is success oriented. Everyone wants to be a success, whether it be a successful basketball player, a successful lawyer, a successful doctor, a successful housewife... the list goes on and on. Success is championed as one of life’s greatest values. Everyone loves success stories. Everyone envies successful people. From the earliest ages, children are taught to admire success. Parents push their kids to be successful. The drive to succeed is reinforced in schools. The competition is fierce to get

into top colleges, because they are seen as the doors to success. Working your way up the ladder of success is the mainstay of capitalism. Accordingly, bookstores are filled with guides on how to succeed.

All of this means that the poor soul who does not succeed is a loser. In western society, if you are not a success, you are probably very unhappy. Your self-image is bound to be low. The successful people are the winners, and you are nothing more than a bum.

Rabbi Kook has good news. If you are a loser, all is not lost. You too can be a winner. You too can succeed. How? By being a good person.

That's right. The key to success is forming a connection with God. For when life is looked at through spiritual glasses, the most important thing is neither money, nor honor, nor power, nor fame. The most important thing is being a success in the eyes of our Maker. This is one of the things that Covid-19 has come to teach us. True success lies in simply striving to become closer to God. Real achievement is measured by what is important to the Creator, not by what society flaunts. In God's eyes, a woman can be successful without looking like Barbie. A

man can be a success without having five or six credit cards and a six-figure salary. The real success is in casting aside illusionary successes and striving to return to the Source.

## THE WILL TO BE GOOD

We learned in the chapter about *T'shuva* that the ultimate force behind existence is the drive to return to the Source. This is the deepest desire there is, of individual man, of mankind in general, and of the world, and all of the Creation. The will to return to the Source, to our Maker, is the foundation of all life, and the essence of man's soul.

The desire to get closer to God is the deepest expression of man's will. For instance, the desire to eat ice cream is a relatively superficial desire, an offshoot of the desire to eat. On a deeper level, the desire to eat is an expression of the will to survive. While not every man has a desire to eat ice cream, every person has a will to survive. The will to live is a deeper expression of man's will, and something less dependent upon a person's free choice. This can be seen in an old, dying person. Though racked with sufferings, the elderly still clutch onto life

with their last ounce of strength. Even if a person lapses into a coma, the will to live in his soul continues to function.

On an even deeper level, buried in the will to live is man's deepest, most basic instinct — the will to return to the Source. This will to be connected to God finds expression in the will to do good and in the longing for goodness. Just as God is good, we should be good. Just as God is giving, we should be giving. Rabbi Akiva taught that the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a supreme commandment of the Torah. Man is the only creature who possesses a free will. Our task is to align our will with the will of our Creator. For example, for a religious Jew, living a life of goodness means living a life of Torah, which is God's will for the Jewish People. Many of the Torah's commandments are guides to moral and just relationships between man and his fellow man. Things like lying, slander, adultery, and cheating others in business disrupt the harmony of existence that God wants for His world. Aligning one's will with the laws of the Creator, laws of righteousness and justice, is the true happiness, as the Psalmist declares: *"The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."*

When a man attaches his will to God's, his will is uplifted toward a higher ideal. He doesn't merely want to make a good living, come home, open a beer, and watch TV. His life is more idealistically oriented. He tends to think less of himself, and he longs to help everyone he can. On many occasions during the Corona quarantine, if a neighbor needs assistance, or an elderly couple down the street have no one to bring them food, a usually egocentric person will hurry to help them.

In a similar light, transgression and immoral behavior act as a barriers between man and his Maker. When a person defies God's will, he distances himself from God. He falls out of harmony with existence, because all of existence is doing God's will. The sun rises every day just as God has decreed. Rains fall, flowers grow, birds chirp, all in harmony with God's plan for the world. Only man has the freedom to turn his will against God. Rabbi Kook explains that every transgression weakens the will to do good. With a weakened moral desire, a man can fall into the clutches of sin completely, God forbid. His unwholesome behavior causes the soul pain and remorse. This is the root of the unhappiness, anxiety, and depression which so many people suffer.

As we learned, the remedy needed to repair this state of detachment is to return to the Source. Returning to his Maker, a person recognizes the value of goodness. This recognition strengthens the will to do good. Reunited with God, a life previously haunted by darkness becomes illuminated with light. Anxiety turns into confidence, and unhappiness turns into joy.

## THE EVER-RAGING BATTLE

As we learned in the beginning of this book, God has placed many things in the world to test man, in order to strengthen his will to do good. These include the many earthly passions in life. The constant spiritual battle between the evil inclination and the good inclination is a part of the inner fabric of life. As the Kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim Luzzatto points out, all of this world is a testing ground. Will a man follow his will to do good, or will he be led astray after his baser passions? The winner is the man who clings to God in all of his doings. He is the true hero, and this is the true success.

Rabbi Luzzatto explains:

“If you look more deeply into the matter, you will see that the world was created for man’s use. In truth, man is the center of a great balance. For if he is pulled after the world and is drawn further from his Creator, he is damaged, and he damages the world with him. And if he rules over himself and unites himself with his Creator, and uses the world only to aid him in the service of his Creator, he is uplifted and the world itself is uplifted with him.”

## A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

True success is achieved in life when a person channels his will towards goodness. What makes this simple teaching so startling? Precisely because it stands in conflict with all of modern Western culture. Who are the so-called “successful people” today? The movie stars and rock performers, the millionaires, the famous artists, the political leaders, the sports heroes. These are society’s champions. These are the role models whom young people emulate. They are considered successful because they have successfully pursued and attained honor, power, money, and fame — values which don’t always champion positive character traits. For example, the Sages of the Mishna teach that we should flee from

honor and pride. The prophets of Israel remind us that the powerful and arrogant shall not inherit the earth, but the humble and righteous. The Midrash teaches that someone who seeks fame will lose it, and that the constant pursuit of wealth brings misery in its wake. In other words, chances are that the faces we see on the nightly news, and on the cover of magazines, are not necessarily the faces which we are going to see in Heaven in the World to Come.

The Talmud relates that a Torah scholar named Rabbi Yosef passed away from a deadly sickness, only to miraculously return to life. His father, Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi asked him to describe what he had seen in the World of Souls during his brief sojourn there. "I saw an upside-down world," his son reported. "The wealthy and honored in this world were awarded the lowest stature in the World of Souls, and the lowly of this world held the places of greatest honor."

Modern Western culture encourages man to channel his will toward the more negative aspects of life. Society's passions and pulls are so powerful that a person soon loses sight of what's good, and begins to glorify and worship the bad. The push toward success is so great,



everything becomes permissible in the fight to achieve it. The will for goodness, man's most basic desire, is buried in the race to get to the top. Only the power which comes from returning to our Source, and the rude awakening of a catastrophic plague like Corona, can save us. Rabbi Kook writes:

“The constant focus of a person's thoughts on returning to his Source builds a person's character on a noble foundation. He constantly fills himself with a sensitive spirit, which places him on the spiritual foundation of life and existence.

When the will to return to God (*T'shuva*) constantly fills the heart, it reinforces in the person the great value of a spiritual life, and reinforces in him the great foundation that a good will is everything. All of the talents in the world are merely to implement the person's will to do good. A great influx of God's spirit falls constantly such a seeker, and a holy will increases in him, far surpassing the aspirations of ordinary men. He comes to recognize the positive value of true success — the will for goodness, which is solely dependent on the person himself, and not on any external condition.”

Thus, when life has been dramatically interrupted by

what insurance companies term “an act of Heaven,” when we sit in our solitary confinement and meditate on who we are and what the Master of Heaven and Earth expects from us, it is precisely this revelation of having strayed far from the Source of our existence which comforts the soul. When the spiritual world opens before “Masters of Return,” they realize that talents are not ends in themselves, but rather the means which they are to use in the service of God. One realizes that the goal is not just to be a good singer, but to sing the praises of God. The goal is not just to be a good writer, but to use one’s talent as a writer to bring people closer to God. The greatness of a person lies not in the measure of his worldly success, but rather in his attachment to God.

The Kabbalah teaches that by attaching oneself to God’s will for the world, a person brings his life into harmony with the positive flow of existence. In the process, a person’s own willpower is fantastically multiplied because he has plugged himself into the Source of all sources, the Power of all powers, the Will of all wills, the King of all kings. People who attain this level of Divine Cleaving possess a superhuman energy and drive. The Talmud records that King David would sleep only a tiny

portion of the night. Both his days and his nights were filled with study, teaching, prayer, and good deeds.

Rabbi Kook writes:

“The success of returning to God is the greatest happiness, greater than all other treasures. Only this success brings joy to the whole world and all of existence. In strengthening his personal longing for goodness, the seeker magnifies the will for good in existence as a whole, since his soul is integrally connected to the soul of all existence.”

The quest to “Return to the Source” elevates a person above all of the baseness which exists in the world. Even if a seeker hasn’t yet reached the Garden, just by being on the Train of Return, he elevates the world. Just by starting out, he has succeeded in aligning his life with God’s will for existence. An aura of nobility, stemming from the yearning for Divine connection, surrounds all those to set off on the return trip to Eden. They are the elite of existence, the real successes in life who call out for man’s perfection, for the victory over obstacles, for the return to true goodness and joy. They call out for the return to the exalted heights of true freedom, unbounded by material boundaries. Their stories of

success are the ones which should fill magazines. They are the “stars” of existence, the true celebrities, even if no one appreciates their inner transformation and the greatness of their deeds.

## Chapter Thirteen

### **SECRETS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE**

#### ADAM AND EVE

In this chapter, we will offer some guidelines to marital happiness during the Corona crisis and after it. A happy marriage is a vital component of Returning to the Source. After all, in the Story of Creation, we meet the world's first husband and wife, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. Not only does an individual have the mission to be connected to God, a marriage can only be truly blessed when both husband and wife are mutually connected as well. The Talmud teaches that ever since God created the world, He spends most of his time bringing brides and grooms together. Unfortunately, in many cases, His matchmaking ends in marriages filled with quarreling and mutual criticism, separation and divorce, no more successful than the world's first nuptial pair. The fault isn't the Matchmaker's. When God matches Joe with Sally, He does so because Sally is the best person in the world to help Joe get closer to God, and visa versa. But if Joe and Sally forget about God and focus on attaining their own egotistical personal wants and desires instead, turning one another into a soda

machine to quench their thirsts, rather than a helpmate to come closer to God, that's when everything starts to go wrong. That's what happened with Adam and Eve. Ideally, their life together in the Garden of Eden should have been a marriage of eternal bliss. But they forgot about God. Instead of listening to His advice, they followed the advice of the Serpent. Ever since, newlyweds have been trying to get back to the Garden, but the proverbial Snake keeps getting in the way.

## THE SERPENT

Everyone is familiar with the story. First, God creates man, who is all alone with the animals in the Garden. Then, in history's first cloning experiment, God takes a rib bone from Adam and builds it into a woman, teaching us that husband and wife are essentially one. This unity is a key to a successful marriage. But when Jo and Sally see themselves as separate individuals, and insist on receiving their own selfish wants and needs at the expense of their partner, their essential unity is shattered and friction begins to divide them. For the moment, let's say that the Serpent represents a person's evil inclination. Craftier than all of the other creatures in the Garden, and jealous that Eve was given to Adam and

not to him, the Serpent convinces the woman to eat the only fruit which God has forbidden to Adam and Eve. Stirring her desire for pleasure and enlightenment, the Serpent cajoles her to turn away from God. *“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for fruit, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.”*

Could it be that God made a mistake in pairing them together? Could it be that Master of the Universe is all-knowing in everything else, but that He’s a bumbler when it comes to matchmaking? Certainly not. Eve was Adam’s perfect match. Until the Serpent came along, Adam inherited the Garden of Eden on a silver spoon. God took care of everything, and Adam was free to have a good time. God’s Presence was so overwhelming, Adam was little more than a freeloader. Eve presented him with the opportunity to be strong on his own. If Adam had resisted her seductions, and refused to eat from the fruit, he would have proved through his action that he was a faithful servant of God. He would have become elevated in moral stature, a leader who could show others the way. Through the challenge presented to him by Eve, he could have become a hero in the service of God. But he failed the test and fell into

disgrace, dragging the whole world down with him. With his fall, mankind was expelled from the Garden.

## HARD LABOR

Exiled from his idyllic life in the Garden, Adam was doomed to a life of hard labor. *“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow you shall eat of it all of the days of your life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you... in the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of the ground you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust shall you return.”*

Not only must a man toil to exist, he must toil in his married life to make the marriage work. In fact, a man must work on his marriage even more than he works at his job, because marriage is the ultimate crucible which brings a man closer to God. A man's relationship with his wife, and a wife's relationship with her husband, are the true scorecards in their relationship with God. Marriage is the true testing ground. All of the traits that a man must perfect in coming closer to God, humility, kindness, being happy with his lot, long-suffering, being thankful and full of praise for God and for people who help him, must be alive in his marriage. If a husband is a saint at the office, kind to strangers, and a loyal buddy with



friends, but a terror in his own home with his wife, angry, complaining, critical of her for her faults, then all of his chivalrous behavior in the world at large isn't worth a thing. If a man wants to be loved by the world, and by God, he must first focus his efforts at home.

### THE LOOKING GLASS

A husband and wife are mirrors of each other. When a man sees a deficiency in his wife, the deficiency is really his. The same equation applies to the wife. If she complains that her husband snores too loudly, chances are that she snores loudly herself. If a man disrespects his wife, she will disrespect him in return. If a wife places her husband on a pedestal, he will do the same for her. The Sages of the Talmud teach that when a man treats his wife like a queen, she treats him like a king.

As we mentioned, the Matchmaker of all matchmakers, gazes down from His celestial heights and pairs Joe and Sally, knowing that Joe's path to Divine Connection is through Sally, and Sally's path is through Joe. Any shortcomings that Joe sees in his wife are God's way of informing him what he has to improve in himself. Rather than to get angry and criticize her, his task is to work on himself. This understanding can save a stormy marriage,

and lead a man to refine his character and come closer to God. God paired Joe with Sally, not to correct her faults, but to correct his. By improving himself, he will see a change in his wife as well, without even saying one derogatory sentence!

The same is true for Sally. Her task is not to remind her husband again and again that he has to control his anger – but rather to work on her own tendency to freak out if there isn't any paprika in the house, or to explode at the children when they scatter their toys all over the house. We haven't come into the world to change our spouses for the better – we are here to change ourselves. This understanding is the key to personal growth. When Joe stops blaming Sally, and Sally stops blaming Joe, then husband and wife will come closer together, and come closer to God.

Needless, when there is a plague lurking outside the house, and husband and wife are quarantined together, anxieties and tempers can explode. If there are a couple of hyperactive children caged up with them, it resembles walking through a field of hidden land mines. Super care must be taken not to get angry, not be judgmental, not to criticize, not let frustration take over to the point

where the mother and father turn into uncontrolled children themselves.

## SLOW-MOTION MARRIAGE

The Talmud teaches that there are three partners in the birth of a child – the mother, the father, and God. Just as we can see God in the miracle of birth, a husband and wife must strive to see God in their marriage. Not only to see Him, but to make sure God that remains a partner. Constant argument, anger, and berating one's spouse, cause God's Presence to flee from the home. One practical way to avoid this is by using the slow-motion technique we learned about in connection with anger. Whenever the spark of an unpleasant word, or a disagreement, or the demand to have one's way threatens to erupt into a full-fledge conflagration, both husband and wife have to switch real time into slow motion and say to themselves, "Wait a minute. This also is for the best. Instead of getting down on my spouse, I have to remember that God paired us together and brought all of this about in order for me to discover the things I need to correct in myself. Instead of getting angry, I should be filled with gratitude."

If Joe keeps this in mind when Sally gets angry at him for not buying everything she wrote down on the grocery list, he needn't take the criticism as meaning that he is a lousy husband, or an incompetent man, or a general failure in life. He needn't translate it into an old wound, as when his mother yelled at him for not cleaning his room. By slowing down his reaction and remembering that her criticism is for his own good, he needn't respond with a knee-jerk attack like, "I end up throwing away half the food on the list because with your ADD you forget to cook them, not to mention that the house is a mess all the time." Instead of attacking her back, he can say, "OK, no problem. Next time, I'll remember to buy everything." If Joe stops himself from responding with an angry comment of his own, Sally doesn't have anyone with whom to fight. It's like a prizefight. If one fighter ducks under the punches of his opponent, the aggressive boxer is likely to tire. If Joe doesn't offer resistance and strike back, Sally has no one to fight with, and her anger is bound to dissipate. Later, after she cools down, Joe can try to explain why he slipped up, but in a way that doesn't criticize his wife in return.

Even if Sally badgers her husband day and night, finding fault with almost everything he does, instead of getting angry and striking back at her, Joe should take a deep

breath, “count to ten,” as the old saying goes, switch the potentially turbulent scene into slow motion, and remind himself that this too is for the best. He needs to quell his anger at her and realize that it isn’t really his wife who is yelling at him, but that God is speaking through her lips in order to help him know the things he needs to work on – or, as husbands are wont to joke - to put him through hell in this world in order to spare him a far more serious hell in the World to Come.

Rabbi Sholom Arush, a leading Kabbalist in Israel today, emphasizes the need to keep one eye on one’s marriage, and one eye on God, to help remember that God didn’t give us our spouses in order to change them, but rather to change ourselves. In his book on marriage, “The Garden of Peace,” he writes: “If you see in a mirror that your hat is on crooked, don’t try to straighten the mirror – it won’t do any good. Likewise, comments and criticism do nothing to correct your wife; they only destroy her joy in life.”

Every husband should pray to Hashem to open his eyes and allow him to see, via the reactions of his wife, the things that he needs to correct. Without this higher spiritual perspective awareness, a husband is easily upset by the flaws he sees in his wife. He becomes

embittered and regrets having married such a woman. He believes he is justified in criticizing, lecturing, blaming, and the like. He can't love her because he only sees her faults. This attitude is a root cause of marital strife. When he blames his wife, he repeats the ancient scenario, echoing the first husband, Adam, who exclaimed, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I did eat." Of course, what is true for the husband is true for his wife. Blaming her husband for all of her frustrations won't bring her closer to her husband, nor to God. She has to concentrate on herself if she wants to return to the Garden.

Rabbi Arush points out that a person's spouse isn't only a mirror to help expose one's own faults, he or she is a magnifying glass as well. A spouse exposes all of one's flaws, even the tiniest. God does this because no man can objectively see all of his shortcomings. Our Sages have said that a hint is enough for a wise man, but a fool needs to be hit over the head. A man must always remember – if his wife sets out on a warpath against him, he is the cause.

## NO CRITICISM

Criticizing one's spouse is as forbidden as God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The wife of a critical husband is broken, depressed, pained, and on the verge of physical and mental collapse. Likewise, a wife who is overly critical of her husband injures his self-image and manly pride. In response, he is likely to retreat into a cave of silence and passive aggression, or flee into the arms of a more accepting woman. Often, high-voltage, electric poles on the sidewalk have signs reading: HIGH-VOLTAGE. TOUCH AT RISK OF DEATH! Similarly, when a man criticizes his wife or speaks to her in a negative, berating fashion, he is taking a big risk. Rabbi Arush stresses that comments and criticism shatter a wife's sense of wellbeing, for God created her to be especially sensitive to her husband, as it says in the Bible, *"Your desire shall be toward your husband."* Her entire vitality and happiness depends on the honor that her husband gives her. Therefore, even the slightest criticism causes her pain, damages her soul, and sours her attitude, not only towards her husband and her children, but towards life itself.

In addition, when a husband criticizes his wife (and visa versa) he is, in effect, criticizing God who gave her to him. It is like he were saying to God, "Why don't you try another profession? Matchmaking isn't your thing. Take

a look at the lemon you sold me!” He is also being ungrateful. Instead of complaining, he should sing the Lord’s praises for having given him such an ideal partner, a helpmate who holds the key to his connection with God, if he will only open his eyes and turn his gaze inward.

Rabbi Arush emphasizes that even when a husband’s comments are gentle and meant in a constructive way, she still suffers. A woman wants to be perfect and appreciated in the eyes of her husband – this is her honor, happiness and security. Snide and cynical remarks destroy her self-image completely. A woman who lives with a critical husband finds her life unbearable. His admiration for her is her oxygen. Her entire wellbeing depends on his kind words and love. Negative comments, snide remarks, and cynicism can devastate her. When a husband criticizes his wife, she becomes argumentative, hostile, and displeased with whatever he does. The house turns into hell. Husbands who give up belittling their spouses are pleased to discover a new happiness in the homes, a mutual respect, and a blossoming love, instead of mutual badgering and strife.



## STOP PRETENDING TO BE PERFECT

Only God is perfect. Some husbands maintain that they are the picture of calmness in the face of their wife's outbursts. Instead of acting like "Mr. Cool," a caring husband should try to understand what is bothering his wife and know that it is because of the things in himself that he hasn't corrected. Women are not always aware what lies beneath bouts of anxiety, uneasiness, and feelings of anger. When the Bible tells us that Eve was created from Adam's rib, it is coming to teach that a wife is an actual part of her husband, as Adam says upon seeing Eve for the very first time: *"This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out from man."* Coming from him, she shares the same root soul. Thus a wife has a built-in radar which can sense from miles away the emotions gripping her husband. If a husband comes home with a box of chocolates for his her, and she greets him with a stream of hysterical curses, instead of lashing back at her, he should play the film back in slow motion, remember how he flirted a little too intimately with his secretary in the office, and know that God is using his wife to remind him that if she doesn't see everything, He does. It is through a man's wife, that God

lets him know that he still has a long way to go on his journey back to the Garden.

Rabbi Arush recommends that every husband have a set time, whether every day or every week, for an examination of his marriage, self-inspection regarding things he needs to correct, and prayer, asking for God's help with all of his marital problems. Without this, he is liable to receive shock treatment from his wife in order to arouse him to be a better husband.

One thing is for sure - Corona has given us plenty of free time for a thorough self-accounting, and has provided us with the most intense marital test center there could be!

## FOR MEN ONLY

A husband may have noble intentions, wanting to help his wife be a better person, but his critical comments have the opposite effect. By nature, women don't like to be criticized or reprimanded for their behavior. Just as it is a positive deed to offer words of correction to someone who will heed it, it is a wise thing to refrain from correcting someone who won't listen. Since criticism is anathema to a wife, comments will only

cause tension and anger. To Sally, Joe's criticism means that he doesn't love her. If a husband knew how deeply his remarks pierced his wife's heart, he would never say them.

A husband's tendency to constantly criticize is a sign of his own character flaws.

Like the Snake of old, the evil inclination encourages a husband to criticize his wife with the pretense that it is for her own good, to help her change for the better. He feels justified, believing that his comments stem from his love for her. But the minute he criticizes her, no matter how warranted it may seem, her soul darkens and she is crushed. Her whole world crumbles. Feeling that her very life is threatened, she may react by striking out at him. Wounded by her remarks, he forgets all about God, forgets that everything is for his best, forgets to see what is happening in slow motion, and his anger explodes like a rocket, bringing him to criticize her further, and the tragic cycle of blame and anger is reinforced.

A husband's criticism can bring a wife to physical illness or a nervous breakdown, God forbid. If he criticizes her in the name of proper religious behavior, this can bring her to hate religion and feel angry toward God, who let

her marry such a bum. In their fury, both husband and wife are liable to abandon God altogether and give up all dreams of returning to the Garden.

## THE RIGHT WAY

To summarize, a husband and wife must avoid criticizing each other at all costs! If a husband insists that it is his duty to point out his wife's failings so that she can become a better and happier person, criticism isn't the way. It is not a husband's job to correct his wife. Instead of focusing on his wife, by correcting himself, he will be doing her the best thing he can, helping her automatically in all areas of her life as well. Needless to say, what holds for the husband is true for the wife as well. She should always strive to see her husband in a positive light, emphasize his good points, and address him with kind words, compliments, and praise.

## A WORD TO THE WISE

Rabbi Arush has another tip for husbands. If for some pressing reason a husband feels it necessary to point something out to his wife regarding her behavior, he should not do so immediately, when the sensitive

matter arises, but wait a few days. For example, let's say a wife is talking on the telephone, saying all kinds of bad things about people while her children are playing in the room. Instead of criticizing her on the spot, the husband should wait. Then, at a time when things are loving between them, he should express himself lovingly in a positive, and round-about manner, saying, for example, "How wonderful it is, sweetheart, to be a positive role model for our children," and not criticize her for talking badly about other people on the telephone in front of the kids.

## DIVORCE CAN BE AVOIDED

It is no secret that a large number of marriages end in divorce. Once again, we can ask, is God a lousy matchmaker? The answer is no. When couples get married for the wrong reasons, God isn't to blame. We started out this book exploring mankind's primordial desire to Return to his Source. All during our sojourn here on Earth, our souls long to reunite with Source from which they came. Since a marriage partner embodies the "other half" of an individual's soul, he, or she, is a person's co-traveler along the way back to the Garden. Since this is the case, a man looking for a wife,

and a woman looking for a husband, should look for a person who shares the same goal and who is headed in the same direction. If a man marries a woman just because she is beautiful, or rich, or a gourmet cook, the marriage isn't going to go anywhere. Similarly, if a woman marries a man because he is famous, or wealthy, or a good lover, chances are they won't reach any destination together. When people marry for selfish, solipsistic reasons, out of the desire to fulfill their own wants and lusts, the marriage is headed nowhere. Conflict is bound to rise, resulting in house filled with unhappiness and anger. When marriage partners have conflicting wants and their own private destinations, instead of coming closer together, they are certain to drift far apart. For a marriage to be successful, both partners should share the mutual goal of Returning to the Garden.

#### MORE ADVICE FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Returning to the Garden means that the focus of the husband and the wife should be on giving, rather than receiving. For example, in their lovemaking, a husband should strive to first give his wife pleasure before thinking of himself. Generally, when someone tries to

help another person, that person wants to help in return. While modern Western society and its digital pastimes like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram place people's focus on Me, Me, Me, in a marriage, one's partner comes first. Just as God is giving, we should strive to be giving people, mirroring His ways. Just as God is kind and loving, lovingkindness should grace our relationship with our spouses. Egotism and selfish behavior are traits of the Serpent. There is no room for them in the Garden.

Maimonides explains that since God is incorporeal, intangible, and above all human conception, we can only know Him through the way He manifests Himself to us on Earth. For example, just as God is giving, loving, patient, and long-suffering with His creations, these traits should exemplify our own interactions with people. Imitating God's ways is especially important in marriage, in order to maintain a loving relationship with our spouse, and to recreate the pristine state which existed before Adam and Eve fell out from the Garden.

From the Story of Creation, we learn to view things in a positive light. Day after day, whatever God created, He saw it as good, as it says: *"And God saw the light, that it was good,"* and, *"And the earth brought forth grass,*

*herb-yielding seed after its kind, and tree yielding fruit... and God saw that it was good.*" Finally, after creating the beasts of the earth, the birds of the sky, the fish of the seas, and mankind, the Bible tells us: *"And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."* We too should always see our spouse in a positive light. No one is perfect. Husbands and wives should stress each other's good points and not focus on the bad. A single compliment can fill a person's day with sunshine. And it is such an easy and natural thing to do. Why make your wife sad when you can make her happy with a few simple words of praise? In contrast, a casual remark like, "Why don't you start exercising so you won't be so fat?" can make a wife depressed and angry for weeks.

Seeing your spouse in a positive light and focusing on the good points will be much easier if you give up exaggerated expectations. If Joe demands that Sally be as tidy a housekeeper as his mother, and as thin as Sports Illustrated bathing-suit models, and as fun as his old high school sweetheart, chances are that she won't meet his standards. Having to live with a forever disappointed husband who you can never manage to please can literally drive a wife insane. Joe's angry at Sally because she doesn't live up to his dreams, and



she's angry at him for expecting her to be Superwomen. That's the end of the marriage. Once again, husband and wife have to remember that a spouse's seeming faults are really pluses! When Joe remembers that the goal of marriage is not getting what he wants all the time, like a selfish child, but rather getting to the Garden, and following the ways of his Creator, he will remember that everything is for his good, and that the seeming faults he sees in Sally are really a mirror image of himself, helping him to face his own shortcomings and pointing his way back to the Garden. By working on, and correcting his own faulty character traits, he comes closer and closer to the Divine Image in which he was created, and which he shares with his Maker.

Be willing to compromise. Be willing to do something you would prefer not to do. Do it without resentment. This is the way to humility. For example, if Joe and Sally decide to take a permitted break from the Corona quarantine and go outside for a walk, but Joe insists on going his way, and Sally insists on going in another direction, they will be walking alone, filled with brooding ruminations and festering anger. The minute one of them compromises and accepts the other's preference, all conflict ends. Opposition has been removed. They can enjoy their walk together.

## LOVE OR LUST?

One final bit of advice for men. The Sages of the Mishna warn that a marriage established on lust won't last. When the lust dies, the connection between the husband and wife will die with it. For this reason, it is important that a marriage be based on true feelings of love, rather than physical passion. The marital act as well must be based on love and not lust. While sexual passion is a natural part of life and love, Divinely-designed to further the species, and to cement the bond between husband and wife, reuniting them as one, as Adam and Eve originally were in the Garden, before they ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, sexual lust it is not meant to be the basis of their bonding.

Nor is sexual lust meant to be the basis of a husband and wife's relationship when they are quarantined together. The marital act is a bonding of love, not a method of reducing anxiety.

In the Story of Creation, when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, God says that, for all time to come, a woman's desire will be toward her husband. This means that a wife's joy in life, her energy, and sense

of wellbeing, derive from the love her husband gives her. In his book, *The Garden of Peace*, the Kabbalist, Rabbi Shalom Arush, explains that the antithesis of this love is sexual lust which evolves from the impurity of the Serpent that entered Adam and Eve after their sin. As long as a husband has an overabundance of lust toward his wife, true love will not be able to blossom and last. The love that a lustful husband thinks he feels for his wife is total self-love. A proof that his feelings aren't really love is that the minute he satisfies his lustful pleasure during the marital act, his desire for her subsides, and all of the great excitement and love which he just felt toward his wife disappears as if it never existed. In most cases, he just falls off to sleep. All of the attention he gave her was simply to satisfy his lust. Since this is his way of relating to her, like a vessel he needs for his pleasure, his wife suffers a feeling of terrible emptiness.

In this situation, the husband wants to be with his wife, not in order to give, but in order to receive. When the husband is driven by desire and lust for his wife, instead of the wife desiring her husband, the opposite feeling awakens. Turned into an object to satisfy his pleasure, she reacts with disgust. His advances repulse her instead of bring her near. In the place of creating their own

Garden of Eden, where their union is blessed with love, their bedroom becomes a brothel, and the source of disunity and rift. Of all the problems that can cause division between a husband and wife, this is the greatest. When a husband lets his lust rule over him, instead of returning together with his wife back to the Garden, their home turns into hell.

In contrast to this, when a man doesn't lust after his wife, but rather fosters a relationship based on caring and interest, she feels a strong desire for him, and when he shows her the slightest affection and warmth, she feels like she's in heaven. Expressions of warmth and endearment before marital relations is very important to a wife. While the marital union is the pinnacle of mutual closeness, like all climaxes, it must be preceded by the proper stages of development. Physical closeness which is not preceded by emotional closeness is something repulsive to a woman. A woman's longing is for the emotional and psychic closeness of her husband and for his loving attention to her. When this exists, she also desires physical closeness as well. But if her husband does not display sincere affection and a daily concern for her needs, she is literally turned off by their physical union. For any physical union that is not accompanied by a meeting of mind and soul leaves the wife feeling

empty and pained. A wife's attraction to her husband comes not from a physical desire, but from the longing to receive warmth and caring affection from him. If these are missing, then everything is missing for her. Every husband must take this matter to heart for this is the foundation of a healthy and happy marriage.

In normal times, taking one's wife out to dinner and a movie, buying her a gift, or writing her a small poem are wonderful ways of expressing affection. But if the husband does all of this just to put her in the mood for lovemaking, the wife will sense his hidden motive and react coldly to his great professions of love. Being a part of his soul, her radar picks up everything her husband is feeling. She can't be fooled. A box of chocolates is sweet, but it isn't love. For the gift to have meaning, the wife has to truly feel cherished in her husband's eyes – not only for her body but for the person she is. For lovemaking to have meaning, it must be based on love, not lust. While there is a place for "sex" in marriage, and having a fun time in bed, it mustn't be the driving factor that unites a husband and wife. If a husband comes home from a pressured day at work, expecting his wife to relieve his pent-up tensions (or to fulfill his lusts toward the women in his office), rather than bring them together, his lust will drive her away.

While for a man, the sexual drive may be a natural human emotion, for many women it isn't. Women need love. For her, feelings of love must be cultivated just like a garden, whose flowers need water, sunshine, and care. Husbands must always focus on the good points and not on the bad. A husband must thank and praise his wife for all the good she brings him, and not complain about the things he finds lacking in her. He should strive to please his wife, not to cajole her into bed, but because she is truly dear to him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. In normal circumstances, when Joe comes home, instead of spending the evening absorbed with television, his computer and smartphone, he should speak to his wife, Sally, in a caring and lengthy manner, letting her know what a good wife she is, how caring a mother to their kids, how clever, understanding, and kindhearted, how lucky he is that he married her. By focusing on her many good points, Joe will rekindle the feelings of love he hopefully felt at the start of their marriage. Then, when endeavors to please her and show his esteem for all that she does, his gestures and words will be real, and his wife will blossom in the garden of his adoration. Feeling united with him spiritually and emotionally, their physical union has transcendental meaning and becomes an exquisite channel of bonding,

with the Presence of God hovering over them like a wedding canopy.

Of course, when governments order people to stay home in order to reduce the risk of Coronavirus infection, a husband can't take his wife out to dinner and a movie, but he can cook her an intimate dinner for two, pop open a bottle of wine, and view an Internet movie together, or read out loud to one another, study something interesting, play a game of Scrabble, and the like. Forced together, day after day, night after night, communication can become routine, focusing on the technical side of life, listening to the radio, hoping for good news, feeling anxious and let down when things remain bleak. Creativity is needed, understanding, compassion, and true love.

## Chapter Fourteen

### DEATH, TAXES, AND EDEN

#### RETURN IS INEVITABLE

There is an old aphorism which claims that two things in life are certain: death and taxes. To this, Rabbi Kook would add a third certainty — the Return to the Source. Just as the body has a built-in mechanism for self-healing, so does mankind. Our Return to the Garden is promised. The world will return to its Maker. The philosopher Nietzsche, and others who followed after him, proclaimed that God is dead. They were very mistaken. God is still here. He keeps Himself hidden behind the curtains of the world, letting people think that Nature rules the world, but the sun's daily rising and setting, and every breath we take, is all orchestrated by the One and Only Creator. Occasionally, like now, in the midst of the apocalyptical Corona crisis, the Almighty lets us know that He is very much present, pushing us along toward a greater and greater recognition. Basing his understanding on the secrets of Kabbalah, Rabbi Kook writes:



“The world must come to a state of complete Return. The world is not static; rather it progresses and develops, and the true, complete development must inevitably bring absolute health, both physical and spiritual to the world, and this will bring the world and everything in it to Return to its Source.”

Webster’s Dictionary defines determinism as: “a doctrine which postulates that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social or psychological phenomena are determined by antecedent causes.” In simple terms, “What’s destined to be will be.” Marx declared that communism was deterministic in nature. The Americans claimed that capitalism, not communism, was destined to conquer the world. Freud insisted that man was deterministically motivated by the events of his past.

As if observing the world from the top of a mountain peak, Rabbi Kook wrote that behind all of these social, political, psychological, and scientific movements was the movement of movements, the determinism of determinisms — the Return to the Source. At the root of them all, the inner force of Return was constantly

pushing the world forward to make it a better place. When the force of Return hits a political thinker like Marx, the Communist Manifesto is born. When it hits Theodore Herzl, it results in a book, *The Jewish State*. When it hits a Kabbalist like Rabbi Kook, it becomes his writings on *T'shuva* - Returning to the Source. Whether it be the drive to build a utopian society; to abolish poverty and disease; to prevent illness, aging, and death; to produce healthier foods; to ban nuclear weapons; to protect the environment; to guarantee equal rights for all minority groups, or imply to survive a worldwide pandemic — all of these things are driven by the inchoate force which God planted in the world to return to the Garden of Eden.

## WORLD DEVELOPMENT

In the book, “The Art of T’shuva,” Rabbi David Samson points out that the world is indeed a better place today than it was a two-thousand years ago. After all, people no longer sacrifice their children to the gods. There is a deterministic trend in the world toward improvement and progress. While parts of mankind are still gripped by primitive superstitions and idolatrous customs, world civilization has come a long way since the days of

Genghis Khan. The Dark Ages gave way to the Renaissance with its focus on art and literature. With the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, mankind took another leap forward. Where once man lived in fear of forces he could not control, now he felt that his intelligence and reason could lead him to master the world. In modern times, the Fall of the Bastille and the Age of Emancipation have brought great benefit to mankind. Generally, the world is a healthier place than it was just a few decades ago. This world development is all a part of the Return to Eden.

## NOTHING IS MORE CERTAIN

One might argue that while the world constantly develops in cultural and material spheres, a spiritual Renaissance when all of mankind returns to God is destined to remain a dream. Individuals, yes, there are always a few oddballs that latch onto religion, but the world? “In God we trust” may be written on the dollar, but the dollar is worshipped far more. Celebrities are far more in demand than Rabbis and prophets of Redemption. Furthermore, violence and murder are still

rampant all over the world. And in the matter of sexual purity, man today is not much more elevated than the average Viking of the past. Nonetheless, Rabbi Kook has hope. And today, with the world in virtual shutdown, even if people still wanted to carry on with orgies, cultural decay, and the rich oppressing the poor, it is getting much harder to do so. They too, Rabbi Kook, will also do T'shuva – if they are still around after the bodies are counted and buried, or simply bulldozed into a pit.

“The desire to Return to the Source is ever-present in the heart. Even at the moment of transgression itself, the yearning to Return is hidden in the soul, and it sends out its rays of Return. In the depths of life, the desire for Eden exists. God created the desire to be attached to the Source from the beginning of existence, preparing it beforehand as the elixir that would rescue the world from its fall from the Garden. Therefore, nothing is more certain in the world than its Return to its Maker, and in the end, everything will return to its original perfect state.”

As an inheritance from Adam and Eve, this idealistic desire to Return to Eden exists at the core of every soul, even in the most misguided and evil Jokers who mock at

everything good in the world. However, it is the task of every person to activate the yearning in his or her life. If a person ignores this aspect of his being, he simply will not feel it. He won't even know it exists. If he does not develop this most intrinsic part of himself, he will come to identify with the norms of the culture around him. This is like the story of the boy, Tarzan, who was raised by apes in the jungle — he thought that he was an ape as well. But this, the Kabbalah assures us, is just a passing phase of world history which will one day lead mankind back to its genuine roots. The abandonment of God seizes man because of his immersion in the darkness of material life. It is part and parcel of man's fall from the Garden. For generations, mankind can become blinded by the material world, leading it to a moral decline in its alienation from the realm of the spirit, but the Presence of God isn't lessened because of this. God is ever-present behind the great movie-set of life, where the skyscrapers, stock exchange, newspaper headlines, and vacations to the Caribbean, seem to be the real goals in the hustle and bustle of living, causing man to forget Who gives him the power to pursue his heart's desire. God merely withdraws to the sidelines, letting man grope in the dark, until a heavy dose of Covid-19 causes mankind to cry out for Salvation, as

people often do when they are sick or when tragedy strikes. The spiritual emptiness of the material world cannot fill up the soul. The desire to Return to God will awaken. For the sickness of forgetting the Divine World cannot hold a permanent place in man's nature. Existence itself, like a polluted spring, demands to return to its purity.

Since Returning to the Source is inevitable, it behooves us to get on the proverbial boat. After all, who wants to lose out on a good thing? Once we know that Returning to Eden is the real goal in life, why waste time on pursuing illusory things like money, power, and fame? Simply because they don't seem so illusory. Today, for the moment, the world is dominated by materialism. In truth, the great leaps forward in technology and science are all leading life toward greater capabilities, but all too often, people get caught up in the race to achieve, to succeed, to consume, to enjoy, and thus they lose sight of spiritual goals. In a competitive, capitalistic culture, people tend to live for "me" and not for "us." Things like morality in big business, and in our private lives, can easily be overlooked. While all over the globe, one can find seekers ardently trying to "return to their roots," the "Garden of Eden" movement still does not attract as

many people as Disney. But this is destined to change. Covid-19 has come to push the world along to greater understanding, genuine unity, and global cooperation, all for one and one for all. The not-so-very-distant future will reveal the miracle of Returning to the Source, and this revelation will capture the whole world with an incredible fervor, far greater than all of the crazes and fads which the world is accustomed to champion today. This new revelation of Eden will captivate every heart with its wonder, and its spirit will influence all people. Then the world will rise to rebirth. Take heart. We are getting closer!

## Chapter Fifteen

### THE JOY OF RETURN

#### THE WORLD'S GREATEST JOY

People who have made the journey back to the Garden describe the experience as the most joyous achievement in their lives. Very often, a gleam of happiness shines in their eyes. Their speech is filled with an excited ring, as if they have discovered a secret treasure. Even people who have tasted all of life's secular pleasures insist that the experience of Returning to God is the world's greatest joy.

What is the reason for this? What is the source of this joy? Returning to the Source is the healthiest feeling possible. A healthy soul in a healthy body must necessarily bring about the great joy of "returning home" – like the great joy of sailors finally reaching their home port after long months at sea.

When a person rids himself of bad habits, such as overeating and cigarette smoking, his physical health is



improved. Without these harming elements, he is stronger and more vibrant. So too, when one rids oneself of bad moral habits and base character traits, his moral and spiritual health is improved. Without these negative influences, his soul is free to receive the flow of Divine light which fills the universe. When a person is both physically and spiritually healthy, his capability to experience the Divine is enhanced. It is this “meeting with God” that brings the influx of joy that every discoverer of Eden feels. When the unhealthy walls which had separated him from God are eliminated from his life, he stands ready for life’s greatest discovery — the discovery that God and the spiritual world are real. The darkness of his past life is removed and an entirely new horizon of vision is revealed, the light of unending expanses of heaven and earth and all that life contains. Suddenly, God’s love and kindness surround him. Instead of feelings of melancholy, anxiety, and separation, there is light all around him and a pool of endless love.

Reuniting with its Maker, the soul is bathed in life’s most natural pleasure. The craving to obtain this incredibly natural pleasure is what people seek in sex. The yearning for the pleasure of Returning to the Source is what lies

beyond the ecstasy of sexual union. While the pleasure is intense, it doesn't last. At best, sex is a brief and transitory imitation of the Divine Union which people really seek. In the holy bonds of marriage, lovemaking is life's most exquisite pleasure, especially when infused with the awareness that the pleasure we experience from uniting with our spouse is a gift from God. But the pleasure of sex for its own sake is fleeting, the pleasure quickly fades, and people are often driven to search for the next passing high.

## THE ULTIMATE FREEDOM

The new spiritual horizons which the Returnee discovers give him a feeling of freedom, as if he were soaring through air. This new-found freedom comes when the walls blocking God's light have been razed. The newcomer to the Garden is freed from the bad habits and passions which had enslaved him in the past. He escapes from a web of anxiety and worry. Freed from the illusions of this world, he or she can experience God. Rabbi Kook explains:

"The steadfast will to always remain with the same

beliefs to support the vanities of immoral living into which a person has fallen, whether in deeds or in thoughts, is a sickness caused by an oppressive slavery to the material world that does not allow Eden's light of freedom to shine in its full strength. For it is precisely the desire to Return to the Source which aspires to the original, true freedom — Divine freedom, which is free of all bondage.”

Once again, we may be startled. People often think that in discovering God, one is restricting one's freedom, not expanding it. If one recognizes his Creator, he also has to recognize His laws. For a person who thinks this way, religion is perceived as a yoke of responsibility and oppressive bondage. But Rabbi Kook tells us the opposite. The discovery of God is the ultimate freedom. Finally, a person is liberated from erroneous beliefs that he previously clung to in order to justify his errant lifestyle. Finally, he is freed from cycles of behavior which he could not control. Like an addict who decides to go straight, he can now conduct his life in the healthiest and most optimum manner. Instead of compulsively following after the deceptive advice of the Serpent, he learns to distinguish between the path to Eden and the path to hell. This is the greatest freedom!

## HIGH IN THE GARDEN

Often people are afraid to set out on a course of Return because they associate the process of penitence and rectification with pain. Changing one's ways and giving up unhealthy habits indeed can be a challenging and painful process. It is like the pain of amputating a jaundiced limb in order to save the life of a patient. Many people, perhaps the majority, prefer to remain in quarantine at home than make the inner changes needed to survive in a more wholesome world. But in our case of rebirth and renewal, after a journeyer cuts through the thickets along the way to the Garden, when he reaches Eden, he discovers that all of his limbs are intact. While pain of change is a part of the journey, the hardships are quickly erased by the joy which the Returnee discovers. Once again, Rabbi Kook explains:

“Returning to one's Source does not come to make life bitter, but to make it more pleasant. The happy satisfaction with life that one discovers emerges out of the waves of bitterness which cling to a person during the initial stages of the Return Voyage. However, this understanding is the highest valor, to recognize that

pleasantness evolves out of bitterness, life out of the clutches of death, eternal pleasures out of sickness and pain. As this everlasting knowledge grows and becomes clearer in the mind, in the emotions, in the person's physical and spiritual natures, the Returnee becomes a new being. With a courageous spirit, he transmits a new life force to all of his surroundings. He spreads the good news to all of his generation, and to all generations to be, that there is joy for the righteous, and that a joyous salvation is certain to come to all the world."

It is difficult to give up the familiar, even if it be a negative habit. When a person understands this and opens himself up to change, he comes to be filled with a courageous new spirit and joy. His life is renewed, and the world seems to be renewed with him. Immediately, he wants to share his good fortune with everyone. With a gleam in his eyes, he tells his parents all about discovering the Garden of Eden, as if he has met the right girl. With unbounded enthusiasm, he phones his brother long distance to turn him on to the great secret which he has discovered. He is so hopped up about his new life in Eden, he wants the whole world to know. "Hey everybody, listen to me. You want to be happy? You want to be high? Get with it. Return to the Garden

of Eden!”

## RIVERS OF DELIGHT

Another reason why the joy of Return is so great is because the happiness of Returning is felt in the soul. Until a person discovers Eden, he or she experiences the pleasures of the world on the physical, emotional, or intellectual levels alone. The person enjoys good foods, stimulating books, new clothes and the like. But a man has a deeper, spiritual level of being, his soul, which derives no satisfaction at all from earthly pleasures. As the Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzatto writes:

“To what is this analogous? To the case of a city dweller who marries a princess. If he brought her all that the world possessed, it would mean nothing to her, by virtue of her being a king’s daughter. So it is with the soul. If it were brought all the delights of the world, they would be nothing to it, in view of its pertaining to the higher elements.”

When a person does Returns to the Source, he his soul merges with rivers of spiritual delight. In the Story of Creation, these are the rivers that stream out of Eden.

The joy the Returnee discovers is like nothing which he has ever experienced. Not only are his physical senses affected, rivers of delight inundate his soul. Just as his soul is deeper than his other levels of being, the happiness he discovers is deeper as well. Just as his soul is eternal, his joy is eternal. Unlike the transitory pleasures of the physical world, the joys of Eden are everlasting. A Jacuzzi feels good, but when it is over, the pleasure soon fades away. But in the paradisiacal Jacuzzi of Eden, you don't just get wet — you become cleansed and transformed.

The River of Delight is not metaphorical expression alone. In the spiritual world, there actually exists a River of Return. In Kabbalistic terms, the river stems from the celestial world called, "*Binah*." From this supernal world stems the constant flow of Return which, though invisible, is always present and active. Like gravity, the force of Return surrounds the world, ready to bring seekers back to the Garden. It is our channel to true joy and happiness because it is our channel to the Source of all being. Nothing in the world can compare to its pleasures.

THE REAL HERO

The real hero is not the Hollywood tough guy. It isn't the man who smokes Marlboro cigarettes. It isn't the corporate president who owns a Lear jet and three yachts. The true hero is the seeker who undertakes the journey to Return to the Source. He is the man of courage who is open to self-assessment and change; the man who has the valor to confront his soul's inner pain and to transform its bitterness into joy. The Return to Eden raises a person higher and higher through its stages of transformation, bitterness, purification, pleasantness, grieving, and joy. Nothing a person to the stature of being truly a man like the profound journey of Returning to one's Source.

While "Returning to the Garden" elevates a person above all of the baseness and darkness of the world, it does not alienate the Returnee from the world. Rather, the discoverer of Eden elevates life and the world with him.

Sometimes, people have a misunderstanding of spiritual awakening. They think that the process of Returning to the Garden of Eden comes to separate a person from the world. While some spiritual newcomers make a



point of isolating themselves from secular society, this is not the ideal. During the early stages of Return, a person should certainly avoid situations which are antithetical to his newfound goals, in order to rebuild his life on purer foundations, but a Citizen of Eden is not a recluse. He should not cut himself off from the world. The opposite is true. When we emerge from our isolated furlong in our Corona-Caves, by participating in the life around us, we elevate, not only ourselves, but also the world with us. After returning to God, the seeker must return to the world. God created the Heavens for the angels. Our lives are to be lived down on Earth. It is man's task to bring healing and perfection to this world, not only to ourselves. When the powerful life-forces which were squandered in the pursuit of vain and transitory goals are redirected toward good, life is uplifted. An "Edener" who returns to a former unhealthy situation, and now conducts himself in a healthy manner, affects a great rectification, which Kabbalists call, "*Tikun*." He is like the movie gunslinger who mends his ways and comes back to town to do away with the bad guys. Because of his personal turnabout, Dodge City becomes a better, safer, more wholesome place. The powerful inner forces which once led the cowboy to engage in wild, unbridled behavior, become an exalted

life-force which acts to spread goodness and blessing. The great powers of life which emanate from the highest and holiest rivers flowing from the Source constantly uplift the Heroes of Return, for they are the champions of life, who call for its perfection. They demand the victory of good over evil, and they point the way to life's true happiness and freedom which lies in store for all those who ascend to their spiritual Source and essential Divine Image.

The time has come to take the lovers of Eden out of the closet, and out of our Corona confinement. The true champions of life are not the basketball players and Hollywood stars. The real heroes are the Masters of Return. They are the Supermen who battle the forces of darkness in order to fill the world with goodness. Teenagers! Tear down your wall posters of wrestlers and rock stars! The people to be admired are the Seekers of Eden! You can be one too!

## Chapter Sixteen

### **DON'T WORRY! BE HAPPY!**

#### THE SECRET OF STRIVING

Because of the Coronavirus invasion, millions of people have been fired or laid off from work. They sit in quarantine, worried about their financial situation, not knowing what will be. For many others, the loss of their job is a psychological blow as well. Very often in modern Western society, people draw their sense of identity from their work and profession, priding themselves on being a successful lawyer, or acclaimed actor, astute investor, start-up wizard, dedicated teacher, or honest auto mechanic. For the moment, the feeling of self-worth that they have from their jobs is gone. For myriads of people, it feels like the end of the world.

But once we understand that real success in life is not necessarily measured by the standards of modern Western culture, but by deeds of kindness and closeness to God, we can find courage and satisfaction, knowing that we, as seekers of God, are on the winning path. And

we can understand another startling concept. Usually, we think that a process is completed when it reaches its end. We experience a feeling of satisfaction when we finish a project. An underlying tension often accompanies our work until it is accomplished. This is because the final goal is considered more important than the means.

Unfortunately, many people feel the same way about Returning to the Source. Until seekers reach the Garden they are liable to feel overwhelmed and anxious, faced with the many changes they need to make in their lives. Programmed by the values of modern culture, they can be bombarded by feelings of failure since the Garden seems so far away. That perspective needs to be thrown out with the garbage. When it comes to Returning to Eden, the goal is not the most important thing. It is the means which count. What matters the most is the striving for perfection, for the striving for perfection is perfection itself. Once again, Rabbi Kook's penetrating vision, sheds light on this crucial understanding:

“Man's moral sense demands justice, goodness, and perfection. Yet how very distant is moral perfection from man's actualization, and how feeble he is in directing his

behavior toward the pure ideal of absolute justice. How can he aspire to that which is beyond his reach? For this, the yearning to Return to the Source serves as a healing balm to man's nature. It is the endeavor to Return which perfects him. If a man is constantly prone to lapse into misguided ways, and to have difficulties in maintaining just and moral ideals, this does not blemish his perfection, since the principle foundation of his perfection is the constant longing and desire for perfection. This yearning is the foundation of the drive to Return, which constantly orchestrates man's path in life and truly perfects him."

If a seeker has not yet reached perfection and the Garden is still far away, he need not be depressed. Much like the old adage, "It's not whether you win or lose – it's how you play the game," the seeker can relax and feel assured that he's already a winner. Success in the Quest of Return is not measured by the final score at the end of the game. It is measured by the playing. The striving for good is goodness itself. The striving for atonement is atonement. The striving for perfection is what perfects, in and of itself. In the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, King Solomon teaches that no man is sin free. Ever since Man's fall from the Garden, transgression and error have been part of the fabric of

life. Sharing the genes of Adam and Eve, we too are subject to “system failure.” Until the approaching time of World Redemption, envisioned by the Prophets of Israel, and quickened by the Coronavirus, an ideal existence is out of man’s reach.

In fact, the process of Returning to the Source never ends. Perfection in thought and deed is out of our reach. Even when we reach the Garden, one can still soar higher and higher without end. When a goal is unattainable, it is the striving to reach the goal that counts. So too with the journey back to the Garden. It is the constant striving for the Garden which purifies, enlightens, elevates, and perfects. Seekers of Eden – relax! Even if you never reach the Garden, as long as you keep it in sight, DON’T WORRY. BE HAPPY. As long as you are trying to get there, that is what really counts. Not your jobs, your titles, your riches, or your fame. Getting closer to God is the real task on Earth. The minute you set off on the quest you’re a winner!

## Chapter Seventeen

### **HAPPINESS NOW**

#### THE MEANS OR THE GOAL — THAT IS THE QUESTION

As we explained in the previous chapter, people tend to place more value on the final achievement of a goal, rather than on the endeavor itself. For instance, many people focus on getting their salaries at the end of the week, rather than on their actual work. How happy they feel when the work week is over and they have their paychecks in hand! For them, their work is merely a means toward receiving their money. This phenomenon is known to cause anxiety and even depression on the job. It can even lead to accidents, when a worker, daydreaming about the future, stops paying attention to what he is doing.

If a person approaches the Journey of Return with this attitude, he will always focus on his shortcomings and how far he has to go, and not on his yearning and efforts along the way. As the saying teaches, one should not focus on the half of the glass that is empty, but rather on

the half which is full. Not understanding that his efforts to improve are what matter, and not the idealized state of existence which he has not as yet achieved, the seeker will always feel anxious, unfulfilled and forlorn.

Rabbi Kook explains that this misplacing of priorities between the means and the goal stems from the “sin of the earth” during the days of Creation. By understanding the depth of this Kabbalistic teaching, we can learn to be happy, not only when we attain our goals and ideals, but also at every moment of our lives.

## THE BARK AND THE FRUIT

In the Story of Creation, after Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden fruit in the Garden, God curses them for their disobedience, and He curses the Serpent for having beguiled them. The earth is cursed with them, as it says, *“The earth shall be cursed on your account”*. The Midrash asks why. Rabbi Yehuda Bar Shalom answers that the earth transgressed God’s command that the ground should give forth fruit trees which are fruit — not only was the fruit to be edible, the bark of the tree was supposed to be edible too, with the same taste as the fruit. This is the meaning of the Divine command



that the earth bring forth, “fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind.” The earth, however, brought forth trees which produced only edible fruit. The bark itself was tasteless.

Rabbi Kook writes:

“At the beginning of Creation, the taste of the tree was supposed to have the same taste as the fruit. All of the means which are needed to sustain any lofty, all-encompassing spiritual goal, should rightly be experienced in the soul with the same exalted pleasantness which we feel when we picture the goal itself. However, the laws of nature, along with the instability of human life, and the heaviness of the spirit when it is enclosed in a physical body, caused that only the taste of the fruit — the actualization of the final, original, ideal goal — is experienced as pleasant and sweet. The trees which produce the fruit, though they be indispensable in the growth of the fruit, have become hard, solid matter, losing their taste. This is the ‘sin of the earth,’ for which it was cursed along with Adam. But every blemish is destined to be perfected. Thus we are assured, without doubt, that the time will come when the world will return to its original state, when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit. For

the earth will return from its sin, and the necessities of practical life will no longer restrict the pleasantness of the ideal light, which is supported and brought into being by these preliminary, practical means.”

How is the gulf between means and the goal, between the imperfect and the ideal, to be bridged? Through Returning to the Source. What will cause all of the details of human endeavor, the hard work of rectification, and the final building to merge in pleasant harmony? Through Returning to the Source. The light which accompanies the way back to Eden penetrates all of the details of life, all of the stages of mending and repair, and fills them all with the taste of the final ideal.

The discrepancy in taste between the fruit of the tree and the bark represents a vast, cosmic concept. Originally, God intended that everything in the world would be perceived in the same deep, inner light. According to the intended plan, people would have experienced every moment with the same joy as the final goal. They would have understood that the means are as important as the ideal, that all of the incompleteness and detailed work which go into achieving something are a part of the whole. With the

sin of the earth, mankind lost the ability to appreciate the small things in life. People talk about the ideal future, about world peace, about universal equality, saving the environment, and the like, but the housekeeper's boycott against ozone-destroying aerosol cans is seen as something less grand. On the contrary, what joy and sense of accomplishment she should feel knowing that she is making the world a better place!

## THE SECRET OF RETURN

When a person sets out on the journey Back to Eden, the means become as vital as the goal. The desire to connect with God penetrates all of the details of life and uplifts them. Everything is seen as important and necessary in the refinement and perfection of existence. The Presence of God enters every sphere of life, illuminating everything with the light of the future ideal.

According to the Kabbalah, the inner foundation of life is built upon the phenomenon of Return. Material existence is based on a step-by-step descent from Divine Spiritual Spheres to the worldly. Thus there is a Divine Spark in everything. This spark is like the DNA of existence. Because of this, when a person is involved in

any detailed spark of existence, it is as if he were involved with the entire universe. Rabbi Kook writes:

“When we understand to what extent the tiniest details of life, the spiritual and the physical, contain, in microcosm, all of the general laws, and that every small detail has shadows of greatness in the depths of its essence, we will no longer wonder at the secret of Return which penetrates man’s spirit so deeply, from the beginnings of his thoughts and beliefs, to the smallest details of his character and deeds.”

When we understand that every fragment is a microcosm of the whole, and that each and every person is like a world in miniature, than how truly powerful is man! How influential is his each and every deed! For example, if a person stops speaking badly about other people, he not only improves himself, he improves his community. Because, he is connected to all of the universe, he improves all of the cosmos. The smallest detail of Return and the smallest step forward along to journey back to the Garden, brings a dose of healing to all mankind! Not only is the Returnee coming closer to Eden, he is elevating the world with him toward its destined Return to the Garden. A seeker’s

cries for Salvation echo through every realm of existence, through every material barrier, through every sphere of Divine Manifestation, and reach the Divine Throne itself. Kabbalists who know the blueprint of existence refer to these rungs on the Spiritual Ladder as “*Sefirot*” and “*Olamot*.” If a seeker was given a pair of “4-D spiritual glasses,” he would see himself traveling through interconnected stations, higher and higher, called *Malkut*, *Yesod*, *Hod*, *Nezach*, *Tiferet*, *Gevurah*, *Hesed*, *Chomah*, *Binah*, and *Keter*. He would discovery on his Spiritual Map the worlds of *Asiyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Beriah*, and *Atzilut*. Man’s every gesture of Return is filled with meaning, connecting the lowest regions to the most exalted heights, the smallest details to the grandest schemes. He is the sun around which all of life orbits. His thoughts, speech, and action literally influence the state of the world.

## Chapter Eighteen

### T'SHUVA MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

#### BEFORE THE WORLD WAS CREATED

The Talmud teaches that the desire to Return to God (*T'shuva*) existed before the world was created. The spirit of Return hovers over the world and gives it its basic form and its motivation to develop. It is this inner mechanism of Return which gives the world its direction and its inner energy to constantly progress. The desire to refine the world and to embellish it with beauty, splendor, music, and art, all derive from the spirit of Return. This constant, ever-present force stands as the impetus behind all human history, all world development, all endeavor toward scientific advancement and social improvement. This powerful force, imbedded in the fabric of existence before the Creation of the World, is the Divine, spiritual force which is constantly propelling all of life toward perfection. It is the voice of God calling through the Psalmist, "*Return to Me, you children of men.*"

Not only was man sent forth from the Garden, with an inner yearning to Return, the world itself was “separated” from God at the time of Creation. In Kabbalistic terminology, since God fills all of the cosmos with His Presence, in order to make room for the world He created, he had to metaphorically “constrict Himself” so that something else could exist besides him. In effect, during the birthing process of Creation, the world was “separated” from its Creator. Following this separation, and tragically mimicking it, man fell out of the Garden. The pattern has continued ever since. Through every act of improper living, and through every misuse of speech, or sordid thought, man further “separates himself” from God. It is only by attaching himself to the primordial, universal yearning to Return to the Source can man achieve harmony with existence and reunite with the Creator.

On a personal level, when a man sells his house in the country because he wants to improve the quality of his life, he is involved in Returning to the Garden of Eden. When a family has a fun and relaxing vacation, they are being motivated by forces of Return. Though there may be underlying factors of profit and self-interest when a pharmaceutical company produces a new drug, they too

are involved in finding the way back to Eden, if their product truly benefits mankind.

## NEVER-ENDING T'SHUVA

In his writings, Rabbi Kook illuminates the phenomenon of Return, not as personal penitence alone, but as an ever-active force in the world which constantly works to unite all things with God. He writes:

“The currents of Return flood along. They resemble waves of flames on the surface of the sun, which break free and ascend in a never-ending struggle, granting life to numerous worlds and innumerable creatures. It is impossible to grasp the multitude of colors of this great sun that lights all worlds, the sun of Return, because of their abundance and wondrous speed, because they emanate from the Source of life itself.”

In his poetic style, Rabbi Kook describes the Force of Return like a sun which sends out constant flames of warming light to the world. Just as God has created the sun as life's principle energy source, so too is Drive to Return the spiritual energy source of existence. The longing for Eden does not only operate when a person



decides to mend his erring ways – the Drive to Return exists all of the time. It exists both within man and all around him, as a personal desire to Return to God from within, and as a general desire which comes from Above. Like gravity, or the wind, or the rays of the sun, the Force of Return is ever present, always at work, bringing the world to completion. One day the force may hit Jonathan; the next day Marsha. One day soon it will uplift mankind as a whole. Its waves flow by us in a continuous stream. Minute by minute, the Song of Return calls out to us to hurry and join in the flow.

## UNION WITH GOD

Throughout his writings on the subject, Rabbi Kook has to clothe his profound understandings in a wardrobe of metaphors to express the phenomenon of Return. “The individual and the collective soul, the world soul, the soul of all worlds of Creation, roars like a mighty lioness in agony for complete perfection, for the ideal existence.”

What empowers the soul to seek out its Maker? What provides the fuel for the quest? The Force of Return. As

King Solomon teaches, *"The dust of the body returns to the earth from whence it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."* When way or the other, we all return to our Maker. The trick is to bring about the reunion in this world, while we are still living, not in the World of Souls after we die. Rabbi Kook writes:

"Through the Force of Return all things return to their Maker. Through the supernal power of Return which prevails in all worlds, all things are returned and reconnected to the realm of Divine Perfection. Through concepts of Return, understandings of Return, and feelings of Return, all thoughts, ideas, understandings, desires, and emotions are transformed and return to their essential character in line with the Divine Will for existence."

## WORLD REDEMPTION

Once we understand that the goal of existence is to be reunited with God, and that the Force of Return, like gravity, is at work all of the time, we can understand that the Return of the individual, and the encompassing Return of the world longing for perfection, all stem from

the same essential drive. So too, all of the cultural reforms which lift the world out of moral decay, along with social, scientific, and economic advancements, all of them comprise a single essence. While the Garden of Eden may be an allegory, the Return to Eden is the force which propels mankind and all existence forward to rectification and perfection. Should this get force sidetracked and stuck in the mud of excessive materialism, sexual immorality, and the abandonment of God, then a Coronavirus is needed to get humanity back on the proper track toward World Redemption, in order to bring healing to a suffering world. Redemption is the ever-active, historical process which brings the world to perfection and completion. The zenith of Redemption is reached when all nations recognize God, and truth and justice will reign supreme. An individual's Return to the Garden and World Redemption are parallel processes, reaching the same destination.

## THE UNITY OF CREATION

How does one man's Return to Eden bring Redemption closer? How does an individual's personal spiritual awakening while caged in Corona isolation influence the course of human history toward a higher ideal and bring

healing to the cosmos as a whole? We discover the answer when we understand that every individual is not a unit separated from the rest of the world, but a part of the whole, integrally united with all of Creation. A man is not a fragmented being disconnected from the past and the future. He is part of the continuity of generations. He is a part of his national history and a sweeping world drama. In the same way that he is a product of his past, he is also the seed of the future. When a man sees himself in this wider perspective, his influence of his personal Return is magnified by his connection to all generations. His personal Return is uplifted by the General Return of the world, which, in turn, strengthens his own drive for improvement. This merging of an individual's Return with the mighty stream of the Universal Return and the Universal Will for Redemption is the source of the great joy which the Journey of Return always brings. In Rabbi Kooks words:

“The Will to Return comes forth from the profoundest depths, from the vast depths where the individual is not a separate entity, but rather a continuation of the greatness which pervades universal existence. The yearning for Return on a personal level is connected to the world's yearning for Return at its most exalted

Source. And since the great current of life's inner yearning is directed toward perfection, immediately, the many streams of goodness flowing through existence lift up the individual and his yearning for goodness brings benefit to all."

For example, as a wheel axis spins, the spokes and the whole wheel spins with it. So too, a person who steals should not look at his theft as his own personal dilemma, he should see his stealing as something that damages the moral environment around him, blemishing the society where he lives, and increasing man's estrangement from Eden. In contrast, when he returns the money he took, he adds goodness to the world and brings all of existence closer to moral perfection. Like a stone thrown into a pool, his individual act of rectification sends waves of rectification rippling through all realms of life, from his family and immediate surroundings, to his community, his nation, and the world. Because his soul is attached to the all-inclusive pool of souls of the world, in purifying his ways, he helps purify all realms of being.

It is impossible to quantify the enormous effect of an individual's striving to Return to the Source, through his

or her practical efforts to become a better person, on the betterment of life in its entirety. Each step along the Return Journey elevates the soul of the individual and the soul of the community to higher and higher levels. This understanding led the Sages of the Talmud to proclaim the greatness of Returning to the Source, for it brings healing to the world, and even one individual who Returns is uplifted and the whole world is uplifted with him. Rabbi Kook writes:

“The more we contemplate to what extent the smallest details of existence, the spiritual and the material, are microcosms containing the general principles, and understand that every small detail bears imprints of greatness in the depths of its being — we will no longer wonder about the secret of Returning, which so deeply penetrates man’s soul, encompassing him from the beginning of his thoughts and beliefs to the most exacting details of his deeds and character.... When we will know more about the qualitative value of man and his spirit, and about the character which his imprint gives to existence, we will immediately perceive the glowing relationship between the great cosmic Return to the Source, in all of its majestic breadth, depth, and loftiness, and the Return of man, the individual and the

community, around which all of practical and spiritual life revolve.”

When a person understands that his personal Return advances the Redemptive process of the world, his motivation to mend his own life is enhanced. His own personal Return expands beyond his life’s limited boundaries and brings benefit to all of mankind. No longer dwelling on his own personal darkness, and his egocentric striving for happiness, he altruistically yearns to bring greater illumination and joy to the world. This is the zenith of Returning. When a person seeks to Return, not only for his personal salvation, but for the betterment of the world, he has already made his way back to the Garden.