

SAFE KABBALAH

PART THREE

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG



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CHAPTER ONE

JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL

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JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL

One of the salient features of Kabbalah is its unified view of everything. When one looks at the world from the outside, one sees a multiplicity of objects, phenomena and ideas. When one views the world from within, however, one sees a unified and cohesive picture of everything. With the perspective of Kabbalah, then, we come to appreciate the unity of G-d that pervades all of existence.

It is not to say that the view from within blurs the distinctions and individualistic nature of all that is. On the contrary, by seeing the unity that permeates all of existence, we can see more clearly how each aspect of life contributes a hue and nuance that makes the overall picture much more dazzling.

If this is true about the world in general, then it is equally true about the direction of the world.

When we view Judaism, as the rest of life from the external vantage point, we see a way of life that is multifaceted and divided by the diverse components of time.

Judaism, for example, is different on Sunday then it is on the Shabbat. That is why we make *Havdalah* at the conclusion of the Shabbat, to underscore that there is a division between the Shabbat and the weekdays, the holy and the profane. Even Monday is unlike Tuesday. There are different prayers, different Torah readings, and different focuses. According to Kabbalah, every day represents one of G-d's different attributes. Even the hours are separated and distinguishable from one another by virtue of the different divine emanations that are dominant each hour.

And this is true about every moment of our lives as Jews. The Torah dictates a different message for each component of time. And that's the way it should be.

When we view Judaism from the mystical and spiritual perspective, however, all of the diversity is channeled towards an inexorably goal. Kabbalah is the view from the inside out and it offers a unified view, in contradistinction to the fragmented view one gets from all other perspectives of life, which is from the outside looking in.

With this introduction in mind we should ask ourselves the question that forms the title of this chapter: Where are we going? This is another way of saying, what is the unified goal and objective of our lives? Around which goal does everything in existence, including all of our lives, revolve?

Jewish mysticism answers this question, ironically, in two ways. Since we are a composite of a soul and a body, Jewish mystical thought views the goal within the context of the soul as well as within the context of the body.

In this chapter we will dwell on the goal as it pertains to the soul. We will leave the discussion of the goal relative to the body for a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURE OF THE SOUL

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NATURE OF THE SOUL

We have already discussed the nature of the soul briefly in the very beginning of the book. Let us probe further into the dynamics of the soul

The soul is a part of G-d. The most commonly used Hebrew word for soul is “neshama” which is associated with the word neshinah which means breath. This, in turn, is related to the Biblical verse “And He blew a breath of life into his (Adam’s) nostrils.”

Obviously, the soul is not our breath of life, for a breath of life is a physical thing and the soul is totally spiritual. And even more obvious is the fact that G-d does not have a physical form, so that His blowing a breath of life into Adam’s nostrils can only be understood figuratively.

Both speech and blowing express air. It is easy to imagine that when one blows air it is much more powerful than when the air is expressed through speech. Not only is there more air and is it expressed with greater force, but it also comes deeper within, from one’s gut.

This, then, is the metaphor of G-d blowing a breath of life into Adam. G-d's very "innards" His very "gut," or His essence were involved in animating Adam, as opposed to other creatures which were created by G-d's "mere" speech.

This means that, unlike the body and the physical world around that were *created* by G-d, the soul is a part of G-d that was "thrust" into the creation.

The soul is also unlike the spark of G-d that must be present in every physical being, even a rock. Without this divine spark nothing could possibly exist. For, if G-d would cease from creating any aspect of this world, it would revert to its original state that preceded its creation, which is, of course, utter nothingness. This spark, of divinity within all of creation, however, is not expressive of its presence, but concealed within the creation.

The soul, by contrast, never loses its divine sheen. It is always capable of releasing itself. It is therefore, in a constant state of yearning to fully express itself and its complete potential.

Let us digress for a moment and try to relate to the soul and its feeling. Imagine a person who falls into a coma and lies still for an extended period of time. Would it occur to anyone of a sound mind to say, "What's the big deal? He doesn't feel any pain. He doesn't even know that he's in a coma!"

Not only is the pain great. There can be no greater pain when a person is incapable of being himself/herself.

Now let us apply this to the divine soul within us that does not express itself fully because it is contained within a physical body. It is utter torture. When the soul's ability to express itself is further hampered because of the unspiritual influences that surround us and affect us in a negative way, the torture becomes unbearable. The soul wants nothing less than to break out of these constraints and attach itself to G-d.

This explains why there are many whose thirst for G-d is so intense that their attachment to G-d through the Mitzvot is greater than for those who were always steeped in the path of Judaism.

This also explains the phenomenon where people of spirit have sought to leave this world through meditation and other spiritual exercises. Their souls were on fire. Others, inadvertently, have chanced upon spiritual experiences that motivated their souls to leave their bodies. Their souls too were ignited and were allowed to express themselves in their most natural state, which is to leave this physical world and reconnect to its G-dly source..

All this leads to the inevitable question:

CHAPTER THREE

WHY THE DESCENT OF THE SOUL?

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WHY THE DESCENT OF THE SOUL?

Why would G-d take the soul, which is a part of Himself, and force it to descend into a physical world clad in a physical body? To make the question even stronger – and which will serve as the key to the answer – we can add: Why did G-d put all the temptations, the blandishments of evil and all the obstacles to the soul in our very faces, making it almost impossible for the soul not to be affected adversely?

To answer this question, mystical thought – particularly in the Chassidic literature – we find reference to a Talmudic expression that is used in the context of the law of unintentional murder, that sheds light on our dilemma.

If a person carelessly allows a lethal instrument to be thrust away from himself and that unintentionally cause the death of a bystander, the Torah demands that the one at fault be exiles to specially designated “Cities of Refuge.” Jewish law, however, makes a distinction between causing the death by a thrust of the instrument in a downward motion. The question discussed by the Talmud is in the instance where

the person was lowering himself to take a swing and in so doing accidentally killed a person. Since the perpetrator's intention was to raise the instrument in an upward motion, do we then consider his downward thrust to be as if it were an upward motion.. This is called "*Yeridah tzorech aliya*-the descent is for the purpose of ascent."

From this Talmudic case we can derive a general principle in all matters of life. When a person experiences a decline of their spiritual state of being, it is not considered a decline if the objective is the ultimate growth and upward motion that one experiences in the end.

Translating this into the question of the soul and its descent into the physical world, the soul's downward mobility is actually a prelude for its upward mobility. We therefore consider the descent to be part of the process of ascent.

But, we are getting ahead of ourselves. Before we can try to understand how going down is actually going up, let us glean from the talmudic expression that "descent is for the purpose of ascent" its most obvious connotation.

Yes, it is definitely true. The soul is certainly going from "the high roof to the low pit," to borrow a Talmudic expression. But, in the end, the soul will ascend, or experience a measure of growth, to a level that is far higher than the soul could ever have achieved on her own.

The second point to be gleaned from the Talmudic analogy, is that when a temporary decline is followed by, and is the catalyst for, an eventual spurt of growth, then the temporary decline is actually considered to be part of that ascent. We should not view the soul's sojourn in this world as a necessary evil. Neither should one think, "I have to waste 100 years before I can get somewhere." On the contrary. And in the spirit of the saying "getting there is half the fun," we can say that the process of the soul "getting there" (wherever "there" is – to be discussed later), is an integral part of being there.

To remind us of the soul's plight, G-d gives us all a taste of the soul's decline and descent into this world. Whenever we feel down, depressed or just plain dissatisfied with ourselves, it is a signal from the soul that says to us: "You think your doing badly? Imagine me, the soul, that was a part of G-d and am forced to be a part of the most banal, profane and even evil world."

The good news, however, is that the soul is not here to punish it, but to serve as a catalyst to grow and therefore even its down period is a part of its up period. Upon reflection, we should be able to tell ourselves that the same is true about all of the negative experiences of life. They are all but stepping-stones to better and higher levels of goodness. But, even when we haven't yet realized that

goodness, the mere fact that they are preludes to it, renders them good as well.

To be sure, lest there be a misunderstanding, the above was not intended to be used as a way of explaining away and justifying someone else's misery. Certainly, Jewish law (and certainly Jewish mystical thought) expects of us, that when we see another person's suffering we should: firstly, do everything in our power to get the person out of it; secondly, implore G-d to alleviate that person's suffering and thirdly, to not justify it. Only after these three provision are met, may we then try to use the above or any other "rationalization" for suffering to help the person cope with it. And this should only be done when there is no danger that it might actually demoralize the person when they misconstrue the message and may think that you are telling them that their suffering might be necessary. Then, and only then, is it permissible to put the suffering into perspective. One may of course, apply this to ones own suffering, especially when it will not only allow us to cope with adversity but it will also encourage us to get out of the rut by increasing our good efforts.

But, the question still persists. Why does G-d have to subject the soul to all of the suffering it experiences in this world, in order for it to reach an even higher level in the next world? What is it about this world that enables the

soul to realize something spiritual that it did not have before it descended?

Moreover, we are told that the soul's passion for G-d when it is in the body of even the most saintly and spiritual person can not even come close to the level of passion the soul had for G-d before it was placed in the physical body. That means that even after a lifetime of the most strenuous positive activity, one, in the best of circumstances, can not even get close to the degree of intensity the soul had when it was unencumbered by the body. Why then subject the soul to all of this torture, when the benefit that it may receive does not seem to match the benefits it loses?

We will leave the answer to this question for the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL II

CHAPTER FOUR

JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL II

Why? The question that everyone asks at one point in life or another. Why did G-d put us here? In the context of the soul, the question assumes greater poignancy. Why would G-d force the soul to leave its “secure” station in the world of souls to enter into a world of impurity and deception. At best, the soul, after surmounting all the obstacles and clearing all the hurdles, will not reach the level of passion for G-d as it had before it entered the body. Why then, would G-d want the soul to undergo this torture?

And torture it is. For the soul, anything short of a G-dly experience is painful. It's like taking a fish out of water or a person out of air.

True, it was explained in the preceding chapter that the “descent was for the purpose of ascent.” The question then becomes how does the soul, or, in what way does the soul, ascend and grow as a result of the tortuous existence within a physical body?

SAFE KABBALAH-JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL

Jewish Mysticism, particularly Chassidic literature, provides us with a way to understand the benefits that accrue to the soul from its existence within our physical world.

CHAPTER 5

STANDING AND GOING

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STANDING AND GOING

Elijah the prophet describes his state of existence before his soul entered this world in the following manner: “And I have stood before Him among these travelers.” The soul, no matter how pure and sublime, is referred to as an “o’med-a standing entity.” This same appellation is applied to the angels as well. Souls and angels stay in one place. Whereas, the soul, when it inhabits a body and struggles in this physical universe, is called a “mehalech-a traveler.”

Thus, the first difference between the soul in this world as compared to the soul before its descent is that there it is stationary and here it is mobile.

There are now two matters that must be clarified. Firstly, how do we define the terms “standing” and “mobile” in relation to the soul? And secondly, how does the soul become mobile in this world?

Life is characterized by growth. But there are two kinds of growth: One that is gradual and incremental. The other is where growth is by spurts and can be described as a leap.

The difference between the two is not only quantitative, but it is qualitative.

When a person, for example, goes from one level to another, they are never really fully removed from the level from which they had left. One can always backtrack and end up at the same point from which they had left.

If the distance between point a and point b is close, and the distance between point b and point c is close, then the distance between point a and point c is likewise close and relative. And no matter how many points one traverses, as long as the distance between one point and the next one is relative and finite, they are all connected. No matter how far one has come from their point of departure, they are still considered as if they had never left that point. They are still standing on one place.

This scenario describes the state of the soul (and angels) before they engage this physical world. Certainly, there are innumerable levels of change that the soul experiences. The soul's comprehension of it's G-dly source grows every instant, thus enabling the soul to grow incessantly. Nevertheless, all these changes are finite and relative. In their essential state, these movements that the soul has undergone, cannot be characterized as true movements. And the changes that the soul has experienced have not changed the soul's inherent identity and chemistry. The soul

has not budged an inch from its original level of comprehension and stature no matter how many gradual and incremental changes the soul has undergone. When you add a finite quantity to another finite quantity, you end up with essentially the same finite quantity.

To give the soul the capacity to truly grow and travel, the soul had to have been thrust into a body and exposed to a hostile physical existence that is everything but what the soul was accustomed to in its pre-descent state.

When the soul experiences resistance, it is then capable of unleashing the hidden Divine energy that transcends its own limitations. The soul then realizes an aspect of its essential identity that is unlimited and infinite.

To illustrate this point, Jewish Mystical literature provides us with at least three analogies: One that is physical, one that is physiological and one that is human.

CHAPTER SIX

OBSTRUCTIONS

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OBSTRUCTIONS

The first analogy is to a dam. When the waters accumulate due to obstructions that exist and block the flow of water, eventually the obstruction will give. When this occurs, not only does the water flow with infinitely more force than before, it also will take all the obstructions along with it.

This analogy actually serves to illustrate two points. The first point is that the obstruction alters the very nature of the flow of water. Relative to the way the water flowed before the obstruction prevented its flow, the new flow is of an entirely different order. To the extent that we can say that there exists an infinite force of anything in this finite world, one could say that the new flow is of an infinite nature, relative to the normal flow of water.

There is also a second salient concept that can be derived from this analogy. Not only does the water flow with a new intensity that is incomparably more powerful than the earlier one, but, moreover, the water transforms the obstruction into a force that flows as well. Whereas the obstruction was formerly a stationary and obstructive entity,

it has now been converted into a very mobile and dynamic force.

What has occurred with the water in the analogy is also true with the soul. Before the soul entered into this world, its movement has been regulated and gradual. Once it enters into a physical body and experiences all the obstacles that the material world poses, and the soul ultimately prevails, the soul acquires a new dynamic power that it did not have previously. In addition, the soul's new movement so has the power to take along with it all the obstructions. This means that the bodies, the material possessions and all the other obstacles, have now been transformed into powerful assets.

It can also be said that once the stationary obstacle becomes a mobile force it makes the downstream flow of water even more powerful than before. In other words, the obstacle and the resistance it represents, gives the water more force. Hence the obstacle affects the water. The water then transforms the stationary obstruction into a mobile force. Hence the water affects the obstacle. The obstacle that is now traveling with the water makes the gush of water that much more powerful and devastating. Hence the obstacle enhances the effects of the water.

Translating this into the dynamics of life, the following analogy can be drawn. The body and the animal soul that

animates the body obstruct the soul. As a result of this resistance the soul develops greater force than it would have had without the resistance.

Once the soul develops this newly discovered intensity, it sweeps the body and animal soul along with it. Not only are they no longer obstacles, they are potent forces for good. Here the animal soul and body affected the soul and enabled it to reach new heights and unleash its hidden powers. Moreover, the soul with its newly discovered energy has also transformed the body and animal soul, that they too serve as potent forces for good.

Thirdly, now that the animal soul has joined forces with the G-dly soul in its passion for more spirituality and G-dly experience, the combined force is far more potent than any of these two forces independently.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THIRST IN A PARCHED
DESERT

CHAPTER SEVEN

THIRST IN A PARCHED DESERT

A second physiological analogy to the growth of the soul through its engagement with a body and a physical world has been cited from the case of a person who has been wandering through a parched desert. When this person sees water, his/her passion for it is infinitely more intense than when they see water under normal circumstances. The deprivation of water increases the desire for it many times over.

Similarly, the fact that the soul is deprived of its G-dly nourishment once it enters into as physical body, does not dampen its ardor for G-d. On the contrary, it enhances it.

The fact that we do not feel the enhanced measure of love is directly attributable to the physical covering that we possess. When the soul finally leaves the body and is able to relate to its own heightened spiritual feelings, it realizes that it has grown significantly and its passion for G-d has likewise increased.

Upon deeper reflection it appears that the soul does not always have to wait for its departure to experience the heightened love for G-d. Very often, people who realize that their spiritual life is very limited – they are in a parched desert – develop a thirst for Judaism and spirituality in general, in a way that is unparalleled by even the most righteous people. Thus, our sages have told us that “the place where the returnees to Judaism stand, even the most righteous people cannot stand.” The fact that they were deprived engenders an even greater thirst and desire.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KING AND THE PRINCE

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THE KING AND THE PRINCE

There is yet one more analogy from the human sphere that relates to a king and his son the crown prince. The king gives his only son, the heir to the crown; the best education money can buy. He hires the best tutors and gives his son everything that is needed to make him the best student he can be.

After a few years of exposing the prince to the best teachers and the most effective pedagogical techniques, the king does something that appears to run counter to his entire educational program for his son. The king sends him away to a faraway province that was known for its lack of education and very limited morals. The prince was shocked. His teachers were stunned. The entire palace community was in an uproar. Why was the king doing this to his beloved son?

After all these years of such a sheltered and insulated environment that the prince was in, the king was now going to expose his only son to the immoral ways of that society. After virtually guaranteeing that his son should be

impervious to all the negative influences of the world around him, he was now going to make him so vulnerable. Why was the king doing this?

Why was he going to undo all of these years of the best intellectual and moral education available?!

We know that the king had not lost his mind and that he still wanted only the best for his heir to the throne. The king, however, realized that there was a limit how far his son's education can go. To continue with the approach he had taken thus far would afford his son more knowledge, to be sure, but it would only constitute an incremental and quantitative increase. The king knew that his son possessed hidden capabilities that would never be realized if he would remain in the sheltered environment of the palace.

By sending his son to a place where the morals were weak, the king was providing him with temptation. This resistant force that he was not exposed to in the palace, would force the prince to reach more deeply into his soul's reservoir of moral fortitude to counter the negative influences of his new surroundings.

And though the odds were that the prince would, on occasion, make the wrong moral choices, the king was confident that in the final analysis the prince will have realized a potential for growth that is incomparable to what he had experienced in his father's secure environment. The

prince returns to be with his father. He has grown from an immature precocious child to a mature young man, endowed with an inner strength that he could have never developed where he was previously.

At this point the analogy to the soul should be obvious. The king is G-d, the prince is our soul. The palace is Paradise, the teachers are angels or the deceased souls of the righteous. Now the soul is sent by G-d to a foreign land, the world of bodies and material pleasures. By doing so, the soul will be given the opportunity to grow in a real way, because only in such a hostile environment can the soul realize its true potential.

When the soul enters this world it is extremely troubled and unhappy. It does not want to descend. "all roads are fraught with danger," is the talmudic expression that is used in Chassidic literature to describe the apprehension of the soul to embark on this journey into the unknown.

CHAPTER NINE

**AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU LIVE;
AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU DIE**

CHAPTER NINE

AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU LIVE; AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU DIE

All of the above has been stated succinctly by our Talmudic sages: “Against your will you must live.” Taken at face value this refers to the lack of choice we have in our own births. Nobody asks us who our parents will be and if and when they will decide to have a child.

But, considering that this quote is in Ethics of the Fathers, a treatise, the Talmud states, that is devoted to teaching us how to become a Chasid, a self-transcendent individual, there must be a deeper message than that contained in the obvious lack of choice in our births, that the simple explanation suggests..

According to the mystical tradition, this quote echoes the concept discussed earlier that the soul does not want to leave its “comfortable” existence in the world of souls and spirituality. It literally has to be compelled to descend into this world.

Equipped with this bit of information we can appreciate our lives very differently. We know that the soul is dissatisfied

because it is lacking the spiritual freedom it had in the past. It exhorts us to look for ways of filling in the void that our souls experience here.

This, however, is not the end of the statement in Ethics of the Fathers. The rabbis continue: “And against your will you die.” Here too, it is unlikely that the rabbis were merely trying to inform us of the obvious, that nobody asks us as to whether we want to leave this world or that in most situations we do not want to die.

Rather, our sages revealed to us that, to the same extent that the soul did not want to enter into this world, it does not want to leave it. Precisely because of the dangers that lurk here, the hardships it endures, and the adversity it encounters, the same soul refuses to leave. Indeed, it is with the same intensity that it did not want to come here in the first place, that it does not want to leave in the end.

Once the soul “tastes” the taste of meeting the challenge of struggling with evil and surmounting all the obstacles and thereby experiencing a quantum rate of growth, it does not want to leave this world. Nothing, not even the greatest state of bliss in the next world can compare to the level of infinity that the soul realizes in this material world. The soul discovers a part of its personality it did not even know existed before it descended here. So both emotions – of not wanting to come into this world and of not wanting to leave

it – are genuine. The soul, once it learns about the challenge of this world and the newly acquired energy, it is a different soul. This “new” soul truly does not want to leave.

The lesson we derive from this knowledge is that we should cherish the struggles we have in our lives and that we achieve the highest heights through our soul’s engagement with this physical world. With the observance of Torah and Mitzvot within the framework of a resistant world, the soul acquires the most potent divine energy and is enabled to climb to unprecedented heights.

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CHAPTER TEN

**IS THERE A HEAVEN AND A
HELL?**

**THE WAY JEWS KNOW JEWISH
THEOLOGY**

CHAPTER TEN

IS THERE A HEAVEN AND A HELL? THE WAY JEWS KNOW JEWISH THEOLOGY

Most Jews, if questioned as to what are the theological differences between Judaism and Christianity, will invariably answer: Heaven and Hell. **They** believe in it and **we** don't. Nothing can be farther from the truth. These concepts of Heaven and hell were taken directly from Jewish sources, Biblical, Talmudic and Kabbalistic.

To be sure, they were adapted by other religions and suited to their theological tastes. But, in essence, these are patently Jewish beliefs that need to be understood from a Jewish perspective.

I think, this is a good place to digress about the way Jews learn theology and the way they try to preserve their individuality. We live in a Christian society and have suffered much from this association in the past. Believe it or not, we are still suffering from it, but, on a different level.

In the past, attempts were made to force Jews to adopt Christian beliefs and practices. While there were some

instances where this occurred, by and large, the Jews resisted this pressure. Jewish beliefs remained intact.

Now that we enjoy unprecedented freedom, and no one is capable of foisting Christian values upon us, we are witness to a troubling new phenomenon, the assimilation of precisely those beliefs into our consciousness.

To cite but one, significant example of how we view our religion and its primary institutions:

On the one hand, many Jews have begun to view the three institutions of a synagogue, holiday and rabbi, in precisely the same manner that Christians view their church, holidays and priest/minister. In Christianity as in other religions, religion is the compartmentalization of holiness in designated places (holy places, shrines, churches), designated times (holidays), and designated people (priests or ministers).

Judaism, by contrast, always thought of G-d as being in all places, times and people. There are laws that govern even our behavior in the bedroom and bathroom. Mystical thought, as articulated by Chassidism, in particular, could not countenance the thought of an unholy place that was devoid of G-d's existence.

It is true, in some places one was able to experience a more pronounced presence of G-d than in others, (hence the notion: of a holy place in Judaism, as in the Holy Land of

Israel, the Holy City of Jerusalem, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem). However, besides the fact that it did not preclude holiness of every other place, the ultimate goal was for us to extend the holiness, or the overt G-dly presence of one place, into another. One of the goals of the Messianic Age is to make the entire world permeated with the sanctity of the Land of Israel.

What has been said about a holy place is equally true of a holy time. Shabbat, for example, is referred to as *Shabbat Kodesh* (the Holy Sabbath) and when it is over we recite the *havdalah* prayer which highlights the difference between the holy and the profane. Nevertheless, the objective of the Shabbat is to instill holiness into all the days of the week. In fact, each day of the week in Judaism is identified by its relationship with the Shabbat.

Who has an obligation to study Torah? Many Jews are under the impression that this is the rabbi's obligation. In the same vein that Christianity views its clergy as the ones who are responsible for the religion; they have to know the Bible and it's their responsibility to teach its values to the laity, many view the role of the rabbi similarly.

Nothing can be farther from the truth. The responsibility to learn Torah rests on every individual. The layman is no less under obligation to study Torah and to know how to live Jewishly. A rabbi does not carry the burden of Judaism. If

anything, the rabbis' responsibility is to see to it that everyone studies Torah to the fullest extent.

In short, Judaism does not believe that there is a place, time or person that is outside the pale of G-dly living. And to be exact, Judaism is not a religion; it is a way of life. Every nook and cranny, every particle of time and every fiber of every level of humanity have a role in Judaism. Judaism is an all-encompassing all embracing way of life.

Yet, most modern day Jews view Judaism in precisely the way Christians view their religion.

There is alas an even greater problem. It is the way Jews whose values are Christian, tries to distance himself from them. Instead of studying Judaism first hand to know what are its premises and values, they look to further their knowledge of Christianity and then assume that these are not Jewish beliefs.

To cite a primary example:

Faith. There are Jews who claim that faith is a non-Jewish ideal. Judaism believes in knowledge and action, not in faith. Wrong. Judaism considers faith to be its foundation. Judaism also believes that a foundation needs a structure, which consists of knowledge and action. Judaism even believes that action without faith is preferable to no action, but nowhere does Judaism put down the role of faith.

But, the most blatant examples of this phenomenon is the belief in the afterlife, Heaven, Hell, the Messianic Age and the Resurrection of the Dead. I don't recall the number of Jews who have maintained that Judaism does not believe in these doctrines. What made them draw this conclusion is not study of Jewish primary texts. In many instances it was the theory that anything Christians believe in we don't. If Christianity believes in these ideals of the afterlife etc., it therefore means, in their minds, that Judaism denies their validity. Alternatively, some have read secondary texts written by authors who did not personally believe in these doctrines.

Whatever the cause of this ignorance, it is tragic that it has denied countless numbers of Jews from their heritage. Thanks to the proliferation of Kabbalah, some of these beliefs have been restored to their rightful place within the framework of Jewish belief. The rest of this chapter we will devote to the Jewish understanding of Heaven and Hell.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HEAVEN AND PARADISE: WHERE IS IT?

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Heaven or Paradise, first of all, is not to be understood as a “place” in the spatial connotation of the word. It is not a place somewhere in outer space, or deep down beneath the surface of the earth that is filled with the greatest material pleasures and delights.

Conversely, Hell is not a fiery place for the wicked to burn endlessly. These images of both Heaven and Hell have certainly developed as a result of the childish literal meaning that was ascribed to these concepts. The fact that the Bible and other Jewish texts spoke in metaphoric terms about these patently spiritual notions, led many to conceive of them in physical terms.

Indeed, even the conception of G-d as a physical being, was not only a Christian take on the subject, but many a devout Jew was influenced by the literal meaning of the Biblical text and ascribed physical and bodily proportions to G-d. When Maimonides declared that anyone who attributes physical properties to the Deity is a heretic, Maimonides great critic, known as the Ra'avad (Rabbi Avraham from Posquires)

demurred sharply and stated that :”many greater and better people have held such erroneous views because the literal meaning of the Biblical text gave them that impression.” Obviously, Ra’avad does not accept any physical ascription to G-d, but he considers them to be justifiable errors.

It is within the mystical tradition, particularly within Chassidic literature, that the non-spatial conception of heaven and Hell are articulated.

When the soul leaves the body, the soul is liberated from its physical shackle that prevented it from appreciating its own spiritual state. The state of Heaven or Paradise, is the ideal state of the soul, because it is where the soul can experience the presence of G-d, its very source.

When the soul was contained within the body, the soul never lost its desire to be in a state of oneness with G-d. Because the body had other interests, the soul’s yearning would be the cause of dissatisfaction and depression. The soul always had a desire to return to its Heavenly source. Now that the soul has separated from the body, the soul’s sense of relief and bliss are indescribable.

We should not understand the state of Paradise to be in any form or shape as a physical location, on earth or any other place in the physical universe. Rather we should view the state of Paradise as a state of mind, which is ubiquitous. Just as the concept of $2+2=4$ does not have any specific location

where it resides, but, by definition, is true all over, similarly, the state of Paradise is not confined to any single place. It is a state of being.

It should be pointed out that together with the blissful feeling that the soul now has – upon its separation from the body – the soul has a feeling of yearning in reverse. When the soul was in the body it yearned to be out of it, free and unhampered in its ability to experience spiritual bliss. Now that it is out of the body and divorced from the world of physical action, the soul experiences a reverse feeling of yearning to be back in our world.

The nature of this feeling of yearning and the way that the soul realizes its goal of coming back we will discuss, G-d willing, in Chapter 18. For our purposes now, we will dwell on the soul's feelings of spiritual bliss that it experiences once it is separated from its earthly cover – the body.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GETTING THE BODY OUT OF THE SOUL

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There is however a “hitch.” While the soul can be removed from the body very easily – through the process of death – the body (read: material influences) does not remove itself from the soul so easily. To paraphrase a famous quotation, “You can take the soul out of the body, but you can’t take the body out of the soul.” All of the body’s thoughts, words and actions become attached to the soul. Certainly the sinful ones cling to the soul, making it impossible for the soul to stay in paradise. This should not be understood as a punishment as much as it is a direct consequence of one’s behavior.

Put in simple terms, if one blindfolds oneself and then complains that he cannot see, must realize that if they would just remove the blindfold, it would restore their sight. If they discover that the string with which they tied the blindfold had been tied so tightly, even in knots that they cannot unravel, they know that it is a direct result of their actions.

What does a soul do in this predicament? During one's lifetime, there are certain things that can be done to avoid the hardships that will follow in the afterlife. Besides the obvious avoidance of sinful actions, words and thoughts, Jewish mystical literature counsels recitation of Psalms among other things that protects the soul from an ordeal that it might have to go through immediately upon death – a process known as *Chibut Hakever*.

Chibut Hakever (translated roughly as “Purgatory of the Grave,” or more precisely as: Beating of the Grave) together with *Kaf Hakela* and *Gehinom* (Hell) are three of the various forms of soul-cleansing.

And though the description of these ordeals in Jewish literature leaves the distinct impression that these are forms of physical punishment, nothing can be farther from the truth. And this is so on two counts:

First of all, as we have stated throughout, the soul is not a physical entity. All the fire in the world cannot consume it and now physical assault can reach it. Try beating up a mathematical equation, or a philosophical concept. And these compared to the soul are physical.

We must therefore conclude that the suffering the soul is subjected to is not physical in any way shape or form. The imagery that is employed by Jewish sources, from the Biblical to the Mystical — are using the physical fires of

hell, for example, as metaphors. Some have suggested that “fire” in the context of hell actually refers to the sense of embarrassment that the soul experiences when it is brought into the next world and its sins exposed to the inhabitants of the celestial domain.

It should be understood that in all likelihood, embarrassment is also a metaphor for the experiences the soul must endure to cleanse itself of all the bodily adhesions. Embarrassment is just a more sophisticated metaphor than the physical fires of hell.

Now that we’ve arrived at a better understanding of these fires of hell; that they are a cleansing agent for the soul to rid itself of its accumulated grease and grime, we can appreciate the second misnomer about hell. It is not a punishment. On the contrary, it is a gift that enables the soul that has lost its capacity to reunite with G-d in the next world. Not to be allowed to enter *Gehinom* is the punishment if we are to use the term punishment at all.

In actuality, G-d does not need to punish. There is no human element of vengeance, contrary to the popular misconception. The entire notion of punishment is to be understood as G-d’s mercy on our soul. The punishment, or more accurately, the purification process, enables the soul to undergo a process of rehabilitation and cleansing so that

it may ultimately experience that which it wants most – an intimate relationship with G-d its very source..

Indeed, the Talmud relates how *Acher*, the renegade rabbi (whom we discussed in Chapter two) was judged so severely that he wasn't even allowed to enter into Hell! Only the entreaties of Rabbi *Meir*, the great Sage who studied under him, got him accepted into Hell. The Talmud relates there that Rabbi *Meir* prayed that *Acher* be allowed to spend time in *Gehinnom* so that eventually he will get into Paradise. His prayer was answered in the affirmative. A fire was seen emerging from *Acher's* grave, as an indication that he was allowed into *Gehinnom*. It took several generations – to the days of Rabbi *Yochanan*, the Talmudic sage – who prayed for *Acher's* soul to be permitted into Paradise.

In effect, the process of Hell in Judaism is to separate the soul the soul accumulates in this world when it functions together with the body. It is the ultimate remover of the bodily influences from the soul and thereby liberates the soul from all and any limiting barriers. Far from being a “pitchforked” guarded place, *Gehinnom* is an expression of G-d's benevolence. Hell, in Judaism, is the ultimate liberating agent.

Generally, the souls of the average person does not have to spend more than twelve months. Thus, the recitation of *kaddish* – which helps the soul go through the cleansing

process – is not said for more than eleven months, so as not to imply that the person for whom *kaddish* is being said deserved the maximum “sentence.”

In conclusion, one further caveat should be touched upon. According to Maimonides, there are certain individuals whose souls never make it to paradise. They are so evil that their relationship with G-d is forever severed. This is not the place to discuss the various opinions that have been expressed about this matter. Suffice it to say that these individuals are the exception rather than the rule. The rule being that the process of *Gehinnom* is a temporary one; a prelude to the blissful state of Paradise, which is the reward the soul receives for its good in this world.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the soul by virtue of its struggle in this world, reveals latent energies that enable it to grow with quantum leaps.

Even after the soul leaves the body, it is still charged with the momentum it developed in this world and keeps on traveling. In the words of our Talmudic sages: “Torah scholars have no rest in this world or in the next world, as it says: ‘They go from strength to strength, they appear before G-d in Zion.’”

But, since the soul’s energy is derived from its efforts when it was associated with a body, the soul always seeks a further relationship with the positive actions of our physical

world. This explains why *kaddish* recitation, or any mitzvah that is performed in behalf of a departed soul, is beneficial for that soul. Not only is it good for the soul who is going through travail in the next world on account of their recalcitrant behavior in this world, but even the *tzadik*, the righteous person, stands to gain from our actions in his/her behalf.

Every action taken in the merit of the deceased relative of friend – particularly a child – connects the soul with the challenges of our world and enables it to grow in ways that the soul on its own could not. But we will return to the soul's desire to return in a later chapter – G-d willing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
DIVINE ECOLOGY:
REINCARNATION
REINCARNATION IS JEWISH

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DIVINE ECOLOGY: REINCARNATION REINCARNATION IS JEWISH

When the soul stands before the heavenly courts, angels carrying wagonloads of *Mitzvot* and transgressions, come before the tribunal to argue for and against the soul of the deceased.

In actuality the angels, we are taught, are the spiritual energies that we generated by virtue of our *mitzvot* or the transgressions. The positive energies struggle with the negative energies to determine whether our soul is ready to go straight to Paradise or does it have to endure the painful “liberating” process of *Gehinnom*, to cleans the soul and allow it to enter Paradise at a later time.

In Kabbalah we are taught that in addition to the “traditional” forms of soul “rehabilitation” there is one more method: This is called *Gilgul*, literally rolling (recycling?), or reincarnation.

Reincarnation – unlike the afterlife, heaven, hell, Moshiach and the Messianic Era, Resurrection of the dead – is not mentioned explicitly in the Bible or the Talmud, the two most authoritative texts of the Jewish religion. The glaring

omission has led some great Jewish leaders, such as Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon*, to conclude that it is not a Jewish belief. Only after the *Zohar* – authored by the second century's Rabbi *Shimon bar Yochai* – was publicized in the thirteenth century, where the concept of *Gilgul* receives considerable attention, did the belief in *gilgul* become part of mainstream Judaism.

This does not mean that Judaism changed its view or adopted some other religious view, but that this belief had its time for its popularization.

Just as Kabbalah in general was a discipline that was confined to a limited number of initiates, while some of the greatest Talmudic sages, were unaware of its secrets, similarly, the knowledge of *gilgul* was confined to a select few. The majority of sages and of people in general, had no reason to know about *gilgul*.

In the words of King Solomon: “For everything there is a time. There is a time for... and a time for...” The Midrash applies this verse to the manner in which the Torah in general was revealed to this world. Even though the Torah was around from before the time of creation, nevertheless, G-d waited 26 generations before revealing the Torah to the world at Sinai.

Similarly, there was a time when the Talmud was written, when Maimonides introduced his novel ideas and when each

and every worthy scholar introduces his innovative insights of Torah. And while all these teachings had to have been given over at Sinai, they were all hidden until the worthy student came along at the right time in the right place to reveal them. And once this knowledge's time has come to be revealed, it becomes the property of all of Israel.

What is true for Kabbalah in general is true of *gilgul* in particular. From the time the *Zohar* had been popularized, *gilgul* became accepted as a basic belief in Judaism. All scholars of all backgrounds, Chassidim, non-Chassidim such as *the Gaon of Vilna*, *Ashkenazic* or *Sephardic* Torah scholars all discuss and accept the belief in *gilgul* and have interpreted Biblical verses to accommodate this belief.

The question that we will discuss now is not whether reincarnation is a Jewish belief, for that is a foregone conclusion, but what is its function and purpose?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

REALIZING ONE'S FULL POTENTIAL

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REALIZING ONE'S FULL POTENTIAL

What reincarnation accomplishes is very simple. Whatever the soul messed up during its first stay in this physical world, it can make up when it returns in another body.

More specifically, there can be two reasons as to why the soul must return. Firstly, when the person – soul and body – transgress, the sin causes a stain and defect within the soul. Sometimes, *Gehinnom* is determined to be the most effective way of cleansing the soul. In other situations it is deemed that the soul can only rectify what harm was caused to itself by living life over again.

An illustration of this approach to reincarnation can be provided in a famous story that occurred with the Ba'al Shem Tov.

The Ba'al Shem Tov was once visited by a curious visitor. When asked by the Ba'al Shem Tov, if he needed a blessing for anything, the arrogant man replied by saying, 'Thank G-d, I have everything. I am a rich man, I am in good health and I really don't need any more blessings.'

When the Ba'al Shem Tov heard this man's smug reply, the Ba'al Shem Tov offered to tell him a story.

There were once two very close friends, who grew up together and shared everything. After they got married and separated, they still would correspond to one another. Gradually, the vicissitudes of life and the many business concerns brought their infrequent correspondence to a halt. In the meantime both of them prospered greatly

But the wheel of fortune is forever turning, and one of the two lost all of his possessions. But, not to worry, he said to himself. My former friend will certainly be happy to give me a loan so I can get back on my feet. Sure enough his friend received him graciously and was very upset to hear of his erstwhile friend's bad fortune. He didn't even wait to be asked, and volunteered a substantial gift to his friend, which got him back on his feet.

Then, the benefactor's fortune began to go downhill. When he stood at the brink of bankruptcy he traveled to his former friend, convinced that he would get the same favorable treatment as he had given. But, alas his former friend didn't even have time to see him, and through his servant he delivered his regrets for not being able to help.

According to one version of the story, the cycle of fortune turned once more and the miser once again benefited from the generosity of his former friend. When the wheels of

fortune turned a third time, the miser once more acted in the worst possible way.

The two finally left this world. When the miser was brought before the heavenly court, there was absolutely no defense for his ingratitude. It was decided, the Ba'al Shem Tov, continued his story, that his soul would have to descend into this world again. Once more he would be a wealthy person and would be tested as to whether he would show some measure of compassion for the poor.

Sure enough, this reincarnated magnate was interrupted one day by the knocking at his door. A poor, emaciated beggar appeared and pleaded for food. The rich man slammed the door in his face and returned to his business. The poor man left and having not been fed for quite sometime, he died and the soul of the rich man failed miserably in rectifying the purpose for which it had descended again...

Upon hearing this, the arrogant rich man fainted. He was the one who just a few days earlier caused the untimely death of a poor man and destroyed his soul's opportunity to rehabilitate itself. The Ba'al Shem Tov gave this man a long program of penance to atone for his sins. Needless to say, this man became a very generous benefactor, whose home and heart were open to all.

We can only speculate. But the reason this man's sin was not cleansed by *Gehinnom*, could be attributed to the fact that the good that he did not accomplish and the miserly behavior that left an indelible mark on society, could not be corrected simply by a cleansing process. This soul had to come back and reverse the evil that they caused the first time around.

This does not mean to imply that reincarnation is not used for cleansing one's self from the evil they may have committed in their first lifetime. The idea that was presented here was that the process of reincarnation is not so much to cleanse the soul, but to make up for the evil that was introduced into the world. No amount of *Gehinnom* can reverse the evil that was unleashed into the world.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REALIZING THE SOUL'S POTENTIAL

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REALIZING THE SOUL'S POTENTIAL

There is also a second reason for reincarnation. It is very likely that a person can live a long, productive and righteous life, but still missed the main reason for which s/he was sent into this world. One can do everything right and nothing wrong and yet – insofar as the purpose for which one's soul was sent into this world is concerned – have accomplished zero.

Let me give a simple illustration: A person has the talent to become a brilliant researcher who can find the cure for cancer and other maladies that claim millions of lives. Yet, when they were at the crossroads and had to make a decision as to what they should do, accepted a position in a family business. Once employed in the business, he is honest, conducts business with integrity, gives a fair amount to charity and is an all-around good person.

If we had to judge this person on his actions, he would score a perfect A. There is not a flaw in this person's behavior and there is nothing wrong with choosing a business career. This person cannot be faulted in any way.

Yet, one cannot deny the fact that this person has not realized his full potential. Quite apart from the fact that the world lost a major force that could have transformed the world in a positive way, this individual's soul has been "asleep" insofar as its true abilities are concerned.

Everyone has heard the slogan "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Well, it is far worse for a soul, which possesses far more than just intellectual know-how – for it to not express its full potential.

Gehinnom and other forms of cleansing cannot assist the soul in realizing its full potential, for as we have discussed in Chapter sixteen, only the soul's engagement with the physical world can make all of its hidden resources come to the surface. No action in the next world can help the soul that wasted its potential. For that the soul must return to the physical world, clad once more in a physical body.

And unlike the eastern notion that the body is no more than a garment that the soul wears and tears and that sheds it to be attired with a new one, the Jewish mystical view of reincarnation is to enhance the soul and enable it to realize its full potential. This is a feat it cannot do without the body.

The following story was related by Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem to Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, *

Rabbi Adam sent the following story and message to Rabbi Israel. It was this story that moved the Ba'al Shem Tov to become one of the most famous and influential leaders of

* Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem was the leader of a clandestine organization, the forerunner of the Chassidic movement, consisting of mystics who served the Jewish community materially and spiritually. These mystics were disguised as simple laborers and craftsmen, but behind their disguise were the personalities of great tzadikkin and brilliant talmudic and Kabbalistic scholars.

Rabbi Adam was attempting to convince Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (his eventual successor and founder of the Chassidic movement) to assume a public role as leader of this society of hidden *Tzadikim*.

Rabbi Israel refused to take the initiative that would catapult him into a public figure with all the fame and honor it would bring him. Rabbi Adam felt that the time had come for the Ba'al Shem Tov to shed his modesty and anonymity, to start a popular movement that would sweep the Jewish world off its feet and rejuvenate the sagging spirits of the Jewish nation. Indeed, Rabbi Adam was convinced that this was the very purpose for which Rabbi Israel's pure soul had descended into this world.

world Jewry and whose influence and inspiration popularized the mystical dimension of Judaism.

About 400 years ago (about 200 before the time the story was first told) there lived a simple, G-d fearing Jew in the Holy city of Tzefat in Israel

One day he heard a knocking on his door. When he opened the door he was startled to find none other than Elijah the prophet. Elijah was sent from "on high" to reward this simple Jew.

'What is it that you did on the day of your Bar-Mitzvah?' Elijah asked. 'Because of this extraordinary act,' Elijah continued 'it was decided that you will be granted a special reward. I was sent to teach you Torah, the deepest secrets of Torah. But, there is one condition. You must tell me what it is that you did to warrant this unusual reward?'

'What I did, was for G-d and G-d alone. I will not divulge this information to you or anyone else. If that means that you will not be able to give me this reward, so be it, the humble Jew replied.

Elijah was startled. .It was unheard of that a Jew should turn down the most incredible reward, just because he did not want anyone to know what he had done to earn that reward! Such altruism was unparalleled!

There was a furor in heaven. And it was decided that the purity of this Jew's intentions entitled him to receive the reward without any strings attached. So Elijah was dispatched to teach this Jew Torah, without ever discovering the original deed that he had done for the sake of G-d and G-d alone.

Needless to say, this Jew – under the tutelage of Elijah the prophet – became proficient in all aspects of Torah, including and especially the mystical teaching. He led a life of simplicity, and no time did anyone ever discover that this simple Jew was actually one of the greatest saints and scholars who merited the reward of learning Torah from Elijah the prophet.

When his time came to depart this world and his holy soul was brought before the heavenly court, there was no angel that could possibly find a fault with this soul. It was pure, unblemished. There was not a tinge of ego and selfishness. Everything he did, particularly the act he performed on the day of his Bar-Mitzvah – was strictly for G-d. The greatest rewards of Paradise were awaiting this remarkable sage.

There was, however, one voice of dissent. 'True, this prosecuting angel acknowledged, this was a flawless soul. But, what benefit did the world derive from his holiness and knowledge. Did he teach anyone? Did he impart his mystical knowledge to disciples? Did he lead the masses in the path

of Torah by virtue of his inspirational talks to them? The answer was no. He was a hidden tzadik. His knowledge remained with him alone. This soul did not realize its potential of illuminating the world with its radiant knowledge and holiness'.

The Heavenly Court was dumfounded. There was no angel that could find a "defense" for that. And so it was decided that this holy soul must once more descend into this world in another body. And when this soul in its new incarnation will grow into a saintly person of similar stature to its first incarnation, the soul must then be revealed and become famous so that everyone could benefit from his knowledge and holiness.

'This soul,' Rabbi Adam confided with Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, 'is your soul. Yours is the soul of the Jew from Tzefat. The very purpose for your soul descending into this world is for the express purpose of become a great Jewish leader who will share his light with everyone. If you absolutely refuse to become a public figure, you will have to leave this world and your soul will have to make the journey again and again until it fulfils its purpose'

Upon discovering the secret of his soul, Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov complied with the wishes of his mentor and the purpose for which his soul entered this world. That is how

we know of the great Jewish leader known as the Ba'al Shem Tov.

In this powerful story, we come face to face with a soul that was flawless. Nevertheless, it had to descend again to fulfil its potential that it had not realized the first time around. It was not a sin, G-d forbid, or a character flaw, it wasn't even the failure to do a mitzvah that required the reincarnation process. It was the failure of the soul to realize its full potential.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

KNOWING YOUR MISSION

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KNOWING YOUR MISSION

At this point, one is entitled to ask a very simple but crucial question. If the soul that we possess was here before because it did something wrong that it has to correct or that it did not realize its full potential, how do we know what it is that we have to do?

If we would have been told at some point in our lives that we are here for the second time (or third etc.) and this is what we did wrong, we would make sure that we won't have to come down again. But since most people, do not know anything about their soul's past history, how is one to know what they are here for?

A related question can be raised. Why is it that we do not have the knowledge of who we are in terms of earlier incarnations? There are accounts of great masters of Kabbalah, such as the Ari, who were able to see a person's complete soul-history. But, the overwhelming majority of people do not possess this ability. Isn't it curious that such an important part of our past has been hidden from us?

Isn't it strange that the information that will guide us in the right direction has been denied us?

In truth, there is an analogy in another aspect of our life's experience that is withheld from us. Before we are born, we are taught the entire Torah. At the time of birth, the Talmud relates, an angel strikes and causes us to forget all that we have been taught.. The question has been raised. Why did we have to learn the entire Torah before we were born, only to forget it before we actually emerge into the world and need that information?

The answer is that since Torah is inherently above human intellect, it had to be instilled in us before we were born. Otherwise, we could never fathom its divine depth no matter how hard we try. However, the objective in life is to reach whatever heights and depths with our own effort. The teaching of Torah before we are born is to give us a boost, but, the actual study must come through our own efforts.

Similarly, the fact that we have been here before gives us a boost in our second or third incarnation. Some of the energies that were already generated in our first life remain with us throughout the various journeys of the soul.

Many of us are familiar with the citation in the *Haggadah* of Passover. There Rabbi *Elazar ben Azaryah* states that "I am like seventy years old and I have not prevailed..." The Talmud gives the background to help us understand his

statement that “I am like seventy..” Rabbi Elazar was appointed *nasi*, or leader of the Sanhedrin. However, he was only 18 years old and it would not have been becoming for him to lead the venerable sages of this institution. Miraculously, the Talmud records, he grew a white bread overnight and appeared as if he was seventy.

A difficulty arises. If he was only seventeen and only appeared to be seventy, why was he so surprised that he could not win an argument against the older sages? According to the Ari, the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Elazar was actually seventy years old, if we count the fifty-two years of his former incarnation of Samuel the prophet. Rabbi Elazar was truly endowed with the resources from his previous life.

What emerges from the above is that we benefit from the earlier life in perhaps a similar manner that we benefit from our pre-natal Torah course. But, as in the analogy, to give us freedom to choose and work on our own, the information is withheld from our conscious minds. We do not know who we were, but we benefit from who we were. If we would know, it could impair our own efforts.

For example, if we discovered that we were some evil individuals, we could become demoralized. If we were great saints, we could feel smug and confident in the knowledge of how much we already accomplished.

One of the aforementioned questions, however, still persists. If we don't know who we were and for what purpose our soul has descended again into this world, how are we to succeed?

There are actually two approaches to this matter. At first glance these two approaches will appear to be opposites. The first approach is to look for the area of one's observance that one finds most exhilarating. Very often, we discover an attraction – not G-d forbid, at the expense of other Mitzvot – to a particular Mitzvah. Whenever we do this mitzvah we feel uplifted and inspired. It might even energize other Mitzvot that we do.

There is a Talmudic precedent to this phenomenon. A certain rabbi was once asked about his father: “What was your father extra careful about?” he meant to ask what mitzvah his father displayed greater conscientiousness than others. The word he used for “careful” in Hebrew is “*zahir*,” which also carries an added meaning of “light” or “radiance.” Accordingly, his question can now be reinterpreted, as it is in Mystical literature, “What mitzvah did your father perform that introduced light into everything?”

It is a mitzvah that brings light into everything that one might conclude is the purpose for which one's soul entered into this world.

There is, however, a seemingly opposite method that can be used in determining what one's specific mission is. Or in other words, what did we not accomplish adequately in our earlier life? This method views any mitzvah or positive direction in life that we encounter the greatest difficulty, as the area of observance that is most important for our soul. As in the story of Adam and Eve, the fact that they could not resist the temptation of not eating one particular fruit (that would have been permitted to them if they would have waited a few hours, according to the Midrash), was an indication that this mitzvah – as insignificant as it may sound to others – was for them their most important mission in life.

The difficulties we encounter in doing Mitzvot are rarely commensurate with the actual degree of hardship. While it makes sense that a mitzvah that involves arduous physical labor, grueling emotional stress or that heavily taxes one's finances, may be hard for a person to do, the hardships that we actually experience have nothing to do with the reality. There are some instances where the mitzvah is extremely simple and yet we find it hard to motivate ourselves to do it, and conversely, there are times that a mitzvah seems hard to do and there is very little resistance for an individual.

Whenever a specific deed is difficult to perform, it is a signal to us. Perhaps it is because this is precisely the area of

life that our soul has descended into this world to accomplish. Perhaps, this area of observance was the one area that our soul failed in the last time around. The hardships we encounter or the exhilaration we experience while doing a mitzvah is often a signal to us that this is what we should concentrate on.

This also explains why in the mystical tradition, a spiritual mentor – such as a Chassidic Rebbe – always played a central role in the lives of the mystical initiates. While Judaism gives us a general direction in our lives, detailing the 248 positive commandments and the 365 negative ones, we are in need of a more specific guidepost for direction in our lives. And while any conscientious person, who is objective and a friend, can and should be consulted for direction, there is still a need for someone who knows our soul better than we do. The genuine Chassidic Rebbe could see who we are and who we were and what direction we should be following.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MULTIPLE INCARNATIONS AND RESURRECTION

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MULTIPLE INCARNATIONS AND RESURRECTION

There is one outstanding issue with regard to reincarnation and Resurrection. As we will discuss in a subsequent chapter (Chapter 19), one of Judaism's fundamental beliefs is that in the Messianic age the dead will be brought back to life. This belief known as *Techiyat Hameitim* is rooted in the Bible, discussed at great length in the Talmud and elaborated on extensively in Jewish philosophical and mystical literature.

The belief in a nutshell is that all of Israel (and the righteous non-Jews as well) will be brought back to life. The exceptions are far and between.

Now, if all bodies will be resurrected, what happens to a soul that was reincarnated. Which of the two (or three etc.) bodies will be brought back to life?

This question has been raised in the *Zohar* and by other Kabbalists. The most authoritative answer seems to be that all of the bodies will be resurrected. But, the question is how?

A soul is a divine force that gives life to a body. But a soul's relationship with a body is far more complex than that. A human must exist on at least three levels.

A person has to use his mind. A person must emote. And a person has to function on a practical level. Particularly, from the Jewish perspective, a Jew's life is incomplete if s/he doesn't study Torah or use one's mind to determine the right course of action in any given situation. A person, by the dictate of the Torah must use his/hr emotions. There are Mitzvot that require that we love G-d, our fellow human being etc. There are times that we must have feelings of fear, awe and reverence. But, the bulk of the divine imperatives in the Torah involve how we act in a physical way, towards G-d or our fellow human being.

Each one of these three basic areas of human expression requires a special component of the soul. The soul must possess the capacity to intellectualize, emote and act.

We also know that there are people whose soul functions primarily in one of the three areas, but not in al. For example there are those who can sit and study endlessly and rarely express emotions to anything and rarely act beyond the absolute minimum. Conversely, there are those whose emotions are powerful and who lack the other two dimensions of human expression, and there are those who are doers, but do not emote and intellectualize very much.

When we see these diverse individuals, their differences can be attributed to a predominance of one aspect of the soul.

Now, we are taught in Kabbalah that each soul possesses all three components. Each of these three components comprises elements of the other two as well as its own. For example the intellectual component of the soul also has the capacity to emote and act. These ancillary faculties, however, are extensions of the dominant trait of the intellect. The sheer force of logic can dictate that one has a certain emotion and acts in a prescribed fashion. Because I understand that a untamed lion is a dangerous thing, I fear the lion and distance myself from it. One does not have to be an emotional person or a very down-to-earth individual to follow that course of action.

When a person's soul first comes into this world it is endowed with the capacity to function on each of the three basic levels of existence, intellectually, emotionally and practically. When such an individual fails to express the emotional and practical aspects of his/her personality, for example, their soul has not realized its full potential and must come down again. The second "trip" however, is different from the first one.

Whereas the first time down the soul was in need of its most pure and unadulterated intellectual faculties, the second time around they are not necessary. That aspect of

the soul had already expressed itself. Now, the emotional and practical functions of the soul are in need of expression. In the second incarnation, only two parts of the soul will descend. The third part that had achieved its goal need not enter the world.

Similarly, when the soul, the second time around, excels in expressing emotion, but had a hard time translating that emotion in practical deeds, the soul must descend a third time. But in this instance, only the part of the soul that is focused on action has to descend. The other two parts can stay in their heavenly abode. And even though it is only the practical side of the soul that is now present in the body, the soul has a full complement of intellectual as well as emotional faculties. For as stated, each component of the soul represents a full complement of intellectual, emotional and practical potential.

We can now understand the process of *Techiyat Hameitim*—resurrection of the Dead as it pertains to multiple lives. Each dimension of the soul that had been dominant and most forcefully expressed within that life will animate that body that gave the soul its ability to express itself. So if Joe Schwartz was a brilliant scholar, the intellectual part of that general soul will be reintroduced into Joe Schwartz' resurrected body. Now if Joe Schwartz' soul then descended into Abe Cohen's body to make up for the lack of emotional

expression, that emotional compartment of the soul will animate Abe Cohen's reconstructed body, and so on.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
THE MESSIANIC AGE:
THE COMPLETION OF THE
PALACE
THE SECOND GOAL

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THE MESSIANIC AGE: THE COMPLETION OF THE PALACE THE SECOND GOAL

In the last few chapters we have been discussing the mission of the soul in this world. Its goal is to struggle with the material world and the obstacles that are posed by our bodily existence. Ultimately, the soul reaches a higher level than it was at before it “descended” into this world. Moreover, the soul realizes its full potential. If things do not work out, there are remedies. Gehinom (Hell) and other forms of painful spiritual experiences are a cathartic process that rids the soul of its grease and grime.

In certain cases, the soul must descend once more (or several times) to make up for what it had lost, and thereby allow the soul to reach its state of perfection.

Our discussion thus far, has centered itself on the purpose of existence from the vantage point of the soul. From that vantage point, if it were the only one, we would have to explain all of Jewish beliefs in terms of how the soul reaches its ultimate goal.

Indeed, this seems to be the view of Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher, Talmudist and leader. In his *Mishneh Torah* as well as in his other works he devotes much attention to the notion that the Messianic Age and the Resurrection of the Dead, are all stages in the development of the world that enable the soul to mature and grow.

Everything, according to Maimonides revolves around the soul. All of creation, in his opinion, was put here to serve the person whose soul and spiritual life – i.e., a life of Torah and Mitzvot – is his primary concern.

And all such people, whose pursuits are Torah oriented during the period of exile and hardship, will either merit the Messianic Age when it will be possible for them to study Torah and observe the Mitzvot undeterred and unimpeded, or will be resurrected in the future. Either way, they will be given the opportunity to excel in the pursuits of the soul, because life in the Messianic Era will be so complete that it will ensure that Torah study and Mitzvot observance will be on the highest level possible. That, in turn, will provide them with the means to realize the highest state of bliss in the Afterlife, when the soul will finally leave this physical world for good.

In Maimonides' view, all of physical existence is secondary to the spiritual existence of the soul. .

This is not the view of the Kabbalists. From the perspective of Jewish mystical thought, there is another way of viewing the ultimate purpose of existence. This is to view existence from the vantage point of the body and the physical world. This does not mean that the soul is unimportant or that the soul does not enjoy the greatest spiritual bliss 1 the end. What it does suggest, however, is that the ultimate goal is not for the soul to grow, but that it is for the world – body and material existence – to change and be transformed. The soul, by virtue of being the catalyst in this process, will not only not suffer, but also be given the opportunity to reach its own state of perfection.

Thus, the Kabbalists are of the opinion that the ultimate reward will be for the co-existence of the soul within the body. And this will occur in the future when the dead are brought back to life. This, state, they declare is the ultimate and final state of existence. We will discuss this in greater depth, G-d willing, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MESSIANISM: AN INTEGRAL PART OF CREATION

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MESSIANISM: AN INTEGRAL PART OF CREATION

Every culture and ism has its own messianic agenda. Even the most diabolically evil forces such as Communism and even Nazism were messianic movements in their own perverse way. Evolution, is also a form of messianism, where the belief of constant changes and developments that ultimately produce a more advanced form of existence is at the very heart and root of evolution. And, of course, all religions have their own versions of the messianic age of perfection and utopia..

The differences between one culture and another are in the way each perceives what is good and ideal, noble and blissful. One's utopia can be the other's hell. Another difference can be in the way one imagines how things will change; incrementally or abruptly. But, everyone who breathes is motivated to go on because in their mind and hearts there is a belief that the world is going to change for the better.

Belief in a messianic age is thus an integral part of humanity. One can posit that what makes people tick is the

notion that their existence is an integral part of the universes inexorable movement and journey towards perfection.

Where does this messianic faith come from? Form the context of Jewish Mysticism it can be suggested that since G-d's intention in creating the universe is to have the world develop to the point that it conforms to G-d's plan, this G-dly intent is the spiritual DNA of the entire cosmos. Everything by virtue of it being part of the creation is endowed, consciously or subconsciously, with the drive towards the messianic goal.

Needless to say, this does not mean that every messianic movement is true or good, what it means that every messianic movement contains within it a kernel of truth. It is crucial that one goes to the source of truth – the Torah – for an understanding as to what constitutes the messianic ideal in all of its ramifications.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THREE FORMS OF MESSIANISM

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THREE FORMS OF MESSIANISM

While there are multitudes of messianic philosophies, they can all be reduced to three forms.

(a) An evolutionary messianic belief. This theory posits that the world, of its own accord, moves in the right direction. Ultimately, the world will evolve into a utopian existence. One can buttress this notion, by referring to the belief that evil cannot survive for the long haul. Criminals who are initially successful ultimately fail, because they turn on each other and society will ultimately gird itself to fight evil, because evil is painful, and we don't want pain. This belief does not need a savior, a Messiah or a G-d oriented attitude.

(b) A G-dly interventionist theory. This theory posits that the world cannot change on its own, or that it will take forever for that to happen, but needs the intervention of G-d, or a G-dlike Messianic figure, to alter the world, by imposing a higher order of discipline, that will force the world to change.

(c) A charismatic leader theory. This theory believes that if a powerful leader rallies his troops behind him they can change the world. We have seen evidence of this phenomenon in our own century in the side of evil. Whether it was Lenin, Stalin, Hitler or Mao, single individuals were successful in forever changing the social and political landscape. If this can be done for evil, the theory goes, it can be done for good as well.

One can ask as to which theory or belief does Judaism subscribe?

The answer is (d) none of the above, and (e) all of the above!

Let's start with none of the above. Answer (a) is inadequate because, according to the "evolutionary" theory, our century – with the Holocaust and the two deadliest wars, etc. – should have been the most humane of all the centuries thus far. Man's cruelty to man have never been greater than in our modern day and age.

Answer (b) is insufficient because if this G-dly figure is the key to changing the world, what is He waiting for? Why didn't he intervene before? And furthermore, what are we needed for? What is our role in a world where G-d makes it happen anyhow?

Option (c) is likewise flawed. What guarantee is there that a evil leader might not come and undo the good that a good charismatic leader wrought?

Now, to the point. From Judaism's perspective, all three ingredients are necessary for the messianic age to occur. There is a evolutionary dynamic, but it requires a divine intervention and a charismatic leader – Moshiach – as well.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MOSHIACH: PURPOSE OF CREATION

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MOSHIACH: PURPOSE OF CREATION

Jewish mysticism puts the messianic issue in perspective.

When G-d created the universe He created two realities. If we would want to use modern day terminology we can say that G-d created reality and a virtual reality. In kabbalistic terminology, “G-d filled all the space. G-d then withdrew and created a vacuum.” G-d is reality, the vacuum is virtual reality.

he reason for this duality is the very basis of existence. In the words of the Midrash: “G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowliest of worlds.” This means that G-d wanted a world to exist that has an identity of its own – virtual reality – that does not readily recognize true reality by its nature. The object is that the world – given absolute free choice to do whatever it wants – will ultimately choose to accept the G-dly reality as the only reality. In simple terms this means that the world will eventually recognize its true divine nature.

How is this accomplished? And what guarantee is there that it will ever occur if we are given free choice?

To facilitate the realization of G-d's purpose in creation, G-d gave us the Torah. With its Mitzvot (G-dly commands) that are "channels of Divine energy," that involve and flow into physical objects and functions, the Torah introduces the divine into the physical. Little by little the world becomes a G-dly world. When a sufficient amount of Mitzvot are performed and the positive G-dly energy released envelops the world, the world will ultimately be so thoroughly divine that it will realize its goal – this is the Messianic age.

It isn't as easy as it sounds. Evil was created by G-d to stand in the way of this process. With the increased generation of positive energies, there is a commensurate increase in the evil forces. So it seems that we're back again at square one.

In truth, this is not the case. While it is true that to balance the increased good and holiness in the world there is also an increase of evil, there is still a fundamental difference between the two. Evil is only on the surface. Evil cannot accumulate. Once an evil act is committed, its effects wane with the passage of time, atonement of the one who committed the crime and the suffering of the criminal.

The good, however, that we perform can never wane with the passage of time. There is nothing that can weaken the power of good. And all the good of our ancestors

accumulate to create a formidable force of goodness and holiness that is infinitely more potent than any evil that might still be around. The power of good is internalized and cannot always be seen. It is like the proverbial tip of the iceberg. To counter the more powerful good, G-d allows evil to remain on the surface, so that it appears to be more powerful.

Another way of looking at the conflict between good and evil is to view evil as a veil that obscures the power of good. But once we get past the veil, we realize that good is real and substantive and here to stay.

Now, despite the fact that there seems to be an evolutionary process going on – whereby the cumulative good of past generations, coupled with our own efforts slowly, but surely, transform the world– it is a G-dly power that enables this to happen. The Mitzvot are not our invention and creation. They are G-d's instruments and channels. But, if not for us who overcome all the obstacles in the path of observing the Mitzvot, the world cannot possibly change..

Accordingly, there is a symbiotic relationship between G-d and ourselves in transforming the world. Only our efforts and struggles to overcome the impediments can unleash the divine power in the observance of Mitzvot, but only the Mitzvot have the divine power to change the physical world.

How do we unleash the power within ourselves? This is where the role of great Jewish leaders comes into the picture. Considering the formidable obstacles that have stood in our way, it were the great Jewish leaders that revealed the soul-powers within, that enabled us to prevail. Depending on the magnitude of the obstacle, is the degree of inspiration that we need from our leaders. In truth, it is more than just inspiration and role modeling, but their souls are inextricable bound with our souls. It is through this connection that they unleash the hidden powers within.

Of all the period in our history, the one in which the greatest soul powers are necessary to be revealed, is the generation of the Messianic age. Precisely because it is the age when evil will be going out of business, it poses the most formidable challenge since it is its last stand.

Moreover, inasmuch as G-d creates a balance between the forces of good and the forces of evil, it follows that at the point of the Messianic age, the accumulation of holiness is greater than ever before, and therefore the evil is most potent as well.

To overcome these obstacles we have to awaken the innermost essence of our souls. This can only be done by a Jewish leader who is of the caliber of Moshiach, a soul that is connected to the very essence of our souls and can awaken the most unprecedented soul powers that we

possess. This is the role Moshiach plays in the days before the Redemption becomes a reality.

We can now appreciate the role that Moshiach plays. It is the leader of **every** generation that is responsible for the response the Jewish people make to the challenges of that particular generation. Moshiach, following in the footsteps of all the leaders before him, and also accessing all the leadership[powers of his predecessors, awakens the Jewish people in an unprecedented manner. Their response is such that it unleashes their essence and they overcome all the obstacles, and their Mitzvot serve as the final catalyst in transforming the world into a dwelling place for G-d.

It is the combined efforts of G-d, through His Mitzvot, the Jewish people and all of humankind through their commitment to their observance and the great Jewish leaders, culminating with Moshiach, who unleashes the soul powers of the Jewish people and the world. Once this occurs they have the ability to resist all the obstacles in their path and unleash the requisite holiness to change the world for good.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF JUDAISM

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FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF JUDAISM

We can now appreciate why the belief in Moshiach is considered to be one of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. To believe in a world that will not lead to the Messianic Era, is to believe that G-d's plan will never come to fruition. That, of course, is a denial of G-d' power.

It is therefore basic to Jewish belief that the world will ultimately come around to G-d's stated desire that it become a "Dwelling place for Him." Thus, the Talmud states that "the world was created for Moshiach." This means that the objective G-d had in initially creating the universe was that a person (Moshiach) will come and unleash the powers of the Jewish people, which would push the level of good "over the top" and usher in the Messianic Age.

From this vantage point, every time we do a mitzvah we make the world around us a bit more G-dly. In a limited sense that is what Moshiach and the Messianic Age is all about.

More specifically, Kabbalah speaks of the process that leads to Moshiach as the process of “Birurim,” or “Avodat Habirurim,” the service of refinement.

Kabbalah refers to the process of creation as a process that occurs in two (albeit simultaneous) stages. The first stage or world is called the “World of *Tohu* (Chaos).” The second (not in time but in level) is the world of Tikkun, correction or perfection.

In the world of Tohu the energies are intense and the vessels (or, instruments) are too “small” to contain that energy. As a result the vessels shatter and the powerful energy “falls” and becomes embedded in all the physical properties of our physical world. That intense energy is now captive within the confines of the physical world.

The second world of Tikkun, is a world wherein the energy level is moderate, but the vessels are extremely well designed to contain the energy. As a result, there is much more room for a harmonious blend of spiritual energies, allowing for much diversity. By contrast, in the world of Tohu, each and every level must stand by itself, because the intensity of Tohu is so great that if it would come in conflict with another level, equally strong, they would clash.

There are people whose souls are from this higher world of Tohu, and by nature they cannot coexist with those who have differing views. According to the Kabbalists the

students of Rabbi Akiva – who perished in a plague that struck them during the period between passover and Shavuot, because they didn't treat each other with respect – acted as they did because their souls were from the world of Tohu. Each one of them had such a powerful soul that he couldn't coexist with another whose approach differed.

Now, every time we do a mitzvah, which involves a physical object, and is done in a specific location and at designated time by a person expending physical energy, they refine the sparks of holiness that are embedded in the physical aspects of the world. This means that the intense lights of Tohu that are confined within the physical world are liberated. The act of the mitzvah – since it occurs within the framework of the world of Tikkun, which has ample vessels, enables us not only to liberate this powerful energy, but also to guarantee that it will be internalized within ourselves. This is what the process of Moshiach is all about – it is to generate the intense and transcendent lights of Tohu into the broad and ample vessels of Tikkun.

In simple, English this means that the process of Moshiach is to introduce a dimension of G-dly energy that is by nature too powerful for us to contain and yet, we will have the capacity to contain it and internalize it.

One final metaphor that is often used to describe the process of Moshiach is the following: When G-d created the

world, as we have mentioned several times, His objective was to eventually have a dwelling place in the lowest spheres of existence, i.e., our physical existence. What we have been doing since the Torah was given at Mount Sinai was to build this Palace for G-d. Every Mitzvah we perform is like another brick. When enough Mitzvot are done, the palace is finally complete and G-d can feel comfortable moving in and making this world His dwelling.

Thus it is said of the Messianic Age that it will be characterized by the presence of G-d that will be felt by every living being. It is we through our efforts now that makes that happen. Moshiach is the Jewish leader whose leadership will “push us over the top” so to speak and perfect the palace and thereby usher in the Messianic Age.

This process actually begun at Sinai at which time G-d descended on Mount Sinai and revealed Himself to the world. It was as if He was saying to us: “This is what it will be like in the future Messianic Age when the world is ready for My presence. Now, I am giving you the Torah and Mitzvot. These are the instruments of bringing Me into the world in a overt way. The rest is history.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
THE RESURRECTION OF THE
DEAD
A JEWISH BELIEF

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THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD A JEWISH BELIEF

One of the most under-emphasized Jewish beliefs is the resurrection of the dead. This is in stark contrast to the way things were in the days of Maimonides. Maimonides bemoans the fact that everyone was talking about the resurrection of the dead. People were asking questions such as “How will we arise?” “Will we arise with our clothing?” etc. ‘

It is also interesting to note that Maimonides was criticized for mentioning very little about the resurrection in his Thirteen Principles of Faith. He was even charged with denial of that belief. As a result, he was compelled to pen his “Treatise on Resurrection” where he makes it abundantly clear that the belief in the resurrection of the dead is a fundamental principle of Judaism, that is rooted in the Torah. His reason for giving it short shrift, he explains is precisely because everyone is aware of its implications and were dwelling on the minutiae, such as whether we will arise with our clothing or not. Maimonides felt that we

should pay more attention to the spiritual concept of the afterlife.

Suffice it to say that in the opinion of Maimonides the belief in the Resurrection is an integral part of Judaism. It is taken from the Biblical book of Daniel (12:2) which states: “Many of them that sleep in the land of the dust shall awake.” Again in the very last verse of Daniel (12:12) this belief is reiterated: “And you shall rest, and shall stand up to your lot, at the end of the days.”

The prophet Isaiah (26:19) had already alluded to this belief when he states: “Your dead shall be revived, my corpses shall arise; awaken and sing you who dwell in the dust, for a dew of lights is your dew...”

Our Talmudic sages (Sanhedrin -) devoted an uncharacteristically long segment on this subject. They begin the discussion with the statement of the Mishnah that one who denies the Biblical source of the Resurrection does not share in it. (Sanhedrin)

What is most noteworthy, however, is that Maimonides who devotes little attention to this belief, nevertheless, included it as a principle of faith. The fact that he included it in his Thirteen Principles of Faith indicates that it is more than just an important belief. It is as the name “principle” implies, a foundation of Judaism. When a building has no foundation or has a weak one, it cannot stand very long.

If Maimonides considered the resurrection of the dead a principle of faith, certainly, Nachmanides and the Kabbalists would regard it as such. For as we have explained in the preceding chapter. Maimonides considered the resurrection period as a mere prelude to the afterlife where the soul divests itself of the body. Even so, Maimonides considers the belief in Resurrection as a foundation of Judaism. Despite its temporary nature, it is still basic enough of a belief to warrant inclusion in the Thirteen Principles of Faith.

How much more so, according to Nachmanides and the Kabbalists, who regard the period of the Resurrection as the final one, that it is a fundamental principle of faith.

The question is why?

Why is it so important to believe that a time will come when all the dead will be brought back to life?

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

G-D'S JUSTICE VALIDATED

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

G-D'S JUSTICE VALIDATED

Some commentators, such as the Abarbanel, explain that both the belief in the Messianic Age and the belief in the Resurrection of the Dead are basic beliefs because without them there remains an unanswered question about G-d's sense of justice and fairness. What follows is Abarbanel's thesis with added commentary based on Chassidic sources.

When we survey Jewish history and witness the untold misery the Jews have been through, it raises a question about G-d's promises to us, the chosen people.

When we look around and witness how the righteous have suffered and the wicked have prospered, it raises a question, similar to the question Abraham raise when he proposed that

G-d should spare the city of Sodom if there were ten righteous people there. Abraham demanded "Will the Judge of all the world not do justice?"

When we look at the Holocaust, there is no logical explanation that can justify the brutal murder of over a

million innocent children. Indeed one would be hard pressed to justify the murder of the other five million adults. Where they all evil that they deserved such a horrible fate? And if one will cite their imperfections, does that make G-d's system of justice make sense?

Can anyone in their right mind declare that the system that considers the horrible deaths of six million justified in light of their imperfections, is a logical system? Do any of us teach their children to react this way? Does anyone think that a non-religious person will hear this explanation and say, "You know, I didn't think of it that way. Now it makes sense to me."

Now, to be sure, G-d does not have to make sense to every one of us. In fact, He doesn't even have to make sense to anyone of us. Even Moses could not comprehend the torturous murder of Rabbi Akiva that he was shown prophetically. And when he questioned G-d about it, G-d's reply was "Be silent!" (Talmud, Menachot). But, if G-d's system of logic and fairness will never be validated by our minds, it will forever encourage those who will mock our belief in G-d. Can this possibly be what G-d wants?

But, on a deeper level, there is something far more troubling than just the prospects of some people who might be "turned off" by the appearance of divine injustice. If there is one aspect of G-d's truth – a very basic one at that

– that will never be reconciled with our minds, that means that a formidable part of our existence – our human logic – will not be permeated with the truth and justice of G-d. There would then be a gaping hole in the otherwise G-dly objective of getting this world to accept G-d.

To elaborate by way of analogy. If people would accept G-d merely because of their ability to submit to a Higher authority, but could never get their minds to absorb G-d's existence, that would mean that G-d's unity would be compromised. After all, the most important creation – the human mind – is not receptive to G-d. How then can we say that G-d's unity is absolute, when a formidable part of creation does not accept Him.

Similarly, if G-d's justice, fairness, and consistency would not be validated by our logic, that would mean that G-d is not totally and inherently consistent. In the realm of logic G-d would then not be totally consistent. When something is only partially consistent it is not really consistent.

Thus, the belief in the Messianic Age is a belief that declares that a time will come and the challenges to G-d's justice will be removed. The righteous will be rewarded. All the wrongs will be righted.

Moreover, not only will the righteous no longer suffer, but we will finally be able to understand why the suffering was necessary. And despite the fact that presently there is no

logical explanation that can justify the suffering, in the Messianic Age G-d – who is not limited by the rules of logic and the parameters of nature – will allow for that which is essentially unknowable to become knowable. In the words of the prophet Isaiah “I shall thank you G-d for having shown your wrath to me.” This does not mean that we will thank G-d in spite of His wrath, but because of it!

This is why we need the Messianic Age. And this is why it is a principle of faith. Without the Messianic Age G-d's justice and consistency would always be compromised. Thus, our very basic appreciation for G-d, depends on our belief in the Messianic Age.

The Messianic Age itself would not suffice, however, to completely validate G-d's justice. How would G-d recompense the millions of good people who had died before the Messianic Age when all the wrongs were righted? To reward them, it is necessary for the dead to be brought back to life, so that they too will reap the rewards they so justly deserve. They too will experience a revelation of G-dly light that will totally transform the woes of the past and make them intelligible to all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THREE DISTINCT PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THREE DISTINCT PRINCIPLES

We must still understand why there is a need for three distinct principles.

The first is to believe in reward and punishment in general. (This is Maimonides' eleventh principle. It should also be noted that Maimonides considers the era of reward and punishment to be primarily the afterlife enjoyed by the soul divested of its body.) This principle also validates G-d's justice and fairness, because it posits that the righteous will eventually get what they deserve and the wicked will get their just deserts.

There is then a second principle that speaks to the same objective, the validation of G-d's justice, the twelfth principle: the belief in the coming of the Moshiach who will usher in a Messianic Era. This belief adds on to the belief in the afterlife, because it a) gives the righteous greater opportunity to deserve even greater reward (as Maimonides explains in his Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah, chapter nine and in other places); b) will finally bring and end to all

suffering; c) it will enable us to finally comprehend the meaning of suffering.

The third principle associated with validating G-d's justice is the belief in the Resurrection of the Dead, the thirteenth and last principle of faith. This adds on to the last principle, a) in that it allows those souls that had died before perfecting themselves in a Messianic Era to do so; b) the reward is absolute and complete (and according to the kabbalists it will endure forever.

The question, however, remains, why is it necessary to have three distinct principles of faith to support the same objective? Aren't they just three stages in the journey of the soul, through which the soul's suffering and apparent injustices meted out to the soul is reversed and explained? Aren't they essentially three stages in the process of reward for the righteous? Isn't the objective of the Resurrection of the Dead essentially the same as the objective of the Messianic Age and the Afterlife– to rectify the wrongs of the past and to establish G-d's utter justness and fairness? Why couldn't Maimonides and others have consolidated these three beliefs into one?

These difficulties could have prompted Abarbanel to explain Maimonides' reason for considering the Resurrection to be a separate principle is because of the multiple times it is mentioned in the Talmud and that it is juxtaposed with

other fundamental principles. Though it is not conceptually a separate principle, it should be listed separately because of the attention paid to it by our sages.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

MITZVOT: AN ARTFORM

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Jewish Mysticism, introduces us to a deeper understanding of the centrality of the Messianic Age and its preeminence over the Afterlife. In addition it also explains the Resurrection of the Dead and its qualitative edge over the preceding Messianic Age.

To better understand what the Resurrection of the Dead will accomplish in terms of the nature of G-d's existence, let us analyze the relationship between the body and the soul.

Throughout this book we have referred to the duality of our existence. When we survey the purpose for which we exist there are also two goals. From the perspective of the soul, our existence within the physical world is the only way the soul can realize its full potential. The soul – by virtue of its stay in this world -- is converted from a “standing” being to a “traveling” being.

From the perspective of the body, however, there is an entirely different focus. Existence revolves around the physical world. The reason the soul enters into this world,

from the perspective of the body, is to reveal the potential of the body and the physical world at large.

These two perspectives translate into two totally different ways we look at the Mitzvot, the responsibilities G-d imposed upon us. From the perspective of the soul and its journey, every mitzvah we do liberates the soul from its bodily confinement. Every mitzvah enables the soul to discover a new and deeper dimension of spirituality within itself.

We can better appreciate the two perspectives by way of two analogies:

An actor, artist, musician, etc. are people whose task it is to show their creative abilities. When they perform there are inner talents and artistic potentials that are being realized. But, an artist cannot perform in a vacuum. The actor must have a stage, with scenery, filled with other actors. Even the audience has a share in eliciting the creative talents of the actor. The musician, likewise, has his props. His instruments, his uniform, etc.

When we analyze the relationship between the artist's self expression with the stage and props that make it happen, it is obvious that the actor's role is not to affect the props and other surroundings, but they – the props etc. – are all geared to elicit the inner potential of the actor or artist.

From this vantage-point we can view the Mitzvot as the “props” through which our souls (the artists) express themselves. Without the Mitzvot – and the entire material world, the stuff from which Mitzvot are made – our souls would not be able to grow. That means that the soul’s potential needs “external” stimuli. In this formulation, Mitzvot are a Divine “art-form.”

This approach to Mitzvot is what the eleventh principle of faith – of reward and punishment – is based upon. If the belief in reward and punishment is important for Judaism because it implies that we are accountable for our actions, then it should have been formulated as a belief in free choice.

In light of what has been said concerning the role of Mitzvot in allowing the soul to realize its potential, this is really what this principle is all about. We are to believe that a mitzvah is not just simply a good act, or an act that the world needs for it to be civilized, but that our soul’s very purpose of descending into this world and its future depend on what we do in this world. Every time we perform a mitzvah, the soul’s potential is unleashed and the soul will ultimately connect with its source in a qualitatively enhanced manner. Our soul’s fortune (i.e., reward and punishment) is inextricably tied up with Torah and Mitzvot.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ACTING OR TEACHING?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ACTING OR TEACHING?

The belief in the Messianic Age and the Resurrection of the Dead – according to the Kabbalists – is not merely a further step in the journey of the soul and in its climb to unprecedented heights, as Maimonides would have us see it. They represent a totally different parallel approach to Mitzvot and the purpose of our souls in this world.

For this distinct approach the analogy of an artist or actor will not do. Rather, the analogy of a teacher and a student would be more appropriate.

A teacher, by definition, must have more knowledge than the student must possess (at least in the area that s/he is teaching). The teacher is usually a more refined, intelligent, educated, cultured and accomplished person, than his/her student.

To teach, however, is not only hard work and sacrifice. The teacher is generally remunerated for his/her efforts. Besides the pay a teacher receives for the job of teaching, the teacher receives a sense of satisfaction, when they see how a

piece of raw material is transformed into a thinking individual. Moreover, a teacher – his/her superiority notwithstanding – can only be challenged by his/her students. In the words of our sages: “I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but I have learned the most from my students.”

Yet, despite the multiple rewards for teaching that accrue to the teacher, the primary reason for teaching is not for the benefit of the teacher. It is for the student.

True, a community might build an entire empire of institutions with multiple layers of workers, just for the children. A school thus has a teaching staff, an administration, a maintenance crew, cooks and all sorts of support personnel. But, their job is to serve the students. The building of a school in a city will employ all of the above plus the builders, electricians, plumbers, etc., whose money, in turn, will support other businesses such as supermarkets, drug stores, doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. etc. yet, all of these are ancillary to the students. An entire universe can be built to revolve around the student.

When we view the role of the soul and the body (and the entire material world), we can view it as the opportunity of the soul to grow, through the challenge posed by the physical world. This, indeed, is the first level that was discussed earlier.

There is another radically different way of viewing the relationship of the soul to the body and that it parallels the relationship of the teacher to the student.

We are thus to view, the soul as the teacher, who was sent to the “boondocks” – i.e., this physical world, to tame, refine, purify, elevate and sanctify it. Our physical body and by extension our physical world is the student, who is not always attentive and not always interested in change. The ultimate goal of the soul, nevertheless, is to preserve until the student not only learns and grows, but also reaches the level of teacher and beyond.

The corollary of this principle is that Judaism – at least according to the formulation of Jewish Mystical thought – considers the physical world to be the essential and the end. Whereas most, if not all, religious systems view the heavens, the spiritual realms and the souls as constituting the end, Judaism, considers them to be the means. The end is for the intrinsic divinity that resides in the physical world to become manifest.

Judaism believes that the means to that end is achieved by way of the soul and the other spiritual dimensions of existence. They gradually refine the body by way of the Mitzvot to the point that its inherent divinity is revealed.

Thus, the Messianic Age is the age when the physical realm assumes full maturity, and the Mitzvot – that involve

physical objects and actions – are recognized for what they are: the uncovering of the divine within the material world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THREE DONKEYS

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THREE DONKEYS

In the Torah there is a reference to three great people and their donkey. Abraham saddled his donkey. Moses put his family to ride his donkey and the Moshiach will ride and be revealed on his donkey. Our sages tell us that these three donkeys were one and the same donkey.

The word donkey in Hebrew *Chamor* is related to the word *chomer* which means material substance. The three stages of the donkey correspond to the three perspectives the world has of the physical and material realm.

In the days of Abraham, prior to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, there was a basic dichotomy between the spiritual and physical. The world was at the stage where the teacher (read: the soul) was just beginning to teach the student (read: the body and the material world). The only way the soul could deal with the body was to overwhelm it and thus not allow it to stand in the way of the soul. The body was not helpful. Thus the imagery used with regard to Abraham is that “he saddled his donkey” – he imposed himself on the material world.

When Moses was on his way to liberate the Jews from Egypt, he was paving the way for the subsequent revelation at Mount Sinai, where the spiritual would gradually make some inroads and the spiritual light of the soul would shine through the receptive physical entities. Thus, Moses did not have to “saddle” or impose on the “donkey” – it was receptive on its own.

To refer to our earlier analogy of the teacher and the student: In the times of Moses, the student was already expressing an interest in being a student. The student was able to transmit some of ideas of the teacher.

When Moshiach will usher in the Messianic Age, not only will the “donkey-material world” not stand in the way, not only will it be completely cooperative and reflect the light of the soul, but moreover, Moshiach will be revealed on this donkey. The material world will have become so refined that its own intrinsic light will begin to shine. Thus it does not just say that Moshiach will ride on the donkey, but that he will be revealed on it. The light of Moshiach is identified as the light that emerges from the material world – his donkey.

We can now appreciate why the belief in the Messianic Age is a cardinal principle of Judaism apart from the belief in the Afterlife. Whereas the Afterlife calls our attention to the basic Jewish belief that the Torah and its Mitzvot are what

enable the soul to grow and realize its potential, the belief in the Messianic Age rivets our focus on the intrinsic value of the Torah and Mitzvot that involve physical actions. Judaism believes that our bodies are holy; that the entire physical universe is G-dly and that the Mitzvot that we do expose the essential unity and divinity of creation.

And this is what our sages had in mind when they said (Talmud, Sanhedrin) “the world was created for Moshiach.” The entire purpose of creation and of the giving of the torah was to lead the world to the point that we will all witness how the body and the entire world express the essential divine presence.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

RESURRECTION: NO DROPOUTS

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RESURRECTION: NO DROPOUTS

Following this line of reasoning, we have one more issue to settle. What added dimension do we gain from the Resurrection of the Dead? Haven't we already -- during the Messianic Age -- reached the point where the purpose of creation is fulfilled? Hasn't the world -- during the Messianic Age -- come to the realization that the material world possesses intrinsic holiness, and that, therefore, even before the Messianic Age our focus on doing Mitzvot is the nurturing of the divinity within the body (and not only the nurturing of the soul)?

There is, at least, one more salient feature that makes the belief in the Resurrection a basic belief of Judaism. When we view the entire process of life as an educational experience, the soul being the teacher and the body, the student, there is one apparent discrepancy.

When the person lives a full life -- replete with Mitzvot -- and the person's body had been refined and qualifies as a "good student," what is to happen with the student? It is odd that while in the analogy the prize student goes on to

become a teacher or an otherwise productive member of the same society, in the analogue, the body after completing the course drops out of life!

What this demonstrates is that the premise of the body's centrality in Judaism is not that complete and the analogy breaks down. True, the body is not just a means for the soul to express itself – as a prop on a stage – and it has its own intrinsic value, however, it cannot be compared to the holiness of the soul itself. And as great as the body will be in terms of it radiating the light of G-d in this world, the soul is still primary in that regard. This is what would have been our conclusion based on the belief in a Messianic Age without the subsequent belief in the Age of the Resurrection,

When we affirm our belief in the Resurrection of the Dead, we are stating that the body once it is affected by the soul will live on forever. Moreover, the body itself will become the source of G-dly light independent of the soul. Thus, the belief in the Resurrection is an affirmation of the truly intrinsic nature of the body and that the body and soul will live on forever, in a relationship that can never wane. And our observance of Mitzvot that involve the physical matter of existence will likewise go on forever. This notion is indeed one that is central to our understanding of Judaism.